

6 Biden picks General Austin as first black Pentagon chief



8 UK, EU strike N Ireland pact as Brexit talks near climax



12 Independent musicians thrive as pandemic silences Bollywood



16 Abu Dhabi royal family member buys half of Israeli football club



PM Sheikh Sabah reappointed by Amir to form new Cabinet

Mutair says he will not contest speaker's post • MPs welcome 'sacrifice'



KUWAIT: HH the Prime Minister Sheikh Sabah Al-Khaled Al-Hamad Al-Sabah is received by HH the Amir Sheikh Nawaf Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah at Bayan Palace yesterday after the Amir signed a decree appointing him as prime minister. — KUNA

By B Izzak

KUWAIT: HH the Amir Sheikh Nawaf Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah yesterday issued a decree reappointing HH the Prime Minister Sheikh Sabah Al-Khaled Al-Sabah to form a new Cabinet after the previous government resigned following general elections. Sheikh Sabah will have to form his Cabinet before the new National Assembly holds its inaugural session next Tuesday, in accordance with the Kuwaiti constitution.

HH the Amir's decision came after he held traditional consultations on Monday by meeting former Assembly speakers Ahmad Al-Saadoun and Marzouq Al-Ghanem and former premiers HH Sheikh Nasser Al-Mohammad Al-Sabah and Sheikh Sabah Al-Khaled. The formation of the new Cabinet will take into consideration the new structure of the Assembly, as an overwhelming majority of newly-elected MPs are pushing for changing Assembly Speaker Ghanem. The position of the new Cabinet is crucial in electing the Assembly speaker, as all the 16 members of the Cabinet are allowed to vote.

Late yesterday, leading opposition figure MP Mohammad Al-Mutair said he has decided to withdraw from the race for speaker, only a day after declaring his intention to contest the post. At a meeting of 38 members of the new Assembly on

Monday, Mutair and MP Bader Al-Humaidhi, a former minister, had said they will contest the election for the speakership against the incumbent Ghanem.

But following appeals from several lawmakers for concessions and sacrifices in a bid to have only one candidate for the post, Mutair said he has decided to withdraw. Mutair said in a statement he posted on Twitter that he took the decision "in response to his historical responsibility to rescue Kuwait, its institutions and authorities from a handful of corrupt people" who wrested control of the country in the past few years.

The group of new lawmakers is scheduled to meet today to elect a candidate for the speaker's post, who is expected to fight against Ghanem. The new development means that if all the 38 MPs stay together, Ghanem will have a very slim chance of retaining his seat, which he occupied almost uncontested for the past seven years. The lawmakers, who call themselves reformists and nationalists, believe that removing Ghanem is the first step towards wider reforms.

Lawmakers warmly welcomed Mutair's withdrawal. MP Khaled Al-Otaibi said Mutair's withdrawal is the right step for unity among reformists, adding that it is hoped the meeting today will agree on one candidate for the speaker and another for his deputy.

Continued on Page 2

News in brief

UAE supports Saudi efforts

DUBAI: The UAE said yesterday it supports Saudi efforts to end a three-year Gulf dispute, Abu Dhabi's first reaction to recent statements suggesting the rift between four countries and Qatar could soon ease. Cairo yesterday also commented on the Gulf crisis, saying it appreciated Kuwait's efforts to end the dispute. — AFP

Heavy metals found

BANGALORE: Traces of heavy metals such as lead and nickel have been found in samples taken from 550 people stricken by a mystery illness in a southern Indian town where some victims have collapsed in the street, officials said. The government has rushed medical experts to Eluru in Andhra Pradesh state to investigate the illness, which first appeared Saturday. One man died after showing the symptoms of seizures, nausea and chronic pain. — AFP

WhatsApp adds shopping carts

SAN FRANCISCO: WhatsApp yesterday added virtual shopping carts people can load with purchases and then use to fire off orders to businesses as the Facebook-owned messaging service pushed deeper into e-commerce. WhatsApp already let users browse online catalogs from shops. The addition of a "carts" feature lets people combine multiple items into a single ordered set via WhatsApp instead of tending to transactions separately, according to the service. — AFP

Jordan opens field hospital

AMMAN: Jordan has opened the first of three field hospitals for COVID-19 patients, northeast of the capital, as a sharp rise in cases has overburdened health facilities. The hospital admitted its first patients on Monday, said the interim director-general of medical services in the kingdom Brigadier General Nidal Khasawneh. The 300-bed hospital was erected in two weeks in the northern Zarqa province at a cost of around \$12 million. — AFP

UK starts virus jabs as Europe cases top 20m

LONDON: Britain became the first Western country to start a mass coronavirus vaccine campaign yesterday with a 90-year-old receiving the initial jab, as the number of cases in Europe hit 20 million. Kicking off Britain's "V-Day", Margaret Keenan said she felt "privileged" to be given the injection, the first of millions expected to be administered in the hard-hit country over the coming months.

The Pfizer-BioNTech jab is one of several vaccines bringing hope for an end to the pandemic that has killed

more than 1.5 million people worldwide and ravaged economies. "My advice to anyone offered the vaccine is to take it," said Keenan, wearing a mask and a penguin T-shirt. "If I can have it at 90 then you can have it too."

The UK's second jab reportedly went to a man named William Shakespeare. The over-80s, care home workers, and at-risk health and social care staff will be at the front of the line. Almost 40 percent of the new cases detected over the last seven days worldwide have been in Europe, the region topping 20 million cases yesterday. But the rate of infection appears to be stabilizing.

Russia, one of Europe's hardest-hit countries in terms of cases, began vaccinating high-risk workers with its own jab on Saturday, and Beijing has

Continued on Page 2

Time running out on Trump bid to overturn results

WASHINGTON: Humiliation in the courts, witnesses who provide more farce than facts and a chief lawyer battling coronavirus - Donald Trump's efforts to overturn the results of the Nov 3 presidential election are not going well. And time is running out. The Electoral College is to meet on Dec 14 to certify Democrat Joe Biden's victory and yesterday was the deadline for state-level challenges to be resolved.

Among the latest blows to Trump's bid to tarnish the vote with baseless fraud claims was the announcement on Sunday that former New York mayor Rudy Giuliani has been hospitalized with COVID-19. Giuliani, 76, has been leading the Trump campaign's legal team, filing lawsuits that purport to expose ballot fraud and staging public hearings in the swing states where Trump lost narrowly. Many of the witnesses put forward by Giuliani

have strained credulity, however, and the flimsy lawsuits rely often on convoluted conspiracy theories that have been repeatedly debunked by state election officials - many of them Republican. One witness, Melissa Carone, who appeared besides Giuliani at a hearing in Michigan, was so over-the-top that she ended up going viral and being lampooned on the comedy show "Saturday Night Live".

Carone had already been deemed "not credible" by a Michigan judge but that did not stop Giuliani from parading her before the Michigan House hearing. When the lawsuits filed by Giuliani and other

Continued on Page 2

Everest 'grows' as China, Nepal agree new height

KATHMANDU: The highest point on Earth got a bit higher yesterday as China and Nepal finally agreed on a precise elevation for Mount Everest after years of debate. The agreed height of 8,848.86 meters (29,031 feet) - unveiled at a news conference in Kathmandu - was 86 cm higher than the measurement previously recognized by Nepal, and more than four

meters above China's official figure.

This discrepancy was due to China measuring the rock base on the summit and not - as with the new reading - the covering of snow and ice on the peak. Everest straddles the border of Nepal and China. Employing trigonometry hundreds of miles away on the Indian plains, British colonial

Continued on Page 2



COVENTRY: Nurse May Parsons administers the Pfizer/BioNTech COVID-19 vaccine to Margaret Keenan, 90, at University Hospital yesterday, making her the first person to receive the vaccine in the country's biggest ever immunization program. — AFP



A Nepal Survey Department team member places a Global Navigation Satellite System (GNSS) receiver after drilling it on a rock during Mount Everest's height measurements. — AFP

Local

Kuwait Army Chief of Staff meets UK Defense Middle East Advisor

National Guard, Interior Ministry discuss boosting cooperation



KUWAIT: Kuwait Army Chief of Staff Lt Gen Khaled Saleh Al-Sabah meets the UK Defense Senior Advisor to the Middle East John Lorimer. — Defense Ministry photo

KUWAIT: Kuwait Army Chief of Staff Lt Gen Khaled Saleh Al-Sabah received the UK Defense Senior Advisor to the Middle East John Lorimer at the General Staff Headquarters of Kuwait Army yesterday. Lorimer is on a visit to Kuwait, where he is accompanied by Royal Air Force Air Commodore Martin

Sampson. The two sides discussed issues of mutual interest, and ways to boost cooperation, especially in the military field. Kuwait Army Deputy Chief of Staff Lt Gen Fahad Al-Nasser and top military brass attended the meeting, the Ministry of Defense's Moral Guidance Department said in a press statement.

Meanwhile, Deputy Chief of Kuwait National Guard Lt Gen Sheikh Ahmad Al-Nawaf Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah met yesterday with Deputy Prime Minister, Interior Minister and State Minister of Cabinet Affairs Anas Al-Saleh in his office at the National Guard's headquarters. The two sides dis-

cussed ways of boosting cooperation in terms of providing assistance and back up to state departments. Saleh also congratulated Sheikh Ahmad Al-Nawaf on earning the political leadership's trust, Kuwait National Guard said in a statement released to the press.



Deputy Chief of Kuwait National Guard Lt Gen Sheikh Ahmad Al-Nawaf Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah meets Deputy Prime Minister, Interior Minister and State Minister of Cabinet Affairs Anas Al-Saleh. — Kuwait National Guard photo

Woman dead, two injured in Salwa house blaze



KUWAIT: A 58-year-old Kuwaiti woman died and two people suffered from smoke inhalation in a Salwa house fire reported Monday night, Kuwait Fire Force said. Firemen from Bidaa and Mishref fire stations responded and put out the

fire, while paramedics treated the two persons on site. Meanwhile, firemen freed a Kuwaiti man who was trapped in his vehicle after it crashed into an asphalt paver. Paramedics rushed the victim to hospital in critical condition.



KUWAIT: Kuwait Fire Force inspection teams closed down five facilities for failure to meet prevention conditions. Deputy Director General for the Prevention Sector Major General Khalid Abdullah supervised the closings.

UK starts virus jabs as Europe...

Continued from Page 1

also begun an emergency inoculation campaign with a medicine made in China. The United States is expected to grant emergency authorization for the Pfizer-BioNTech vaccine later this week, announcing yesterday that no concerns had been found in trial data.

Despite the vaccination news, curbs continue to

be reimposed - roughly 30 million people in the US state of California are now under stay-at-home orders. And the World Health Organization has warned that successful vaccines on their own will not immediately end the crisis. America's floundering efforts to quell the pandemic have been widely criticized - the nation is the world's worst-hit with more than 283,000 deaths.

Even as hopes rise for vaccines and a resulting economic recovery, governments are being forced to tighten restrictions to contain surges in infections. German Chancellor Angela Merkel urged regions with high coronavirus rates to tighten curbs, while Denmark said it will close middle and high schools, bars, cafes and restaurants in half of the country. — AFP

PM Sheikh Sabah reappointed...

Continued from Page 1

MP Bader Al-Dahoum said the withdrawal will serve Kuwait's interests, while MP Thamer Al-Suwait praised Mutair for his "sacrifice", adding this will help "restore the presidency of the people's house".

The host of today's meeting, opposition MP Abdulkarim Al-Kandari, had earlier called on MPs to cooperate and make concessions. He said on Twitter that the Kuwaiti people made sacrifices by braving the coronavirus and the rainy weather to vote, and "it's

time to make concessions and coordinate for the sake of the loyal people".

New MP Muhalhal Al-Mudhaf said there is no choice for MPs but to agree on one candidate for the speaker's post to reflect the will of the Kuwaiti people, adding the lawmakers should not let the people down. New Islamist MP Abdulaziz Al-Saqabi said the Kuwaiti people have voted for reforms and change and lawmakers must respond.

New MP Marzouq Al-Khalifa yesterday said cooperation with the new Cabinet will depend on its position towards the election of the new speaker, alluding that it should not support Ghanem. He said cooperation will also depend on the government's position over approving a general pardon law, tackling corruption and improving the standard of living of citizens.

Time running out on Trump bid to...

Continued from Page 1

Trump allies have actually reached the courts they have been tossed out by judges - sometimes in scathing terms. The latest defeat - bringing the Trump campaign's win-loss record in court to 1-47 - came on Monday in Michigan, where Trump lost to Biden by 154,000 votes.

"The People have spoken", wrote US District Court

Judge Linda Parker. "This case represents well the phrase: 'This ship has sailed.'" Parker said the suit seeking to overturn Biden's victory in Michigan was "stunning in its scope and breathtaking in its reach". "If granted, the relief would disenfranchise the votes of the more than 5.5 million Michigan citizens who, with dignity, hope, and a promise of a voice, participated in the 2020 General Election," she said. The judge said the suit appeared to be mainly aimed at shaking "People's faith in the democratic process and their trust in our government."

A letter published Monday by more than 1,500 lawyers from across the country made a similar point, accusing Giuliani and other attorneys of filing "frivolous court claims" in a bid to "undermine citizens' faith in our election's integrity". — AFP

Everest 'grows' as China, Nepal...

Continued from Page 1

geographers first determined Everest's height in 1856 at 8,840 m above sea level.

After Edmund Hillary and Tenzing Norgay Sherpa famously first reached the summit of Everest on May 29, 1953, an Indian survey readjusted the altitude to 8,848 m. That measurement was widely accepted, with the number appealing not only to ambitious mountaineers but also inspiring names for adventure

clothing lines, restaurants and even a vodka brand. In 1999 the US National Geographic Society concluded the world's highest point was 8,850 m, but Nepal never officially recognized this - although it is widely quoted.

China meanwhile conducted several surveys of its own, and in 2005 came up with a measurement of 8,844.43 m. The provoked a row with Nepal, which was only resolved in 2010 when Kathmandu and Beijing agreed that their measurements referred to different things - one to the height of Everest's rock and the other to the height of its snowcap.

Nepal decided to conduct a survey - initially alone and later joined by China - after suggestions that tectonic plate movements including a major earthquake in 2015 may have affected the height. — AFP

Local

Sheikh Sabah Al-Khaled to form 37th cabinet of Kuwait

Seven statesmen served as prime ministers since 1962

KUWAIT: His Highness the Amir Sheikh Nawaf Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah assigned yesterday His Highness Sheikh Sabah Al-Khaled Al-Hamad Al-Sabah to form a government, the first under His Highness the Amir and the 37th in Kuwait's history. This will be His Highness Sheikh Sabah Al-Khaled's second cabinet following the one he formed on December 17, 2019 until he tendered the cabinet's resignation on December 6, a day after parliamentary elections. In addition to His Highness Sheikh Sabah Al-Khaled, seven other officials served as prime ministers of Kuwait since 1962.

Article 56 of the constitution states that His Highness the Amir shall, after the traditional consultations, appoint the Prime Minister or relieve him of office. The Amir shall also appoint ministers and relieve them of office upon the recommendation of the prime ministers. It says ministers shall be appointed from amongst the National Assembly members and from others, and that the number of ministers in all shall not exceed one-third of the MPs.

Transitional cabinet

The first government was called the transitional cabinet. It was formed on January 17, 1962, and chaired by the late Amir Sheikh Abdullah Al-Salem Al-Sabah, consisting of 14 ministers. It had a specific mandate: writing a constitution, and therefore it ended with the end of its task on January 27, 1963. The second government, formed on January 28, 1963, was chaired by Sheikh Sabah Al-Salem Al-Sabah and consisted of 15 ministers including the late Sheikh Sabah Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah who was named Foreign Minister for the first time in post-independence Kuwait.

The third government was formed on December 6 1964, chaired by Sheikh Sabah Al-Salem, consisting of 14 ministers, four of them were MPs. This government survived for 28 days only because it failed to win confidence of the National Assembly due to constitutional measures regarding the selection of some ministers. Sheikh Sabah Al-Salem chaired the fourth government that was formed on January 3, 1965 and included 13 ministers.

The fifth government was formed on December 4, 1965, and was chaired by Sheikh Jaber Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah. This government consisted of 13 ministers including three MPs. The late Sheikh Sabah Al-Ahmad was given the portfolios of finance, oil and foreign affairs. This government resigned at the end of the legislative term: on February 3, 1967. The sixth cabinet was formed on February 4, 1967, also chaired by Sheikh Jaber Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah. It consisted of 14 ministers including three MPs, and served for four years until February 1971, at end of the parliamentary legislative term. The seventh government, which also served a full four-year term, was formed on February 2, 1971. Chaired by Sheikh

Jaber Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah, this cabinet includes 13 ministers. Sheikh Jaber Al-Ahmad formed the following cabinet, the eighth, on February 9, 1975, included of 15 ministers. It served for only 19 months and ended a month after the dissolution of the parliament in August 1976.

The ninth government, formed while the parliament was dissolved on September 6, 1976, was chaired by Sheikh Jaber Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah and consisted of 18 ministers. This government ended in December 1978 after the passing of then Amir Sheikh Sabah Al-Salem Al-Sabah. Sheikh Jaber Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah, then Crown Prince and Prime Minister, was named as Amir. The 10th government was formed on February 16, 1978. Then Crown Prince Sheikh Saad Al-Abdullah Al-Salem Al-Sabah chaired the cabinet. The cabinet consisted of 18 ministers and served until March 3, 1981 when new elections were announced. The 11th government was formed on March 4 1981 and chaired by Sheikh Saad

including four MPs. The government resigned on March 21, 1998 after a no-confidence motion was tabled against then information minister Sheikh Saud Nasser Al-Sabah. The following government, the 18th, was formed by Sheikh Saad on March 22, 1998. It served for 15 months and resigned on July 12, 1999, in the wake of an Amiri decree to dissolve the parliament. The 19th cabinet, formed on July 13 of 1999, was chaired by Sheikh Saad Al-Abdullah. The government resigned on January 2001 after relations with the parliament deteriorated when former MP Hussein Al-Qallaf requested the interpellation of Minister of Justice and Minister of Awqaf and Islamic Affairs Dr Saad Al-Hashel. However, the cabinet was formed by His Highness Sheikh Sabah Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah because Sheikh Saad had to leave the country for treatment. Sheikh Sabah selected 15 ministers including three MPs.

Separation of posts

The 21st government was formed on July 14, 2003, by His Highness Sheikh Sabah Al-Ahmad because the post of Crown Prince was separated from the post of Prime Minister for the first time. This government served until February 8, 2006, in the wake of the passing of the Amir Sheikh Jaber Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah. The 22nd government was formed by His Highness the Prime Minister Sheikh Nasser Al-Mohammad Al-Ahmad Al-Sabah on February 9, 2006. This government, which consisted of 15 ministers, lasted for five months only due to parliament's dissolution that was caused by an interpellation against the Prime Minister over the electoral districts. His Highness Sheikh Nasser, following the parliamentary elections, formed the 23rd government on July 10, 2006. Minister of Health Sheikh Ahmad Abdullah Al-Sabah was grilled and a no confidence motion was tabled against him thus triggering the government's resignation on March 4, 2007. The 24th government was formed by His Highness Sheikh Nasser on March 25, 2007, and resigned on May 19, 2008, in the wake of the dissolution of the National Assembly.

His Highness Sheikh Nasser formed the 25th government on May 28, 2008. However, the extremely tense relations between the legislative and executive authorities caused by an interpellation against the Prime Minister forced the government to resign on November 25, 2008. His Highness the Amir accepted the resignation and the government continued as caretaker until January 22, 2009. The 26th government was formed by His Highness Sheikh Nasser on January 23 of the same year and resigned after four months. The 27th government formed by His Highness Sheikh Nasser on May 29 and served for two years. It resigned following the growing number of interpellations. His Highness Sheikh Nasser was re-assigned to form the 28th government that consisted of 15 ministers including one MP.



Sheikh Sabah Al-Khaled Al-Sabah

On December 13, 2001, His Highness Sheikh Jaber Al-Mubarak Al-Hamad Al-Sabah formed his first government, the country's 29th. This care-taker government was mandated with organizing elections and its term expired on February 13, 2012. His Highness Sheikh Jaber Al-Mubarak formed the 30th government the following day. However, this government was dropped because the Constitutional Court annulled parliamentary elections. The government resigned on July 18, 2012. His Highness the Prime Minister formed the 31st government on July 19, 2012 with 13 ministers. This cabinet lasted for four months due to parliament's dissolution. The 32nd government was formed by His Highness the Prime Minister Sheikh Jaber Al-Mubarak on December 11, 2012. It served for seven months until the Constitutional Court's annulled parliamentary elections that took place in the same month. Elections were held on July 27, 2013.

The 33rd government was formed on August 4, 2013, and ministers tendered their resignations after the Constitutional Court rejected all lawsuits against the legitimacy of the parliamentary elections. The thirty-fourth government was formed on December 10, 2016 headed by His Highness Sheikh Jaber Mubarak Al-Hamad Al-Sabah, consisted of 15 ministers, including one MP. The 35th government was formed on December 11, 2017 under the chairmanship of His Highness Sheikh Jaber Al-Mubarak, consisting of 15 ministers, including one MP. The 36th government was formed on December 17, 2019, headed by His Highness Sheikh Sabah Al-Khaled Al-Hamad Al-Mubarak Al-Sabah. It consisted of 15 ministers, including two MPs, along with the return of seven ministers from the 2017 government and the entry of three women in the new ministerial formation.— KUNA



Political upheaval forced several resignations

Al-Abdullah Al-Sabah, consisting of 15 ministers including one MP. The cabinet served a full four-year term up until March 2 1982, ahead of parliamentary elections.

The 12th government was formed on March 1985 and chaired by Sheikh Saad. The cabinet served for 16 months only due to deterioration of relations between executive and legislative authorities, which forced the parliament's dissolution in 1986, triggering the government's resignation on July 11 of the same year. The 13th government was formed in the following day and consisted of 21 ministers. Sheikh Saad formed the 14th government with 22 ministers on June 20, 1990. This government continued in office despite the August 2, 1990 Iraqi invasion of Kuwait, and was functioning from the Saudi City of Taef until the liberation in February 1991.

The 15th government, the first after liberation, was dubbed the 'government of reconstruction.' It was formed on April 20 of 1991 and consisted 20 ministers. The government lasted until October 16, 1992, when new parliamentary elections were held. The 16th government, formed on October 17, 1992, was chaired by Sheikh Saad Al-Abdullah Al-Salem Al-Sabah and consisted of 15 ministers including six MPs. The 17th government was formed on October 15, 1992. Chaired by Sheikh Saad Al-Abdullah, the government consisted of 14 ministers

Kuwait lists 301 new COVID-19 cases, three deaths

KUWAIT: Kuwait listed 301 new coronavirus infections yesterday, which raised the total 144,900, while three deaths recorded over the past 24 hours upped the death toll to 900, the health ministry said. The ministry had earlier reported that 297 patients recovered over the same period, raising total recoveries to 140,638. The number of COVID-19 patients hospitalized stood yesterday at 3,362, with 83 of them in intensive care units, according to ministry spokesman Dr Abdullah Al-Sanad. He added that 5,783 swab tests were conducted over same period, bringing the total number of swabs to 1,152,203. He went on to urge the public to abide by health precautions, mainly following social distancing rules, as the only way to halt the spread of the virus. — KUNA

Stay safe. Stay home. Stay informed.



تطورات مرض فيروس كورونا COVID-19

كلها في مكان واحد

الإعلام الصحي

301 إصابة جديدة NEW CASES الإجمالي 144,900	3 حالة وفاة جديدة NEW DEATHS الإجمالي 900	297 حالة تعافى جديدة NEW RECOVERIES الإجمالي 140,638
83 إجمالي الحالات في العناية المركزة TOTAL SERIOUS CASES	3,362 إجمالي الحالات التي تتلقى العلاج TOTAL ACTIVE CASES	5,783 مسحة جديدة NEW TESTS الإجمالي 1,152,203

Kuwait Times
Established 1961
The First Daily in The Arabian Gulf

THE LEADING INDEPENDENT
DAILY IN THE ARABIAN GULF
ESTABLISHED 1961

Founder and Publisher
YOUSUF S. AL-ALYAN

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

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

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

UNDP commends Kuwait's efforts against corruption

KUWAIT: The United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) highlighted the Kuwaiti government's efforts to tackle corruption, praising resulting strategies aimed at enhancing transparency and promoting integrity. UNDP Resident Representative in Kuwait Hideko Hadzialic said this work is represented by Kuwait's Anti-Corruption Authority, Nazaha, in partnership with the General Secretariat of the Supreme Council for Planning and Development and the UNDP. This cooperation, she said, has resulted in the formation of the Kuwait Integrity and Anti-Corruption Strategy 2019-2024 to enhance the principles of transparency, accountability, the rule of law in the public and private sectors in a way that contributes to achieving sustainable development. The successful implementation of this strategy, she explained, would help Kuwait to mobilize further resources required to achieve its New Kuwait 2035 Vision development plan and a higher degree of commitment to the provisions of the UN Convention Against Corruption with regard to preventive measures, law enforcement, international cooperation and the recovery of funds. A day ahead of International Anti-Corruption Day, which falls today, she said bribes cost governments one trillion dollars a year, while the value of the sums wasted amounts to more than 2.5 trillion dollars - equal to five percent of the global GDP. Meanwhile, the head of Nazaha Abdulaziz Al-Ibrahim stressed the importance of concerted state institution and civil society efforts to bring the economic and development situation to broader horizons. — KUNA

UN, Kuwait maintain close partnership in combating human trafficking: Officials

KUWAIT: UN officials praised on Monday the "close partnership" with Kuwait to enhance the capacities of local partners and relevant ministries to protect the victims of human trafficking. This came in a press statement issued by Representative of the UN Secretary-General and Resident Coordinator in the State of Kuwait Tariq Al-Sheikh during a visit of a UN delegation to the shelter of foreign workers, which was established in November 2014. The center is an actual translation of the special attention paid by Kuwait to labor rights and the preservation of human dignity, he added. Sheikh praised Kuwait's progress in addressing the issues of foreign workers, mainly the female domestic helpers hosted by the shelter, and also the health and social services and care offered to them.

Awareness campaigns

Meanwhile, the UN officials said that within the fruitful cooperation with Kuwait over the last years, many awareness campaigns have been organized about labor exploitation, trafficking in persons and domestic workers' rights, in addition to providing technical support and advice to support the government's efforts to respond to the challenges of the novel coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic through comprehensive solutions compatible with international laws and standards. Out of Kuwait's keenness on providing legal, humanitarian and social protection to foreign workers, the center was founded so as to provide shelters to female workers and help them adjust their legal positions or return to their

International Women's Group hosts seasonal celebrations

KUWAIT: The International Women's Group (IWG) held its second virtual meeting for the group's members on December 6, 2020, to celebrate Christmas and New Year. Layla Boulos, Public Relations Coordinator, hosted the meeting.

IWG President Ambreen Mustafa, the wife of the Pakistani Ambassador, gave a warm welcome to the participating members, and spoke about the challenges faced this year. She expressed hope that the new year will bring better times, and wished everyone a Merry Christmas and happy New Year. She also thanked esteemed members who have been a part of IWG, saying that she was thankful for their support and interest.

As a part of the celebration, the place was beautifully decorated in a Christmas theme, and adorned with sparkling lights, as well as a shimmering tree that was radiant on the occasion. Red roses representing the celebration of the holidays were distributed throughout the entrance, which added to the celebration's atmosphere.



KUWAIT: Members of a UN delegation visit the shelter with Kuwaiti government agencies' representatives.

home safely, they added. They commended endeavors of the Public Authority of Manpower (PAM), supervising the center, to enhance partnerships and cooperation with different UN organizations, mainly the IOM to return workers to their home, and develop capabilities of employees. Head of the IOM mission to Kuwait Tareq Abu el-Hassan said that the shelter is an example of ensuring continued care to the female beneficiaries. He encourages the PAM to continue providing support especially in light of the coronavirus, noting that Kuwait has been a main donor country to back responses to humanitarian crises all over the world.

Grace period

Furthermore, head of UN Development Programme Hideko Hadzialic said that the UN is evaluating the grace period made by the Kuwaiti Interior Ministry for expatriates as a plan to

respond to the repercussions of the pandemic. This grace period will allow those who violate the residency law in the country to adjust their status or leave without paying any fine, she said. Finally, Director General of PAM Mubarak Al-Azmi said the authority uses its financial and human capabilities to ensure providing full protection to all workers mainly the domestic ones. The authority provides all legal, health and psychological services to the females at the shelter, he said, pointing to the success in facing the challenges of the COVID-19 pandemic. He pointed out that the PAM is keen on cooperating with all international organizations so as to develop their services and enhance capabilities of workers in various sectors to achieve the optimal application of international standards in human rights. The center is hosting women who are in dispute with their employers to help them obtain their rights. — KUNA



KUWAIT: Layla Boulos and Ambreen Mustafa host the event.

Crowne Plaza Hotel, Chef Khodor, and the band. Certificates of appreciation and shields were given virtually to the carol singer, violinist and Chef Ashek.



Health minister congratulates team on 'historic achievement'



KUWAIT: Health Minister Sheikh Dr Basel Al-Sabah received members of a medical team who carried out the first liver transplant operation in Kuwait, which was performed on a Kuwaiti citizen in her sixties. The minister congratulated the

team on this 'historic achievement,' which he said "proves the competence of Kuwaiti doctors and the strength of the health system." Ministry Undersecretary Dr Mustafa Redha attended the reception.

Kuwait's youth authority, SACGC sign cooperation protocol

KUWAIT: The Public Youth Authority signed a cooperation protocol with Sabah Al-Ahmad Center for Giftedness and Creativity (SACGC) yesterday, aimed at developing scientific, technical and technological skills of youth. Authority Director General Abdulrahman Al-Mutairi said the protocol, signed in Qadisiya Youth Center, aimed at helping youth to be able to spread culture of technological creativity as well as holding training courses in Qadisiya Youth Center. The authority, he added in a statement, was keen on establishing partnerships with youth-sponsoring bodies to have the maximum benefits from potentials of youths. Dr Omar Al-Bannai, SACGC Director General, said SACGC would place its capabilities for the service of Kuwaiti youth, and has already organized workshops in Governorates of Jahra and Ahmadi.

SACGC and youth authority seek to open



KUWAIT: Public Youth Authority's Director General Abdulrahman Al-Mutairi (left) and SACGC Director General Dr Omar Al-Bannai at the signing ceremony. — KUNA

more activities in other youth centers nationwide to contribute to social development, he said. SACGC, added Bannai, would also setup industrial and agricultural incubators for the youth inventors. The protocol aims at establishing a strategic partnership between the two parties with the ultimate objective of developing skills of youth. — KUNA

Kuwait Times
ESTABLISHED 1961
THE FIRST DAILY IN THE ARABIAN GULF

STAY CONNECTED

Read Kuwait Times now on your phone for **FREE**

Send Subscribe to **+965 944 88888**

Enjoy the first daily paper in Kuwait on your phone

P.O. Box 1301 Safat, 13014 Kuwait
Tel: 24833199 - 24833358 - 24835616/7 | Fax: 24835620 - 24835621
E: info@kuwaittimes.net



EU citizens in the UK face two-tier system

India farmers block railway tracks, roads in protest

Page 7

Page 6



GEDAREF, Sudan: In this photo taken on Dec 1, 2020, an Ethiopian man watches the rising Moon on top of a hill at Um Raquba refugee camp. — AFP

Tainted legacy of Nobel Peace laureates

Drones, wars, genocide - Abiy's aura tarnished

OSLO: A "champion of peace" doesn't normally threaten to show no mercy before carrying out an attack that sparks a humanitarian crisis. Yet Ethiopian Prime Minister Abiy Ahmed is not the first Nobel Peace Prize laureate to go to war. Officially, the guns in Tigray have been silenced: On November 28, Abiy, who won the 2019 Peace Prize, declared victory after three weeks of fighting in the northern region. The exact death toll is not known but the International Crisis Group (ICG) has estimated several thousand were killed. Civilians have fled the country in droves and the UN has warned of a large-scale humanitarian crisis.

Abiy's aura has been tarnished. "Whatever the rights and wrongs of the current confrontation, it is certain that his reputation as peacemaker will be severely damaged," the Financial Times wrote in an editorial on November 11. "For the Nobel committee there is a lesson here. When in doubt: wait." Such patience would also have been a good idea on several other occasions, historians note. Ten years before Abiy, Barack Obama won the Nobel Peace Prize just nine months after taking office as US

president - according to his recent autobiography even he was asking: "For what?"

Three bombs an hour

Days before accepting his award in Oslo, Obama decided to send 30,000 more troops to Afghanistan. In his acceptance speech, he defended the right to go to war, a word he uttered 35 times - compared with 29 times for the word peace. "To say that force is sometimes necessary is not a call to cynicism - it is a recognition of history; the imperfections of man and the limits of reason," he said.

Not only did Obama fail to put an end to the conflicts in Iraq and Afghanistan during his two mandates, but he also stepped up controversial drone strikes. In 2016, US forces hit seven countries with more than 26,000 bombs - or three bombs an hour - according to the Council on Foreign Relations think tank. Former Nobel Committee secretary Geir Lundestad once told AFP the expectations placed on Obama were "totally unrealistic". "It was impossible for anyone to meet (the) expectations," he said. In 1973, the Peace Prize was award-

ed to US Secretary of State Henry Kissinger and North Vietnamese leader Le Duc Tho for negotiating an armistice.

The peace did not hold and Le Duc Tho, who orchestrated the final offensive against South Vietnam two years later, declined his half of the prize. Kissinger also offered to return his half, in vain, and his legacy is one of a cynic guided by US foreign policy aims rather than respect for rights. "Not only did he continue the war in Vietnam but he gave the green light to Indonesia for the invasion of East Timor," recalls Norwegian historian and Nobel expert Asle Sveen, referring to the 1975-76 invasion and annexation of the former Portuguese colony. Kissinger is also known for bolstering the power of South American dictators who were friendly to the US.

Nobel and 'genocide'

Israeli Prime Minister Menachem Begin shared the 1978 Nobel with Egyptian President Anwar Sadat for their Camp David peace deal signed that year. But Begin's hands are also tainted with blood, according to Sveen. "Begin went on to, among other

things, order the Israeli invasion of Lebanon in 1982 and the (siege) of Beirut, and that indirectly led to the massacre of Palestinians in the Sabra and Shatila refugee camps," Sveen says.

A number of other Peace Prize laureates have also seen their aura fade over time, without necessarily having been particularly belligerent. Aung San Suu Kyi stands out in that category. Her passivity as the military cracked down on Myanmar's Muslim Rohingya - termed a genocide by UN investigators - has led to numerous calls for her 1991 award to be revoked.

The Nobel statutes do not allow for that and the prize committee normally refrains from commenting on developments regarding a country or person that has won the prize. And yet, that's exactly what it did in a rare move on November 16, when it said it was "deeply concerned" about developments in Ethiopia and appealed for an end to the fighting - though it still defended its choice of 2019 laureate. This year, the committee seems to have gone with a safer and more consensual pick: the World Food Program, which will accept its prize on Thursday. — AFP

Forgotten Syrians need winter help: Author Gaiman

PARIS: The world can't forget the plight of Syrian refugees this winter despite the global upheaval caused by COVID-19, fantasy author Neil Gaiman said yesterday as he helped launch the UN refugee program's cold weather appeal. The award-winning writer said the pandemic had exposed weaknesses in governments' ability to respond to crises, and should serve as a reminder that refugees are ordinary people dealing with upheaval.

"The thing that if anything 2020 has intensified, is that we are all one step away from being refugees," Gaiman, Goodwill Ambassador for UNHCR, the UN Refugee Agency said. "We all had plans for 2020. And God has laughed at all of our plans and given us a completely different 2020 instead. "For most refugees, that's their plot too. They had plans for their life, they were trying to be where they were because most people like being where they are, and then everything went wrong," he said.

Gaiman, famed for his surreal novels such as "American Gods" and "The Sandman" comic series, collaborated with hundreds of fans and artists to release a new animated version of his crowd-sourced poem, "What You Need to Be Warm". "People are incredibly resilient, people are imaginative, people are creative," he said. "But for a lot of people, and for a lot of refugees, 2020 may have been the final aftershock of the earthquake that finally brings down the house."

UNHCR has warned that winter 2020 - for some their ninth away from home - is likely to be the harshest yet for the more than six million Syrian refugees who fled their country during the near-decade long civil war. Annual challenges such as snow and freezing temperatures will be harder to manage as COVID-19 has drastically affected relief campaigns. "It's very easy to forget the refugee crisis, it's very easy to forget that there are nearly 80 million people forcibly displaced right now in the world," said Gaiman. "And we can't forget them."

"It's getting really cold out there; it's even colder if you're living in a tent." Lisa Abou Khaled, UNHCR's spokesperson in Beirut, told AFP 2020 had been the "hardest year yet" for the one million Syrians exiled in Lebanon. She said many were



AZAZ, Syria: Syrian schoolchildren sit in a makeshift school set up by locals in the village of Maarin in the rebel-controlled northern countryside of Aleppo province yesterday. — AFP

struggling to survive freezing temperatures and torrential rain in makeshift shelters. "Life is made even tougher by the devastating impact of COVID-19," she said.

'Right to be here'

To help raise awareness, Gaiman asked his followers on Twitter to share their memories of being warm. He received more than 25,000 words in response, using them as inspiration for the poem, which has now been turned in to an animated short drawing on artworks from artists and refugees. "Twitter can be a cesspit," he said. "It can be the worst place in the world and yet, sometimes, you can go out and say 'what does it mean to be warm?' and get 25,000 words of replies from people and all of them evoke memory, childhood, the joy of coming from a cold place to a warm place." Gaiman, who explained how many of his family members perished in the Holocaust, ends the poem: "You have the right to be here."

He said 2020 had shown the fragility of even democratic governments and modern health care systems, just as the 2015 refugee crisis in Europe laid bare the extent of human suffering in those fleeing conflict. "If COVID had got worse, if governmental handling of it got worse, I can absolutely see a world in which people are trying to figure out how to get out of the United Kingdom and to go somewhere else that's safer," said Gaiman. "It's good to welcome people in because one day you may want to be welcomed." The animated film and donation instructions for UNHCR's Winter Appeal can be found at: www.unhcr.org/neilgaiman — AFP

Athens accuses Turkey of facilitating Somali migration to Greece

ATHENS: The Greek government yesterday accused Turkey of encouraging Somali migration through promotion campaigns and visa offers, and then allowing the migrants to continue on to Greece. Athens has long accused Ankara of weaponising migration to pile pressure on the European Union. Turkey counters that the EU is providing insufficient support to enable it to accommodate around four million migrants, many of whom want to travel to Europe.

In February and March, there were days of skirmishes between migrants and police at the Greek-Turkish border after a surge the Greek government says was orchestrated by Turkey. "In Somalia, we understand that the Turkish authorities, the ministry of education and other ministries, are promoting immigration to Turkey," Migration Minister Notis Mitarachi told a news conference. Citing alleged testimony from Somali migrants, Mitarachi said applicants were being "facilitated" by a Turkish liaison office in Mogadishu to obtain visas based on certificates and documents provided by Turkish-funded institutions in Somalia.

These include a hospital and a university in Mogadishu, the minister said. "We understand that as many as 300 people have flown to Turkey in this way," Mitarachi said. "These people are essentially arriving legally in Turkey, for the express purpose of illegal trafficking into Europe." "When Somalis arrive in Istanbul, they are transferred in vans, to specific areas of the city where they stay until their relocation to the western Turkish coast can be arranged," he said.

"It is obvious that these people are not at risk in Turkey and therefore should be given asylum there, if appropriate. "It is worrying that Turkey appears to be facilitating the arrival of these migrants by willingly providing visas for travel," Mitarachi said. He added that Somali asylum seekers were also allegedly using "subsidized tickets and visas paid for by NGOs". There was no immediate comment from Ankara to the allegations. A Greek migration ministry source said relevant testimony had been drawn from Somali survivors of a migrant sinking on December 2 in which two women died. — AFP

IS jihadists built up arsenal after 'red flags' ignored

PARIS: Islamic State jihadists were able to build up a major arsenal of explosives, weapons and drones through a sophisticated procurement process that saw "red flags" ignored by governments and suppliers, a monitoring group said yesterday. The Conflict Armament Research group said in a study that IS was able to build up a store of material for a weapons production program in Iraq and Syria from 2015-2019 via individuals and companies in southern Turkey and also elsewhere.

IS was ousted last year from its former strongholds in Iraq and Syria - where it had wanted to build an extremist so-called caliphate - but experts warned that the knowhow and connections in its supply network have not gone away. IS "procured key commodities through groups of linked, family-owned companies and individuals located near key border crossings into IS-held territory," CAR said, adding these groups were centered around the towns of Siverek and Akcakale in southern Turkey. The CAR emphasized there was no evidence that these companies were "witting accomplices" to IS procurement efforts or guilty of any wrongdoing.

"They nonetheless acted as key junction points within the supply chains that provisioned IS forces," it said. They are based around two extended family groups in the area, it said. It said that purchases of bulk explosive precursors and electronic items through this network had unusual features that should have raised "red flags". Companies made large purchases of products that were "incongruent" with their business activities, it said, pointing to how a small mobile phone shop purchased six tons of aluminum paste from a large chemical distributor.

Mike Lewis, co-author of the report, said the findings show how "surprisingly fragile" the procurement network was, relying on a small number of key individuals and businesses. "With stronger due diligence, much of this trade might have been disrupted," he said. Namir Shabibi, CAR's Head of Iraq Operations, warned that although IS forces may no longer hold territory, remaining cells have become increasingly active in the past year. — AFP

International

Biden picks General Lloyd Austin as the first Black Pentagon chief

Austin led US troops into Baghdad in 2003

WASHINGTON: President-elect Joe Biden has chosen Lloyd Austin, who led US troops into Baghdad in 2003 and rose to head the US Central Command, as the first African-American secretary of defense, US media reported Monday. A veteran of conflicts in Iraq and Afghanistan, the retired four-star army general, 67, beat out the favorite for the job, former under-secretary of defense Michele Flournoy, amid pressure on Biden to nominate more minorities for positions in his cabinet. CNN, Politico and The New York Times cited unnamed sources familiar with the decision, after Biden said earlier Monday that he had made his choice and would announce it on Friday.

Austin would require Senate confirmation to take up the post. He would also require a special waiver from the Senate due to federal law that requires military officers to wait seven years after retirement before serving as the Pentagon chief. The rule is rooted in the view that only a civilian should serve as defense secretary. The waiver has happened twice—most recently for General Jim Mattis in 2017, President Donald Trump's first defense secretary. But members of the Senate agreed begrudgingly, and several said at the time that they wouldn't want to do it again.

Middle East commander

Austin spent four decades in the army, graduating from West Point Military Academy and following a career with a wide range of assignments, from leading platoons to running logistics groups and overseeing recruiting, to senior Pentagon jobs. In March 2003, he was the assistant division commander of the 3rd Infantry Division when it marched from Kuwait into Baghdad in the US invasion of Iraq.

From late 2003 to 2005, he was in Afghanistan



WASHINGTON: In this file photo, Commander of US Central Command Gen Lloyd Austin III conducts a media briefing on Operation Inherent Resolve at the Pentagon. — AFP

commanding the Combined Joint Task Force 180, the principle US-led operation seeking to stabilize the security situation in the country. In 2010, he was made commanding general of US forces in Iraq, and two years later became the commander of the Central Command, in charge of all Pentagon operations in the Middle East and Afghanistan. That put him in charge of the fight against the Islamic State as it captured large swathes of Iraq and Syria. During that period, he reportedly earned the trust of Biden, who was vice president at the time.

Few in command jobs

Austin would take responsibility for the 1.2 million active service members, of whom about 16 percent are Black. But Black people serve disproportionately in the

lower ranks, and few have achieved high command positions. The issue became more clear over the past year when African-American servicemen and women expressed support for the national Black Lives Matter movement against police racism and abuse.

Former defense secretary Mark Esper said he held numerous listening sessions to make white soldiers understand what their Black colleagues felt. Austin faces several challenges: first is the rule that the position should only be filled by civilians. "He shouldn't be considered for the same reason that Sec. Mattis shouldn't have been," said Congressman Justin Amash in a tweet. "The law prohibits recently retired members of the Armed Forces from serving in this civilian capacity. Biden would be the second president in a row to violate this norm."

Second are Austin's ties to the defense industry. After retiring in 2016, he joined the board of directors of Raytheon Technologies, one of the Pentagon's largest contractors, with multi-billion dollar arms supply contracts up for review. He also was involved with a consultant, WestExec Advisors, already the source of several senior members of the Biden administration, including secretary of state pick Antony Blinken and Avril Haines, nominee for director of national intelligence.

Flournoy was one of the firm's founders. Women in the defense and national security community expressed disappointment that Flournoy, who had stellar qualifications for the job and would have been the first-ever female defense secretary, was bypassed. "Nothing but respect for Lloyd Austin, but picking another 4 star so recently retired that he needs a congressional waiver sends a terrible message," said Rosa Brooks, a Georgetown University law professor formerly with the Department of Defense.—AFP

EU citizens in the UK face two-tier system

LONDON: Most EU citizens settled in the UK will retain their rights to live and work in the country after Brexit, but on January 1 a two-tiered system comes into force that may exclude thousands. The right of EU citizens to move to and settle in Britain without a visa will cease to exist on January 1, when Britain no longer has to abide by the bloc's rules. EU citizens who have been living in the UK for less than five years have to apply for pre-settled residency status to allow them to live, study and work as well as claim healthcare and benefits.

Those who have lived in the country for more than five years can apply for settled status, which gives recipients the right to stay indefinitely. Romeo Manciu, 39, arrived from Romania before Brexit and secured pre-settled status, as did his wife, daughter and father who joined him later. "You just have to prove that you are in the UK, and this is very simple, for example with a bank statement," he said. "I included my father in my bank account and got him a credit card and insurance for his car. He can prove that he's in and that's enough," he added.

Poles (773,840) and Romanians (670,600) have made the highest number of applications for settled status, followed by Italians (401,800), Portuguese (306,350) and Spanish (246,600). As of September 2020, 3.9 million applications have been processed with 56 percent granted settled status. Forty two percent were granted pre-settled status and two percent of applications were withdrawn, rejected or found invalid. More than a third of the 17,000 individuals rejected were from Romania, which has one of the lowest GDPs per capita among EU member states.

Slip through the cracks

One of the main arguments made by pro-Brexit campaigners before Britain's 2016 referendum was that leaving the EU would stop the arrival of migrants from poorer EU countries. Manciu, who helps his compatriots who have little or no English, said some Romanians had experienced more difficulty settling in the UK. "There are a lot of people who work in the black market and are not renting legally. Some also have criminal convictions," he said. The immigration changes at the end of the Brexit transition period on December 31 also include a rejection of EU citizens who have been jailed for more than a year. EU citizens—as well as those from Iceland, Liechtenstein, Norway and Switzerland living in the EU—have until June 30 2021 to apply for settled status. But there are fears the changes could see the elderly in care homes, vulnerable children and other people who are difficult to contact or unaware of the deadline slip through the cracks.—AFP



LONDON: Pedestrians cross Westminster Bridge yesterday as talks on a trade deal between the EU and the UK enter a critical stage. — AFP

Post-Brexit borders to divide EU, UK citizens

BRUSSELS: From January 1 British and EU citizens will be confronted with the reality of Brexit as the transition period ends and borders done away with decades ago return. From that date, Britons will be treated by the EU as "third country" nationals, no longer enjoying freedom of movement to work, study or retire across the European Union. Britain in turn will process EU nationals at its borders as it does other non-UK passport holders. EU citizens proving residence in Britain, or Britons already living in a European Union country, will theoretically retain their rights under a Withdrawal Agreement struck in late 2019.

Tourists

Tourists will see some immediate changes—apart from the evolving coronavirus restrictions already crimping travel—but both sides have agreed that travel will be visa-free, as long as the other side keeps it that way. But the EU will stop British passports being used in its automated e-gates, potentially meaning longer queues at manned passport booths. Britons must hold passports still valid for at least six months and will be limited to EU stays of 90 days in a rolling 180-day period.

They will also need to show travel insurance coverage, sufficient funds and a return ticket on request. Europeans entering Britain can use a national ID card until October, after which only passports will be accepted, for stays of up to six months. EU passport holders will be able to continue using British e-gates under current guidance. Those with criminal records may be banned and non-European family members of a European may need a visa, depending on nationality. The UK treats Irish citi-

zens separately from other EU nationals under a bilateral arrangement dating back nearly a century that allows continued freedom of movement between Britain and Ireland. Europeans will be able to keep using EU pet passports as long as rabies vaccines are up to date.

Business travelers

Border control for business travelers is one of myriad issues yet to be worked out between the EU and the UK. In the EU, Britons attending conferences or meetings likely will be exempt from visas where they do not receive payment or provide services. However, for other UK business travelers, including posted workers and the self-employed, a visa and or a work permit may be imposed in line with each individual EU country's laws. There will also be tax and social security considerations. Certain services or company ownership in those countries may be off-limits to non-EU citizens or residents or those lacking national licences, and customs declarations may be needed for goods carried in.

Without an EU-UK deal, Britain will likely apply its current rules for those coming from favored nations, meaning a visa needed for work but not for short stays to attend a conference or training. Those same rules would require EU citizens with a job offer to prove English-language skills and a minimum salary dependent on whether the position is skilled (26,500 pounds, equivalent to 29,600 euros or \$35,000) or a shortage occupation (20,480 pounds, 22,800 euros).

From January, EU students going to Britain will need a visa for courses longer than six months, and will have to pay steeper tuition fees—four times as much for degrees such as medicine or MBAs in prestigious universities. UK universities fear that that hefty burden will force many European students to choose EU institutions—some of which are free—instead, blowing a big hole in their finances. They also say they are already being shunned for research projects led by EU universities. According to UK parliament research, there were 143,000 EU students in British universities in the 2018 to 2019 school year.—AFP

Central African town finds Muslim-Christian peace after years of war

BAMBARI: In the crowded alleys of Bambari's Kidjigira market, customers of all faiths brush together as steam rises from hanging cooking pots and flies swarm around them. At last, people are not afraid. Until recently, the marketplace remained a no man's land separating the Muslim and Christian districts of Bambari, a town at the epicentre of civil war in the Central African Republic (CAR) from 2013 to 2017.

Today, three weeks before presidential and parliamentary elections in a tense climate, the town at the heart of one of the world's poorest countries could be an emblem of reconciliation between communities that tore one another apart. International donors and humanitarian agencies have concentrated their efforts on Bambari since 2017, treating the town as a "pilot project" for the rest of a divided, landlocked nation. But despite the millions that have been spent, unemployment and poverty persist and uncertainties weigh heavy on the future. Two thirds of the CAR's territory is still occupied and controlled by armed groups.

Bambari was long split in two and ravaged by fight-

ing between Muslim former members of the Seleka, an alliance that toppled President Francois Bozize in 2013, and the largely Christian and animist anti-balaka militias, claiming to defend their communities. Sporadic fighting between militias prevails in many parts of the CAR, in spite of a peace accord signed by 14 armed groups and the government in 2019. Militia forces regularly attack civilians, carrying out atrocities that heighten the insecurity. Bambari buildings ruined by decades of abandon by the state and the years of conflict are today getting a fresh coat of paint.

'For lack of a job'

"We rejoice in the return of peaceful cohabitation, but it's fragile because it also depends on the economy," says Jeannot Nguemendji, president of Bambari's Peace Committee, in his newly refurbished office. In a report late last month, the World Bank urged the next government to diversify an economy that is heavily reliant on subsistence agriculture to "address the fragility trap and escape the vicious circle of vio-

News in brief

40 jihadists killed in Sinai

CAIRO: The Egyptian army said yesterday it had killed 40 suspected jihadist militants since September in air and ground operations in the Sinai region, site of an Islamist insurgency. In a video statement posted on Facebook, the army said its air force had "managed to eliminate 25 takfiri elements" ... in the strategic northeastern region". Another 15 suspected Islamist militants had been killed "in special operations" since September, it said. Egyptian security officials use the term "takfiri" to refer to extremist Islamist militants. The army also said seven of its own personnel had been either wounded or killed, without specifying how many suffered injuries or died. The operations also "resulted in the arrest of 12 other" suspected extremist fighters, the statement said without providing dates or places. In addition, the army said it had destroyed 437 weapons caches, defused 159 improvised explosive devices, and confiscated dozens of other types of weapons. — AFP

Lightning strike hospitalizes 13

BRISBANE: Thirteen primary school students and two teachers were taken to hospital after lightning struck a school sportsfield on Australia's east coast yesterday. The children, aged between 10 and 12 years old, were playing on the field at their school in Queensland when the bolt struck nearby, a spokesman for the local ambulance service said. The group was treated for numbness in their legs and "mild tingling", with one teacher complaining of chest pains, Greg Christensen said. "It is believed lightning came down between two trees on the oval where the kids were playing," he said. The kids "were pretty wound up" after the incident but there were no signs of physical injury, he added. "It could have turned out very differently... with burns and other injuries, but lucky we had none of that there today." — AFP

Death sentence for Iran's Zam

TEHRAN: Iran's judiciary yesterday said it had upheld a death sentence for Ruhollah Zam, a former opposition figure who had lived in exile in France and was implicated in anti-government protests. The Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps announced the arrest of Zam in October last year, calling him a "counter-revolutionary" who was "directed by France's intelligence service". He was charged with "corruption on earth" - one of the most serious offences under Iranian law - and sentenced to death in June. "The supreme court handled the case more than a month ago," Iran's judiciary spokesman Gholamhossein Esmaili told reporters yesterday. It "upheld the ruling issued by the Revolutionary Court," he added, speaking at a videoconference. Zam, who reportedly lived in Paris, ran a channel on the Telegram messaging application Amadnews.—AFP

Japan begins capsule analysis

TOKYO: Scientists in Japan yesterday began analyzing a capsule sent back to Earth by a probe, hoping to find asteroid material that could offer clues on how the universe was formed. Officials from Japan's space agency said they were jubilant about the successful return of the capsule, which landed in Australia on Sunday after separating from the Hayabusa-2 probe. "I'm genuinely appreciative of the fact that the capsule came back, after a 5.24 billion-kilometer round-trip," project manager Yuichi Tsuda told reporters. Scientists hope it will yield up to 0.1 grams of material collected from the asteroid Ryugu some 300 million kilometers from Earth—though they won't know for sure until they look inside. "I'm really looking forward to seeing (the samples) with my own eyes," Tsuda said. But that isn't expected to happen before at least next week, with a series of steps required first to ensure the material is not contaminated. — AFP



BAMBARI: Shopkeepers sit outside their shops on Nov 18, 2020. — AFP

International

India farmers block railway tracks, roads in protest against new laws

Farmers launch a national day of action

NEW DELHI: Railway tracks and highways were blocked across India as farmers launched a national day of action yesterday against reforms deregulating the agriculture sector, upping the stakes after 10 days blockading the capital. Tens of thousands of farmers have set up barricades on roads into New Delhi since November 26, vowing not to move until the laws are repealed in one of the biggest challenges to the Hindu nationalist government since it was re-elected in a landslide in 2019.



SINGHU, India: A farmer holds a placard during a nationwide general strike to protest against recent agricultural reforms at the Delhi-Haryana state border yesterday. - AFP

Fruitless talks

Five rounds of talks have failed to narrow differences between farmers and ministers. The laws will allow farmers to sell their produce on the open market - including to supermarket chains - instead of through state-run organizations that guarantee a minimum price. Farmers say the industry will be taken over by major firms that will force prices down. "The government is misleading the farmers to benefit a few companies, whether Indian or foreign," Sonipat Agricultural Market Traders Association president Pawan Goyal said.

"If the law continues in future, the farmers will be reduced to laborers and only become workers for big companies." But the government insists the changes are necessary to give agriculture - still the backbone of the Indian economy - a long-term future. Prime Minister Narendra Modi said Monday at a rail project launch that "reforms are needed for development". "We cannot build the next century with the laws of the previous century," he added, in remarks seen as alluding to the protests. The blockade has already caused fruit and vegetables prices in Delhi to rise over restricted supplies.

The farmers are strongest in the north, but even the government in the southern Karnataka state suspended online school lessons for the day to show support. Top athletes including wrestler Kartar Singh, who has won gold medals at the Asian Games, said they would return national awards in protest at the laws. Singh, alongside hockey player Gurmail Singh - gold medalist at the 1980 Moscow Olympics - and former women's hockey captain Rajbir Kaur tried to march on the presidential palace Monday to return their awards but were stopped by police. Fresh talks on the reforms will be held today. — AFP

News in brief

Striking Tunisia medics protest

TUNIS: Thousands of striking Tunisian medics and hospital staff staged an angry protest yesterday over the country's crumbling public health infrastructure, after the death of a young doctor in a lift accident. Badreddine Aloui, 27, died last week after falling down an elevator shaft when the doors opened with no lift in place - despite the fault having been reported several years earlier. His death sparked calls for the health minister to resign and renewed anger over the failings of Tunisia's long-neglected healthcare system, bucking under the strain of the coronavirus pandemic. The protesters, many of them wearing white coats, gathered outside the health ministry in Tunis and chanted angry slogans against the country's political class. "Killers of our children! Thieves of our country!" they shouted. "Strike! Strike! No crime unpunished!" An AFP photographer said doctors, nurses, hospital staff and teachers took part, with many carrying Tunisian flags or portraits of Aloui. — AFP

Iran prosecutes Rouhani's ally

TEHRAN: Iranian prosecutors have pressed criminal charges against a deputy of President Hassan Rouhani, the judiciary said yesterday, making him the second Rouhani ally to face prosecution in recent weeks. Vice President Isa Kalantari, who is Iran's environment chief, is involved in an ongoing case involving the condition of a lagoon in north of the country as well as "remarks that circulated recently on social media," judiciary spokesman Gholamhossein Esmaili told reporters. He did not elaborate. Kalantari has faced strong criticism from conservative media in recent days over comments he made in a year-old interview that they deemed insulting to the founder of the Islamic republic, Ruhollah Khomeini. "He has presented his explanations. We must wait and see what the court decides, as he has only been recently summoned," Esmaili said. Kalantari told state news agency IRNA on Sunday that his comments had been taken out of context. — AFP

Romania's PM Orban resigns

BUCHAREST: Romania's liberal Prime Minister Ludovic Orban resigned Monday after a disappointing showing for his pro-European National Liberal Party (PNL) in elections on Sunday - but the PNL still seems to be on track to lead the next government at the head of a centre-right coalition. Orban said in a televised statement that his resignation had "a defined purpose: enabling the start of talks on the formation of the next government". Defense Minister Nicolae Ciuca has been named interim prime minister. Analysts see Orban as taking the rap for the fact that the PNL came in second on 25 percent compared to 30 percent for the left-wing opposition Social Democrat Party (PSD). The PSD has dominated Romanian politics since the collapse of communism but its last spell in government was overshadowed by street protests and clashes with the European Union and President Klaus Iohannis over judicial reforms. — AFP

Girl arrested for 'own kidnap'

LAGOS: An 18-year-old girl has been arrested in Nigeria's commercial capital Lagos for allegedly faking her own kidnap to demand ransom from her family, police said yesterday. Ujunwa Offiah is accused of conspiring with her boyfriend to stage her abduction, asking her family to pay 30 million naira (79,336 dollars, 65,500 euros). She was arrested along with another alleged accomplice, Precious Chukwu, 22, as the ransom money was being dropped, police said. "This is a case of conspiracy and staged kidnapping," state police commissioner Hakeem Odumosu said in a statement. He said Offiah's boyfriend, an Uber driver and "the man at the centre of this case", is still on the run. "We are going after him because he conspired with one of these two ladies, Offiah, who faked her kidnap." Odumosu said that after negotiation, the ransom was reduced to 700,000 naira (1,851 dollars). — AFP

Liberia votes on presidential terms

MONROVIA: Liberians voted yesterday on President George Weah's plan to shorten presidential terms, with critics fearing the former football star could use the constitutional referendum to cling to power. Weah has argued that keeping the same leader for years "is not the way to go" and wants presidents and lower-house lawmakers to serve five years instead of six, with senators serving seven years instead of nine. But the move has sparked suspicion in the region because other presidents have used constitutional changes to re-set the clock on their time in office, extending their grip on power. In Guinea, 82-year-old President Alpha Conde won a controversial third term in October after pushing through a new constitution that allowed him to bypass a two-term limit. The same month, Ivorian President Alassane Ouattara, 78, was elected for an equally contentious third term, after having revised the country's constitution. — AFP

“We are worried, our children will starve”

"We are worried, extremely worried. Our children will starve, what could be a bigger worry than this?," farmer Ved Singh told AFP ahead of the strike, echoing fears of his peers that large corporations would lower prices and destroy their livelihoods. "There would be nothing to eat... How will we earn money? This is the biggest worry for us." Authorities put on extra police in Delhi and boosted security in the rest of the country in a bid to head off any trouble.

The farmers were supported in their call for action yesterday by railway workers, truck drivers, teachers and other unions. In many eastern and western states, protesters blocked railway tracks, roads and halted trains. "We want to support the farmers' cause," a sen-

ior leader from the Communist Party of India told AFP in eastern West Bengal state. The blockade and strike have taken on a political dimension with the national ruling Bharatiya Janata Party accusing opposition parties of opportunism by rejecting measures they had called for when in power.

Delhi Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal's Common Man Party said he had been placed "under house arrest" since Monday by Delhi Police, which is controlled by the national government, after he visited the farmers' blockade site. Police denied the claim. Footage posted on Twitter showed an opposition Congress leader in western Gujarat state riding a scooter being chased by a police vehicle as he sought to join the strike.

3 fathers sentenced after pushing sons to migrate to Europe

DAKAR: A Senegalese court yesterday handed down jail terms to three fathers accused of pushing their sons to migrate to Europe by sea, sending them on a trip that left one of them dead, a defense lawyer said. In a high-profile case, the trio were given two-year jail terms, 23 months of which were suspended, on a charge of "placing the lives of others in danger," attorney Assane Dioma Ndiaye said.

They were acquitted of the charge of abetting migrant trafficking, the lawyer said. The sons were with other migrants who boarded a canoe to make the crossing from Senegal to Spain's Canary Islands, the first step in a plan to reach continental Europe. But one of them, a lad aged about 15 nicknamed Doudou, fell ill and died during the trip. The fathers of the three, all of them fishermen in the coastal town of Mbour, were arrested a couple of weeks later.

Doudou's fate triggered uproar in Senegal, prompting anguished debate about poverty, parental pressure and the allure of life in wealthy but distant Europe. His father had paid 250,000 CFA francs (\$460 / 380 euros) to a smuggler, who was to take the boy to Spain. His destination after that was Italy, where he hoped to sign up for a football training academy. A source close to the investigation said Doudou "died after having problems eating" during the trip. Further details are unclear, as according to local media his body was tipped overboard after he died. — AFP

Sister of missing Thai activist asks Cambodia to investigate

PHNOM PENH: The sister of a missing Thai activist pleaded yesterday with a Cambodian court for a thorough investigation into her brother's disappearance, more than six months after he was snatched off the streets of Phnom Penh. Democracy activist Wanchalearm Satsaksit has not been seen or heard from since June 4, when he was dragged into a car in broad daylight according to witnesses and security camera footage. The 37-year-old was wanted by Thai police for running an acerbic anti-government Facebook page, and was living in the Cambodian capital in self-imposed exile before his disappearance.

His elder sister Sitanan travelled to Phnom Penh and appeared in court yesterday to plead for a proper investigation of her brother's case - which has gotten no traction in Thailand's justice system. Sitanan - who has waged a vocal campaign demanding answers from Thai authorities - said she is not sure she will ever see her brother again. "But if I can, I will be very grateful," she told reporters after the hearing. Cambodian lawyer Sam Chamroeum said the investigating judge had asked for more evidence to be presented at a later date - after which they would decide whether the case would be taken to trial.

He added that the court has already issued charges against unidentified people for "illegal confinement and



PHNOM PENH: Sitanan, sister of missing self-exiled Thai activist Wanchalearm Satsaksit, arrives at the Phnom Penh Municipal Court yesterday. — AFP

the use of illegal weapons" - an apparent acknowledgment of Wanchalearm's disappearance within Cambodia's borders. Amnesty International blasted the "snail's pace" of the investigation. "The glaring inadequacies of this probe make a mockery of Cambodia's obligations to conduct a thorough, impartial, and independent investigation," said Amnesty's Yamini Mishra, adding that key evidence "appears to have been ignored".

Wanchalearm had fled Thailand after allegedly breaching the Computer Crimes Act and was also wanted for sedition, according to Thai police. His disappearance has been taken up by a youth-led pro-democracy movement in Thailand, drawing thousands to the streets demanding answers. At least nine pro-democracy activists living in exile have disappeared in recent years, according to Human Rights Watch. — AFP

Hope, joy for Ethiopian children at refugee-run school in Sudan

UM RAQUBA: "Do, re, mi, fa, so, la, ti, do!" an Ethiopian girl sings to her classmates, who are huddled together on a straw mat on the sandy ground of a refugee camp in Sudan. Shielded from the hot mid-afternoon sun in a makeshift classroom built from wood and straw, the children sing the octave back in unison. When they finish, they laugh as they break out into noisy applause, with nods of approval from their teacher Bereket Weldgebriel. "Education is the light of the world," Bereket, a 35-year-old English and music teacher, tells AFP.

He and the children in his class are among some 49,000 people who fled their homes after Ethiopian Prime Minister Abiy Ahmed's government launched a military operation against the authorities of the northern Tigray region on November 4. They have found shelter in a string of camps along the Sudanese border, where they live in tents and straw huts. According to the UN refugee agency, 45 percent of the refugees are children. "When I came here, my heart was broken," says Bereket, who used to run an English-language academy and teach at a public school in the Tigray town of Humera.



GEDAREF, Sudan: An Ethiopian refugee and English and music teacher Bereket Weldgebriel gives lessons to grade four refugees at a makeshift classroom at Um Raquba refugee camp on Monday. — AFP

morning and afternoon shifts. With five makeshift classrooms to shield the children from the elements, he and his team offer a basic education to the eager students according to their grade. With support from the Norwegian Refugee Council, each classroom is equipped with a blackboard and chalk, and the children have notebooks and pens. "We teach basic subjects: English, our national language Amharic, basic sciences and art, for recreation, ... sports, music and arts," says the head teacher, adding that the children also study the language of Tigray, Tigrinya. "We simply omitted all the subjects dealing with politics," he says. "Many people were killed in Tigray due to politics."

Hope and safety

Teklebrham says he fled Humera after a military officer kicked and beat him with his gun. What followed, he says, was an extraordinary exchange with the officer. Speaking in English, he describes the scene: "I told him: 'My government gave me a chalk to take my responsibility to accomplish my mission to teach children. And ... our government gave you a weapon, so you are (tougher) than me, so you can kill me.' After I talked like that he calmed down and released me." Now in Um Raquba, he gathers the teachers for an afternoon meeting, preparing for the next day's classes. According to Catherine Mercy, education adviser for the NRC, many parents arriving at the camp identified the need for schooling as a key priority, even though most had fled to Sudan with nothing but the clothes on their backs. "Education provides hope, education provides a routine for the children, education provides a safe space for the children in such times of conflict, education gives a chance for children to hope for a better future," Mercy says. Among the children attending classes at the temporary school is Emmanuel Thagakiros, a 10-year-old boy who wears a green T-shirt and shorts. He says his favorite subject is maths. "I want to learn so I can be happy and get a job to help my parents," he adds shyly. His 36-year-old mother, Askwal Hagos, says Emmanuel has had frequent nightmares since they fled their home three weeks ago. Wearing a long white cotton scarf over her hair, she tells AFP through a translator that both she and her son saw "the bodies of people who had been slaughtered" in Humera. — AFP

New meaning

Now, he and his colleagues at the temporary Um Raquba School Site I have found meaning to their new lives. "If we teach these children, they will be happy," says Bereket, a graduate of the Academy of Music of Ethiopia in Addis Ababa. "If children have an education, they can solve their problems," says the teacher, who wears his thick black hair in short dreadlocks. Holding back tears, Bereket says that during the army assault on Humera in early November, he saw "many dead bodies" on the streets. "I never expected I would see anything like that," he says, pulling his phone out of his pocket to scroll through the photos of his school back home.

No politics

Bereket's boss Teklebrham Giday, 32, was also a schoolteacher in Humera. At Um Raquba School Site I, he is the head teacher. He explains that there are several other makeshift schools in the camps, and that his school has registered 722 students so far, from grades one through 10. Holding a blue folder, a pen and several sheets of paper, Teklebrham says classes are held in

Business

WEDNESDAY, DECEMBER 9, 2020

UK, EU strike Northern Ireland pact

Brexit talks near climax as sides brace for face-to-face showdown

LONDON: Britain and the European Union yesterday announced a pact to regulate complex arrangements for Northern Ireland after Brexit, as both sides readied for a face-to-face showdown to try to salvage a wider trade deal. Prime Minister Boris Johnson is set to meet EU commission chief Ursula von der Leyen in Brussels to see if they can find the breakthrough that has eluded their trade negotiators for months, ahead of Britain's exit from the European single market in just over three weeks. Neither side sounded particularly hopeful, although the pact on Northern Ireland offered some grounds for optimism hope that each side is capable of compromise on key issues.

"I am always hopeful, but I have to be honest with you, the situation at the moment is tricky," Johnson said, touring a hospital in London for Britain's historic rollout of a coronavirus vaccine. "Our friends have to understand the UK has left the EU to exercise democratic control. We are a long way apart still," he said. "It is looking very difficult at the moment. We will do our level best. I would say to everybody there's great options ahead for our country." After the negotiating teams' latest session in Brussels, Johnson held a phone call with von der Leyen late Monday and secured an invitation to head over in person.

In a joint statement, they noted yawning gaps still on three big issues: ensuring fair cross-Channel competition after Brexit, arbitration of a future deal, and fisheries. The 27 EU leaders are due to meet in person at a summit tomorrow, so time is short, but Downing Street said details of Johnson's trip were still being ironed out. It confirmed, however, that there were no plans for Johnson to meet French President Emmanuel Macron or German Chancellor Angela Merkel in Brussels.

EU negotiator Michel Barnier and UK counterpart David Frost were holding another session of contacts Tuesday in Brussels, to review progress and draw up a report for their leaders.

After briefing EU ministers, Barnier tweeted: "Full unity. We will never sacrifice our future for the present. Access to our market comes with conditions."

'Not at any price'

Even as London and Brussels try to carve out a new trading relationship after nearly five decades of tight economic integration, the separate and politically vexed issue of Northern Ireland has been looming in the background. Northern Ireland will have the UK's only land border with the bloc from next year, and that border is meant to stay open in all circumstances as part of the 1998 peace deal that ended three decades of violence over British rule.

How to keep the trade border-free, while also ensuring Northern Ireland retains full access to mainland Britain, has been testing a separate channel of talks between senior UK minister Michael Gove and European Commission vice-president Maros Sefcovic. After they met in Brussels on Monday, the two officials said agreement had been made "in principle" including on border arrangements for Northern Ireland, covering goods passing from Britain to the province, and onwards to the EU's single market via Ireland.

As a result, London will cut three controversial clauses in a bill going through parliament that would have denied Brussels a say in future trading arrangements between the province and Ireland. In turn, that could smooth the path for Johnson's trip to EU headquarters after Germany's Europe minister Michael Roth pointedly



LONDON: Pedestrians cross Westminster Bridge in London yesterday as talks on a trade deal between the EU and the UK enter a critical stage. — AFP

demanding London restore "trust and confidence" to the relationship. Heading into the meeting with Barnier, Roth said: "Both sides will undertake additional efforts to reach a deal. We want to reach a deal, but not at any price. What we need is political will in London."

Britain left the EU on January 31 and entered a transition period to allow negotiations to establish a trade relationship with zero tariffs and zero quotas. Johnson

boasts Britain will thrive whatever the outcome of the talks and has rejected asking for a longer transition, or to prolong the negotiations into next year. "There may come a moment when we have to acknowledge that it's time to draw stumps," he said yesterday, using a cricket analogy meaning to declare play is over and abandon the talks. "But you know, we will prosper mightily" either way. — AFP



BERLIN: This file photo taken on February 17, 2020 shows pine logs piled up on the future site where US electric car giant Tesla is building its new car factory, in Gruenheide near Berlin. — AFP

Lizards, snakes block construction on Tesla's Berlin plant

FRANKFURT: US automaker Tesla was forced to suspend forest clearing for a new German plant yesterday after environmentalists won an injunction over threats to the habitats of resident lizards and snakes. The electric vehicle giant ran into opposition from two nature conservation groups which launched urgent court action against the felling of 83 hectares (205 acres) of pine trees for its huge "gigafactory" plant at Gruenheide, south of Berlin. The news risks delaying the company's hopes to roll its first electric cars off the assembly line at the site in July 2021.

The administrative court in Frankfurt am der Oder told AFP it issued an interim injunction Monday "imposing a temporary halt to clearing" to allow for an examination of the case "in view of the rapid progress of the clearing work". A final decision on the complaint filed by the Brandenburg state chapter of the Nature and Biodiversity Conservation Union (NABU) and Green League is still pending.

Among the concerns was the destruction of habitats of protected species of sand lizards and smooth snakes in the area, or disturbing them during their winter hibernation.

"Tesla cannot and must not place itself above the law," said Heinz Herwig Mascher, chairman of the Green League in Brandenburg, in a statement. Despite the energy-saving image of Tesla, run by eccentric billionaire Elon Musk, the plant has long been in environmentalists' crosshairs.

In February, a court temporarily halted deforestation work over the alleged impact on wildlife and concerns it might harm the drinking water supply.

Work was also stopped earlier this year as authorities defused seven World War II bombs discovered at the site. Tesla's first site in Europe still only has provisional construction permits, and has been authorized by local officials to begin work at its own risk, pending final authorization.

Tesla said the land covered under the latest injunction must be cleared to allow for pipelines and storage, according to the Tagesspiegel newspaper. Last week, Tesla was allowed to start installing machines in the gigafactory's paintshop, with the vast factory planned to churn out 500,000 Model 3 sedans and Model Y SUVs per year. Musk recently announced the company was looking to build the world's largest battery factory at Gruenheide alongside the car plant. — AFP

The factory will be adjacent to the Hambantota port, which was leased to a Chinese company in 2017 after Sri Lanka failed to service the \$1.4-billion debt from Beijing used to build it. Sri Lanka's cabinet approved the setting up of the tyre plant under legislation that allows generous tax concessions, Media Minister Keheliya Rambukwella told reporters in Colombo.

He said Shandong Haohua Tire Co Limited will export at least 80 percent of production, with the option of selling the rest on the local market. The announcement came just weeks after Prime Minister Mahinda Rajapaksa unveiled the country's 2021 budget, banking on a huge Chinese real-estate development in Colombo to attract more investment and revive the island's economy.

The Colombo Port City—a \$1.4 billion land reclamation project which started in 2014 — has doubled the size of Sri Lanka's current financial district. When Rajapaksa was president between 2005-15, Colombo borrowed billions from China, accumulating a mountain of debt for a string of infrastructure projects—including an international airport dubbed "the world's emptiest" by media for its lack of flights.

Yusuff Ali nominated into top Indian govt award jury

NEW DELHI: Yusuff Ali MA, Chairman and MD of UAE-based Lulu Group has been nominated into the Pravasi Bharatiya Divas Samman Awards (PBSA) jury committee by the Prime Minister of India Narendra Modi on the occasion of 2021 PBD Divas Convention along with four prominent personalities from various fields.

Other members who were nominated by the Indian Prime Minister along with Yusuff Ali are Professor Manjul Bhargava of Department of Mathematics, Princeton University, Ramesh Babu, Group MD of Kiboko Group of Companies in Uganda, Shayarande, Secretary of non-profit organization Indian Council for International co-operation and Nivruti Rai, Country Head of Intel India. A notification in this regard has been issued in the official gazette.

The Vice President of India heads the prestigious award jury committee which also includes External Affairs Minister, Principal Secretary to the Prime Minister, Home Secretary and Foreign Secretary. The Pravasi Bharatiya Divas (PBD) Convention is scheduled to be held virtually for the first time due to COVID pandemic on 9th January 2021. The Pravasi Bhartiya Samman Awards (PBSA) are announced on the occasion of Pravasi Bhartiya Divas Convention to recognize Overseas Indians who have made significant contributions either in India or abroad in various fields.



Yusuff Ali MA

He and his brother Gotabaya Rajapaksa—the current president—have rejected accusations that many such projects are white elephants, and have denied falling victim to a Chinese debt trap.

With credit agencies cutting Sri Lanka's debt ratings, the country is expecting more Chinese loans in the new year. Its economy is struggling with both the coronavirus pandemic and the devastating effect the Easter Sunday bombings last year had on the tourism industry. — AFP

Second US judge blocks Trump's TikTok ban

NEW YORK: A second US federal judge has suspended a Trump administration executive order threatening to ban TikTok in the United States. The preliminary injunction granted late Monday by judge Carl Nichols in a district court in Washington DC comes more than a month after a similar decision in Pennsylvania.

Nichols said TikTok's lawyers had demonstrated that the Commerce Department likely overstepped its authority by seeking to ban the popular social media app and "acted in an arbitrary and capricious manner by failing to consider obvious alternatives." The White House claims TikTok is a national security risk because of potential links to the Beijing government through its Chinese owner ByteDance.

President Donald Trump signed an executive order on August 6 giving Americans 45 days to stop doing business with ByteDance—effectively setting a deadline for a sale of the app to a US company.

Trump's order said the action was necessary to "protect our national security" and claimed the personal data of TikTok users could be used by Beijing. 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.

The latest order follows an October 30 ruling by a federal court in Pennsylvania which issued a temporary injunction blocking Trump's ban. After a complaint from three TikTok content creators, Judge Wendy Beetlestone ordered the US administration not to prevent other companies from providing essential services to the platform, such as online hosting.

Beetlestone had considered that the August 6 presidential decree should be suspended.

At the end of September, judge Nichols had also issued a temporary injunction stopping the US from banning downloads of the app, which he said would cause "irreparable harm" to TikTok, but he refused to rule on its total ban in the United States. TikTok has a further fight on its hands over an August 14 executive order from Trump to force ByteDance to sell its US operations to an American buyer.

The US Treasury has repeatedly extended the deadline for the Chinese group to divest, and indicated on Friday it would continue negotiations to resolve the dispute. TikTok has 100 million users in the United States and 700 million worldwide. Washington is in a tense trade battle with Beijing, and Trump's administration has stepped up warnings about China's growing economic and military power. — AFP



In this file photo a general view is seen of the TikTok building, in Culver City, California. — AFP

Sri Lanka gets \$300m Chinese factory near key port

COLOMBO: Sri Lanka announced yesterday the first large-scale Chinese investment in manufacturing in the country, a \$300-million tyre factory near a strategic deep-sea port. Western nations, as well as regional power India, have long been concerned about Chinese influence in Sri Lanka through projects under its gargantuan Belt and Road infrastructure initiative.

Business

Uber to sell autonomous car division to startup Aurora

Ride-hailing giant to invest \$400m in Aurora, to hold 26% stake in it

SAN FRANCISCO: Uber agreed to sell its autonomous car division to Aurora in a deal that gives the ride-hailing giant a stake in the startup developing self-driving technology, the companies said Monday.

As part of the deal, Uber will invest \$400 million in Aurora to merge the teams from both firms seeking to advance the technology for autonomous ride-hailing and will hold a 26 percent stake in Aurora. "By adding the people and technology of Uber's Advanced Technologies Group to the incredible group we've already assembled at Aurora, we're shifting the landscape of the automated vehicle space," said Chris Urmsen, co-founder and chief executive of Aurora, which has been backed by Amazon and South Korean carmaker Hyundai, among others.

Sale of Uber's autonomous driving unit, which was temporarily stalled several years back after a fatal crash, comes as it streamlines operations to navigate a ride-share market scuttled by the pandemic.

Uber did not appear to be giving up on self-driving cars, which have been part of its vision for a profitable ride-share business, but was instead swapping the unit for a stake in Aurora Innovation.

"With the addition of ATG, Aurora will have an incredibly strong team and technology, a clear path to several markets, and the resources to deliver," Urmsen said. "Simply put, Aurora will be the company best positioned to deliver the self-driving products necessary to make transportation and logistics safer, more accessible, and less expensive."

Along with acquiring ATG, Aurora announced a strategic partnership with Uber to mesh its technology

with the leading smartphone-summoned ride service, according to the companies. The companies expected the self-driving technology to be initially put to use for long-haul trucking.

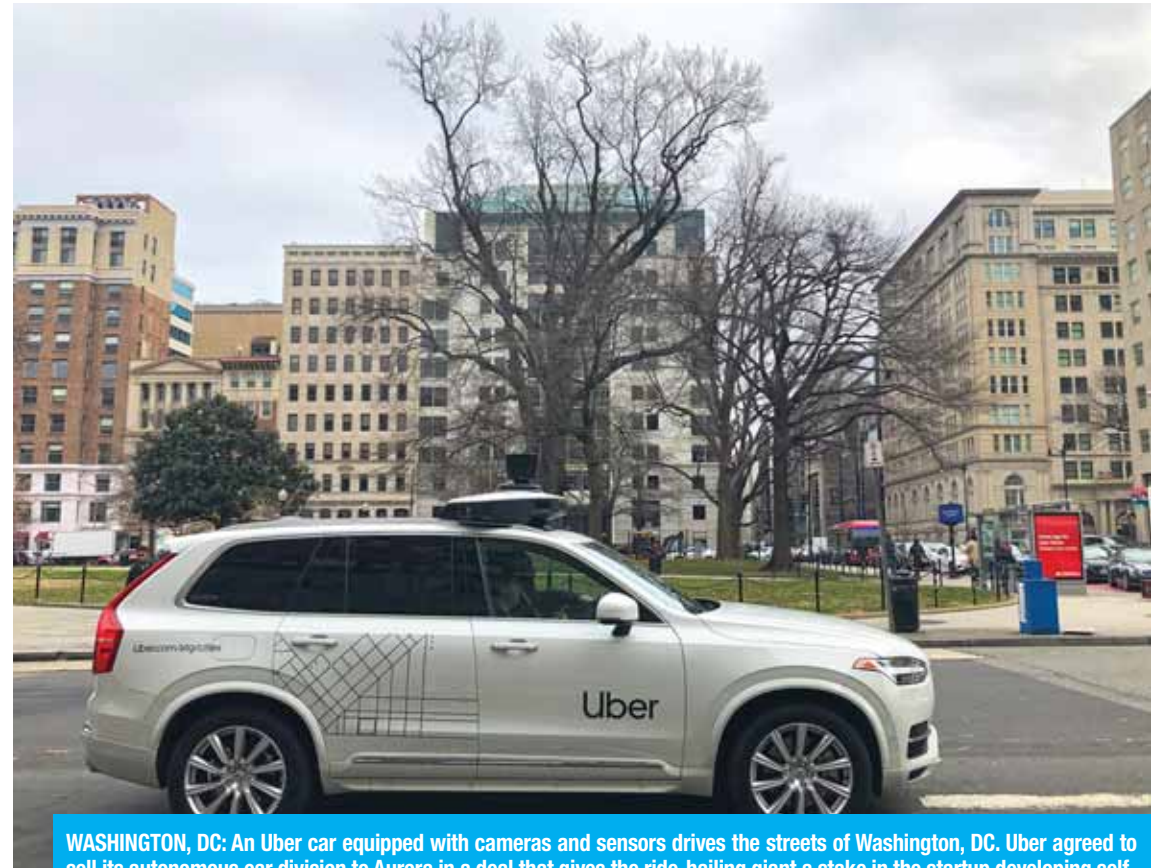
Robo-taxis

Uber chief executive Dara Khosrowshahi is joining the Aurora board of directors as part of the deal. The merged firm will work on the technology to be known as Aurora Driver. "Few technologies hold as much promise to improve people's lives with safe, accessible, and environmentally friendly transportation as self-driving vehicles," Khosrowshahi said. "I'm looking forward to working with Chris, and to bringing the Aurora Driver to the Uber network in the years ahead."

Uber's autonomous vehicle aspirations took a hit after a US investigation into the death of a pedestrian struck by a self-driving Uber car in 2018 faulted driver inattention along with "inadequate" safety measures implemented by the company. It also struggled as a result of litigation by former Google car unit Waymo claiming Uber had misappropriated trade secrets on autonomous technology.

Waymo opened its robo-taxi project to the general public in the US city of Phoenix in October, becoming the first widely available driverless ride service. Aurora, founded by an engineer for formerly worked on the Google autonomous vehicle team, has backing from Amazon and Fiat Chrysler.

Japanese car giant Toyota and investment fund SoftBank Vision Fund have made investments in Uber's autonomous driving unit. — AFP



WASHINGTON, DC: An Uber car equipped with cameras and sensors drives the streets of Washington, DC. Uber agreed to sell its autonomous car division to Aurora in a deal that gives the ride-hailing giant a stake in the startup developing self-driving technology, the companies said Monday. — AFP

German city courts Poles from post-Brexit Britain

GOERLITZ, Germany: Poles living in Britain may receive a surprise package in the post this Christmas of dried mushrooms, candied fruit and spice cake—not from Santa, but someone with a less altruistic motive.

The parcels of Polish and German delicacies are being sent by the city of Goerlitz in Germany's former communist East, as part of efforts to attract Poles in Britain who are tempted to return to the continent because of Brexit. Faced with labor shortages and an ageing population, the city on the border with Poland has been running a campaign over the past year aimed at the some 900,000 Poles currently living in the UK. Around 100,000 have already left since Britain's referendum on leaving the European Union in 2016.

The campaign has included adverts in British newspapers, a Facebook page and a website with an FAQ in three languages where Poles can find answers to questions such as "Can I transfer my company's headquarters," "Will my health insurance cover me when I arrive in Goerlitz," and "Can I work in Goerlitz without language skills?" The city's reasonable rents, architectural gems and picturesque cobbled streets are also highlighted as selling points.

Bilingual classes

Goerlitz is a home away from home for Poles, according to Andrea Behr, in charge of investment strategy for the city authorities and head of the project. "If you go into a bakery, you might well be served by a Polish woman... If you go to nurseries or schools, you will find bilingual classes," she said. Some 4,000 of the city's 57,000 inhabitants are Polish, and many others commute across the border every day, drawn by the more generous salaries on the other side of the Neisse river. Goerlitz is just a short hop across the John Paul II road bridge from its Polish twin town of Zgorzelec.

Like most of the former communist East Germany, Goerlitz has seen its population decline since German reunification. The glitz and glamour of "Goerliwood", the city's nickname since blockbusters such as "The Grand Budapest Hotel" were filmed there, cannot disguise crumbling facades, boarded-up windows and derelict factories. Last year, the far-right Alternative for Germany (AfD) party found itself in a position to conquer the town hall in Goerlitz, with the traditional parties forming an awkward alliance to block it. "On average, for every child that is born, two people die. In a few years' time, we will be facing a major labor shortage," said Behr. The shortage is already making itself felt. From research to blue-collar and manual trades, IT and the medical sector, jobs are not being filled due to a lack of candidates. Last year, Goerlitz's main hospital placed an advert in a major British daily newspaper urging Poles to consider returning home. The hospital's management did not wish to comment on the advert.

German salaries

According to the mayor of Zgorzelec, Rafal Gronicz, "most of those leaving the UK will want to maintain the same standard of living and will certainly not return to Poland." In Goerlitz, "they can earn German wages and at the same time be closer to their families, to their country," he said. Izabela Jucha is one of those who have already made the move. After moving to the UK when Poland joined the EU in 2004, she now lives in the region with her husband and their daughter, who goes to school in Goerlitz. The family live on the Polish side but Jucha is learning German in the hope of developing her career in human resources in Goerlitz, which "presents better economic opportunities".

Brexit "marked a leap into the unknown... We didn't know if we were going to lose our jobs," said the 30-year-old, who lived for 12 years in Northampton and Kettering, England, and then in Canada. "The future of our 14-year-old daughter was a determining factor in our decision," she said. "The education system here is very good, and free." It remains to be seen how successful the Goerlitz campaign will be, especially since it was suspended for several months because of the coronavirus pandemic.—AFP

Daimler sells French Smart factory to Britain's Ineos

METZ, France: Mercedes-Benz parent Daimler has sold its Smart car factory in northeast France to Britain's Ineos, which will use it to build a 4x4, a source close to factory management told AFP yesterday. "The sale was signed on Monday evening," the source said, adding that the deal would preserve 1,300 of the 1,500 jobs at the site in Hambach.

Petrochemicals firm Ineos had initially said it planned

to build the Grenadier off-roader, its first foray into the automotive industry, in Wales. But this summer it said it was considering buying Daimler's plant at Hambach instead. German auto giant Daimler caused surprise when it announced was putting the factory up for sale to try cut costs in the face of losses caused by the Covid-19 pandemic. It will continue production of an electric-drive Smart and part of a new electric Mercedes SUV at the site until 2024, the source in Hambach said. The carmaker's departure from Hambach marks the end of an era that began with great fanfare in 1997, when then German chancellor Helmut Kohl and former French president Jacques Chirac inaugurated a plant to produce a mini two-seater city car.

The factory's communications director, Jean-Yves Schmitt, told AFP both Daimler and Ineos would issue statements on the sale later. —AFP



BRISTOL: An aerial view shows lines of new Honda cars parked up at the Royal Portbury Dock in Avonmouth, near Bristol in south-west England. In the absence of a Brexit deal, the UK and the EU would move from almost seamless trade in many areas to trading on standard terms set by the World Trade Organization. — AFP

Deal or no deal, Britain to pay high price for Brexit

LONDON: Brexiters have long argued that leaving the European Union, with or without a trade deal, would herald Britain's so-called sunlit uplands of economic prosperity.

But the outlook remains uncertain, as the economy struggles to recover from a recession sparked by the coronavirus outbreak. Despite eye-wateringly costly emergency state interventions, including the subsidy of private-sector wages, a bounce back does not look to be on the cards for months, if not years. Britain will nevertheless embark upon life outside its main trading partner on January 1, 2021, leaving the EU single market and customs union that benefitted "UK plc" for decades.

The nation officially left the EU in January but is currently locked in a Brexit transition period that means the bloc's rules still apply until December 31.

Many analysts predict Brexit will unleash even more painful economic damage, delivering another hammer blow just as the Covid-19 fallout begins to ease with the advent of vaccines. Just how much harm it will do hinges on the outcome of fractious trade talks between Brussels and the government of Britain's pro-Brexit Conservative Prime Minister Boris Johnson, which have gone down to the wire.

'Inevitable disruption'

Capital Economics analyst Thomas Pugh says there will inevitably be disruption but predicts it might not be long lasting. "If there were a deal it would probably mean no tariffs or quotas on goods, and trade in services would probably remain similar to how it is now," Pugh said in a research note, also sounding optimism over a possible deal for key financial services.

In the absence of an agreement, Britain will revert to World Trade Organization (WTO) rules which would see tariffs imposed on a wide range of products, from car parts to beef. UK companies would face an overnight spike in their costs—which they are expected to pass on to consumers in the form of higher prices, particularly for imported fresh food products. "There would be some inevitable disruption as firms get used to the new rules—there will be 'rules of origin' checks for the first time in many years," predicted Pugh.

"But the period of disruption should be relatively short-lived." At the same time, even a Brexit trade deal would not be as advantageous as being part of the EU's single market, which ensures a smooth flow of trade across the continent. The Bank of England has forecast that slumping exports and supply-chain disruption arising from no-deal could send the UK economy shrinking by 1.0 percent in the first quarter of 2021.—AFP

On the pulse of cybersecurity threats in healthcare

Author: Ahmad AL Bikawi, Chief Security Officer – North Gulf, Huawei Middle East

There's nothing more important than our health. For many, there's also nothing more private than our health information. Imagine all the personal information our healthcare providers have about us; from identification details and demographics to home addresses and postal codes, as well as health information such as medical history, current medical status, and medications we're under.

Such information is considered of high value by bad actors on the Internet. Unfortunately, the healthcare industry has become a major target of cyber-attacks. According to one recent report, cybersecurity investment in the healthcare industry vertical is expected to grow at the highest compound annual growth rate in the Middle East until 2022, due to the technological proliferation of healthcare applications and increased instances of data thefts in the sector.

As we all know, the region is moving towards smart care and smart hospitals, featuring connected devices and medical equipment that relies heavily on IT and networking to deliver the latest healthcare services. In particular, connected medical devices provide patients advanced, flexible, and convenient services to help improve their lives.

However, this increased connectivity and the proliferation of devices open new vulnerabilities for cyberattacks. Cybersecurity threats in the medical industry are actually a threat to peoples' lives. Healthcare professionals need to be aware of these threats. Moreover, these threats do not just impact individuals. An increase in healthcare devices susceptible to attackers means potential access to entire healthcare networks. Today's pacemakers and health monitors connected to the internet can



act as a gateway for hackers to exploit or block a healthcare system.

While most healthcare institutions are committed to privacy regardless of what it takes, some are still far behind in adopting cybersecurity protocol and progressing with the times. In the region, too many healthcare organizations still have low data-encoding levels, and have minimal investments in awareness of cybersecurity best practices. This results in poor management and protection of patient data. Externally, the cost of reselling stolen health records remains attractive, reinforcing the level of interest among criminals to continue with their malicious attempts to extract data.

Many governments in the region have started to take a proactive approach to confront these challenges. There is also an increasing knowledge exchange happening between local and international healthcare entities on this topic. Ultimately, addressing medical device security risks and wider cybersecurity challenges requires integrated collaboration across the industry, from regulators to manufacturers and clinicians.

Business

stc forms strategic partnership with Tecnotree to deliver EDP

Enterprise digitalization program to enable digital transformation

KUWAIT: Kuwait Telecommunications Company - stc, a world-class digital leader providing innovative services and platforms to customers enabling the digital transformation in Kuwait, announced a strategic partnership with Tecnotree to deliver stc's Enterprise Digitalization Program (EDP). The digital transformation project will provide stc's enterprise customers with a seamless and personalized omnichannel experience.

In its statement, stc mentioned that the three-year partnership supports the Company's vision to become a world-class digital leader in innovative telecom services and platforms across the region. The step forward will contribute to enhancing the customer experience through innovative solutions, facilitating business processes efficiently and expediting customer service responses across the various channels used by the Company.

The EDP aims to transform stc's legacy BSS infrastructure with an open ecosystem composed of mul-

ti-speed digital architecture, enabling the company to rapidly deploy new capability models and integrate both partner and third-party digital channels into a single framework.

Tecnotree's vast experience in driving digital transformation engagements globally will underpin the program. As stc's partner on this journey, Tecnotree brings unique capabilities to the project via its Digital BSS Suite 5 products, including Tecnotree Surge, an award-winning Digital Accelerator Platform that publishes TM Forum certified APIs. The two companies will use these tools together to help stc transition to a digital service provider of the future, enabling it to compete in the new digital telecom paradigm.

On this occasion, engineer Fahad Abdulrahman Al Ali, Chief Technology Officer at stc, expressed his happiness in forming the strategic partnership, which serves as an additional step taken by the Company to widen its offerings, range of innovative

digital solutions, and build the infrastructure of its 5G network.

He added, "Upgrading our digital services will provide our customers with enhanced connectivity solutions, thereby accelerating the deployment of smart applications and promoting digital transformation. This initiative builds on stc's commitment to continuously offer its enterprise customers with less restricted solutions that accelerate digital transformation with an aim to increase productivity and operational efficiency."

Upon completion, the multi-phased transformation project will upgrade stc's current systems to state-of-the-art IT architecture and processes that



Fahad Al Ali

will allow delivery of seamless and personalized omnichannel customer experiences via leveraging intelligent insights. This will enable stc to become a full digital ICT player and system integrator, whilst also expanding its services & solutions beyond mobility. Commenting on the strategic partnership, Tecnotree CEO, Padma Ravichander, said, "The Telecom industry today stands at the cusp of digital transformation where digitalization has become a core necessity to compete and survive. We are delighted that our Digital BSS Suite 5 has been selected by stc, as they embark on a digital transformation journey to become a digital leader. We are confident that our vast experience in driving digital transformation and superior deployment capabilities for telecom service providers globally will augment stc's capabilities allowing them to emerge as leaders in the digitally connected ecosystem. Through this partnership, we will deliver visible results that will set new industry standards and benchmarks."

Jazeera Airways offers passengers PCR test for KD22 only

KUWAIT: Jazeera Airways yesterday announced that its passengers can now have their PCR test done before traveling for KD 22 only.

The airline has partnered with the Jarallah German Specialized Clinic which is accredited by the Ministry of Health to provide its passengers with the reduced rate. Passengers can schedule an appointment online while making a reservation with Jazeera Airways or by calling the airline's call center at 177.

Rohit Ramachandran, CEO Jazeera Airways said: "We are pleased to be able to offer our passengers an affordable test option. This will help free up trav-



el for more people and enable them to fly to their destination of choice whilst complying with entry requirements." Tickets and PCR tests can be booked at jazeeraairways.com, on the Jazeera App or by calling 177.

Jazeera Terminal 5 and Jazeera flights comply

with all hygiene regulations to ensure a safe flying experience for passengers. Recently, the airline launched 'Duo Seat' that enables passengers to book the middle seat next to them in addition to their seat when travelling, giving passengers more comfort and security on their flight.

Japan approves \$700 billion stimulus package

TOKYO: Japan's government yesterday approved more than \$700 billion in fresh stimulus to fund projects from anti-coronavirus measures to green tech, the country's third such package this financial year.

The Covid-19 pandemic has wrought global economic carnage and countries across the world have announced massive cash injections. Japan's latest package, worth 73.6 trillion yen (\$708 billion), includes loan schemes and actual government spending of around 40 trillion yen.

It is the first stimulus spending Prime Minister Yoshihide Suga has announced since taking office in September, and comes as Japan faces a spike in Covid-19 infections, with record numbers of new cases reported in recent weeks. "We drew up (the stimulus package) to pave the way for new growth, to protect people's livelihoods as well as maintaining employment and keeping businesses going," Suga said. Japan officially exited recession last month after three quarters of contraction, and hopes to cement its recovery with the latest spending — which follows two previous packages this year each worth around 117 trillion yen.

The new package includes financial support for medical institutions and facilities for the elderly, and subsidies to continue a controversial domestic travel



TOKYO: A woman looks at fruits and vegetables for sale at a street stall in Tokyo yesterday. — AFP

scheme supporting tourism-dependent businesses. While Japan has seen a relatively small coronavirus outbreak overall — with 163,929 confirmed cases and 2,382 deaths — there has been a sharp rise in infections, and doctors have warned that hospitals could be overwhelmed. Yesterday the defense minister also ordered military nurses to be sent to a city in the northern Hokkaido region that is facing a severe shortage of medical staff. The package also

features a \$20 billion green tech fund designed to support projects from renewable energy development to pollution reduction.

In October, Suga set a 2050 deadline for Japan to become carbon neutral, significantly firming up the country's climate change commitments. Yasutoshi Nishimura, the minister in charge of fiscal policy, said the government aims to return the economy to pre-pandemic levels within the next financial year. — AFP

Ailing Norwegian Air secures bankruptcy protection in Norway

OSLO, Norway: Embattled low-cost carrier Norwegian Air Shuttle said yesterday it had secured bankruptcy protection in Norway, after recently receiving a similar shield in Ireland.

Burdened with massive debt after an ambitious expansion program and suffering from the Covid-19 pandemic that has paralyzed global air traffic, Europe's third-biggest no-frills airline is now fighting for its survival.

An Irish court on Monday allowed Norwegian to put itself and several Irish subsidiaries—which manage its fleet and some of its routes in Europe—under "examinership", the equivalent of the US procedure known as Chapter 11. The manoeuvre shields the

company from creditors and potential bankruptcy while it tries to restructure its debt.

A specialized Norwegian court yesterday also granted it protection. "A supplementary reconstruction process under Norwegian law will be to the benefit of all parties and will increase the likelihood of a successful result," Norwegian chief executive Jacob Schram said in a statement.

"Our aim is to secure jobs in the company and to contribute to securing critical infrastructure and value creation in Norway," he added. Pending a worldwide roll-out of COVID vaccines that could enable air traffic to return to normal, Norwegian last week presented a rescue plan that included slashing its fleet, debt conversion and a rights issue of up to four billion kroner (\$453 million, 374.5 million euros). Shareholders are due to vote on the plan at an extraordinary general meeting on December 17.

The company, a pioneer in the low-cost long haul sector, has been in the red since 2017 and its debt amounted to 48.5 billion kroner at the end of September. — AFP



German investor confidence jumps on vaccine boost

FRANKFURT: German investor confidence jumped in December, buoyed by hopes that vaccines—which are expected to win approval for general use in the EU imminently—could help end the coronavirus pandemic. The ZEW institute's monthly barometer measuring economic expectations rose to 55.0 points from 39.0 points in November, after falling for two straight months.

"The announcement of imminent vaccine approvals makes financial market experts more confident about the future," said ZEW President Achim Wambach. Britain yesterday became the first country to administer the Pfizer/BioNTech coronavirus vaccine outside a clinical trial, and potential approvals of a swathe of vaccines have galvanized optimism of a route out of the pandemic.

ZEW's figure, based on a survey of 174 financial market experts, came in well above analyst expectations. However, it did not reach the high of 77.4 points logged in September, ahead of the second wave of the pandemic.

Germany reintroduced restrictions in November to curb infections, including shutting food-and-drink outlets and leisure and cultural sites, but kept shops and factories open. German data for October showed industrial production and orders rose, with Germany's car industry showing promising resilience. Despite the growing investor optimism, ZEW's assessment of the current economic situation in Germany worsened again, dropping 2.2 points to minus 66.5 points. — AFP

JD.com health arm rockets 75% on Hong Kong debut

HONG KONG: The medical arm of Chinese e-commerce giant JD.com soared 75 percent on its debut in Hong Kong yesterday, valuing the company at \$50 billion, as investors bank on the pandemic boom in digital health services. While the coronavirus has left national health services stretched, demand for digital health-care providers like JD Health grew on the back of the virus.

The company's chief executive Xin Lijun said it has "changed the entire (health) industry" and pushed the company to accelerate its listing in Hong Kong, the biggest initial public offering in the financial hub this year. The company, China's largest online healthcare platform and retail pharmacy, raised HK\$26.5 billion (\$3.41 billion) in the sale and with demand for the firm outpacing supply its share price spiked at HK\$123.90 — compared with its offer price of HK\$70.58 — briefly giving it a valuation of \$50 billion.

However, it later eased slightly to end up 56 percent at HK\$110.00. Xin described the telemedicine company's listing as a "new starting point" in healthcare, adding that the firm aims to provide "convenient and accessible" medical services after a challenging year in the health sector. As China's coronavirus outbreak peaked in early 2020, the subsidiary of JD.com offered free online consultations, attracting tens of thousands of patients a day and helping stem the wave of people who may have sought to attend a hospital.

Finance 'shifting east'

The share sale comes after the company's parent raised around \$4 billion in the city in June.

The listing of the Beijing-based subsidiary could also raise that much if banks execute an option for additional stock. JD's June sale came around the same time as another tech firm, NetEase, raised \$2.7 billion and followed Beijing-Shanghai High Speed Railway's \$4.3 billion listing in January.

However, the share market was dealt a blow last month when Ant Group, the financial arm of Alibaba, was forced to pull its world-record \$35 billion listing under pressure from Chinese authorities.

But Tuesday's debut performance by JD Health, the first big tech offering since Ant's IPO was shelved, showed Hong Kong remains an attractive location for listings.

"It's a sign of how the center of finance is shifting to the East in a big way," Brian Tycango, analyst at Stansberry Research, wrote on Twitter of the market capital added to the Hong Kong Exchange.

Chinese tech companies are increasingly looking to move into digital healthcare after months of lockdowns caused by the coronavirus pandemic, which emerged in central China late last year.

The health arm of JD.com's rival Alibaba has more than doubled in valuation in Hong Kong while personalized health company Ping An Good Doctor has surged in value by more than 50 percent during the pandemic. Online health services can help plug holes in China's health system, where smaller cities and rural areas are not very well covered by the country's best medical professionals.

Because of China's widespread internet coverage, Xin said an online consultation platform like JD Health's could "become China's largest tiered diagnosis and treatment platform".

The company already hosts more than 100,000 people a day even after the worst of China's outbreak, when it attracted up to 150,000 daily visitors, he said. The company's platforms now boast 65,000 doctors and more than 72 million patients. JD Health's total revenue rose to 8.8 billion yuan (\$1.34 billion) in the first half of 2020 from 5 billion yuan in the same period last year, it said in its prospectus. —AFP

Classifieds

Wednesday, December 9, 2020

Kuwait Times
Now you can browse
www.kuwaittimes.net
e-mail: info@kuwaittimes.net



Tel: (+965) 161 Ext: 66819 - 66817
Fax: (+965) 24348714
www.met.gov.kw

Expected Weather for the Next 24 Hours

BY DAY: Fair with light variable wind to light to moderate north westerly wind with speed of 08 - 32 km/h.

BY NIGHT: Rather cold to cold with light to moderate north westerly wind to light variable wind with speed of 08 - 30 km/h.

WEATHER WARNING			No Current Warnings	
STATION	MAX. EXP.	MIN. REC.	SFC. CHART 08/12/2020 0000 UTC	
KUWAIT CITY	21 °C	14 °C		
KUWAIT AIRPORT	22 °C	09 °C		
ABDALY	23 °C	09 °C		
BUBYAN	20 °C	12 °C		
JAHRA	21 °C	11 °C		
FAILAKA ISLAND	- °C	- °C		
SALMIYAH	20 °C	16 °C		
AHMADI	- °C	- °C		
NUWAISIB	22 °C	10 °C		
WAFRA	22 °C	09 °C		
SALMY	23 °C	11 °C		

4 DAYS FORECAST						
DAY	DATE	WEATHER	Temperatures		Wind Direction	Wind Speed
			MAX.	MIN.		
Wednesday	12/09	Fair	23 °C	09 °C	VRB-NW	08 - 30 km/h
Thursday	12/10	Fair and some scattered clouds will appear	22 °C	10 °C	VRB-NW	12 - 32 km/h
Friday	12/11	Fair	22 °C	09 °C	NW	10 - 30 km/h
Saturday	12/12	Fair	21 °C	09 °C	NW-VRB	08 - 28 km/h

PRAYER TIMES	
Fajr	05:07
Sunrise	06:31
Zuhr	11:40
Asr	14:31
Sunset	16:50
Isha	18:12

RECORDED YESTERDAY AT KUWAIT AIRPORT	
MAX. Temp.	20 °C
MIN. Temp.	11 °C
MAX. RH	95 %
MIN. RH	33 %
MAX. Wind	NW 28 km/h
TOTAL RAINFALL IN 24 HR.	0 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
Khaldiya	24848075
Kaifan	24849807
Shamiya	24848913
Shuwaikh	24814507
Abdullah Salem	22549134
Nuzha	22526804
Industrial Shuwaikh	24814764
Qadsiya	22515088
Dasmah	22532265
Bneid Al-Gar	22531908
Shaab	22518752
Qibla	22459381
Ayoun Al-Qibla	22451082
Mirqab	22456536
Sharq	22465401
Salmiya	25746401

SHARING ACCOMMODATION

For Filipino Bachelor ONLY Farwaniya block 1, near gulfmart. Available 25 of December, Contact 94418396 or 97345734 (8-12-2020)

FOR SALE

House hold items for sale. Contact mobile: 66076140

Mitsubishi Galant model 2012, white color, low mileage, first owner. Contact: 66076140 (C 5822) 7-12-2020

CHANGE OF NAME

I, Lijo Gladin Austinsingh D/o Livingston, holder of Indian passport No: S2396095 presently residing in Kuwait, hereby declare that henceforth my name will be changed as given name: Lijo Gladin and surname: Livingston. (C 5821) 6-12-2020



Airlines

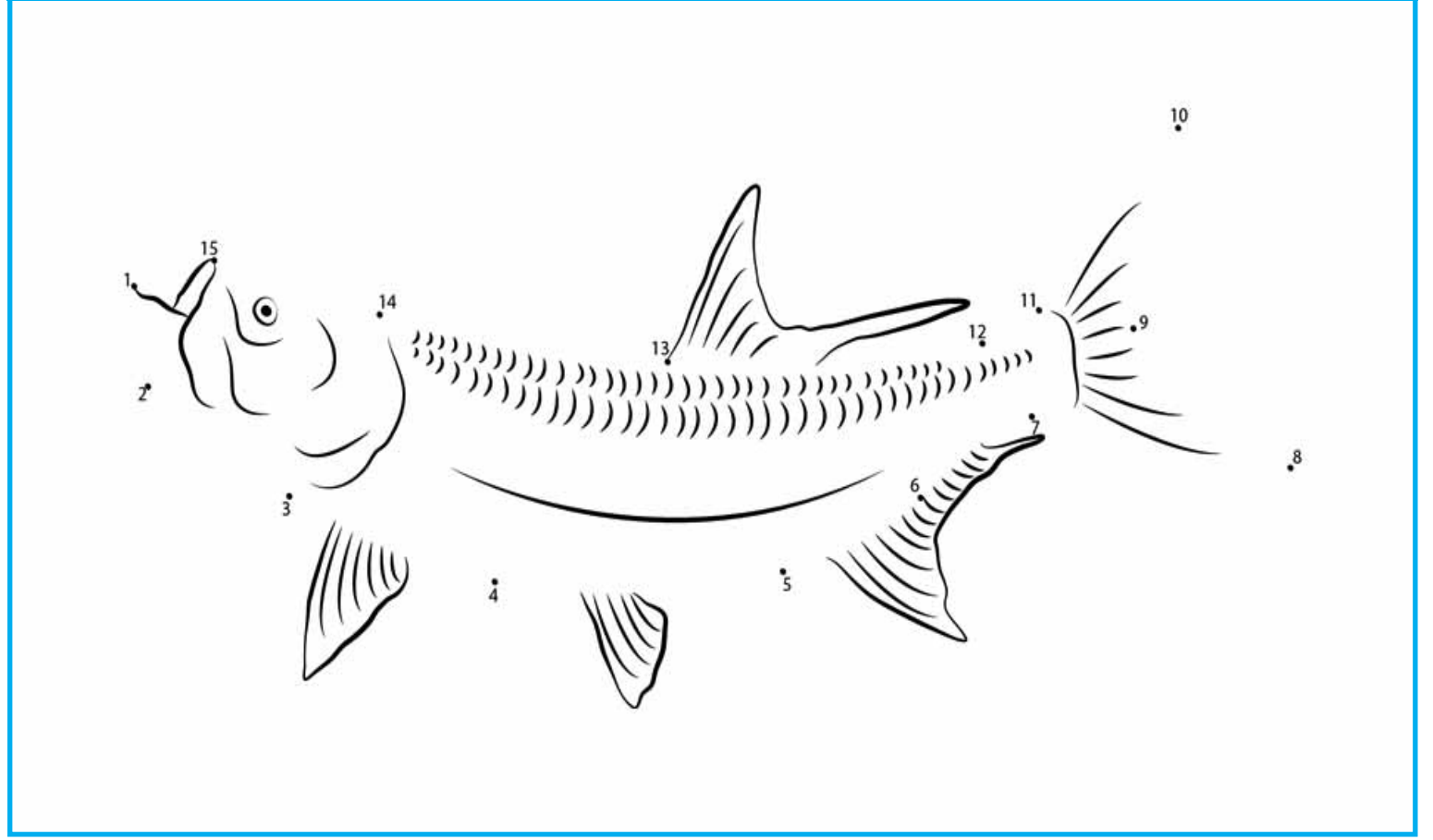
Kuwait Airways	171
Jazeera Airways	177
Turkish Airlines	1884918
FlyDubai	22414400
Qatar Airways	22423888
KLM	22425747
Royal Jordanian	22418064/5/6
British Airways	22425635
Air France	22430224
Emirates	22921555
Air India	22456700
Air India EXPRESS	22438185/4
Sri Lanka Airlines	22424444
Egypt Air	22421578
Swiss Air	22421516
Saudia	22426306
Middle East Airlines	22423073

Word Search

Candy Bar WORD SEARCH

ALMOND JOY	HERSHEY BAR	PAY DAY
BABY RUTH	KIT KAT	SNICKERS
BUTTERFINGER	KRACKEL	TAKE FIVE
CARAMELLO	MARS	THREE MUSKETEERS
CHARLESTON CHEW	MILKY WAY	TWIX
CRUNCH	MOUNDS	WHATCHAMACALLIT
FIFTH AVENUE	MR. GOODBAR	ZERO
HEATH	OH HENRY	

Join the Dots



STAR TRACK

Aries (March 21-April 19)
You could be feeling especially sociable today. Maybe there's a virtual party of some kind you want to be invited to. You could hear some good news, and there is probably some truth to it, but take everything you hear through the grapevine with a grain of salt. Not everything you hear is based on fact. If you can, go to someone in a position to know and find out from him or her.

Cancer (June 21-July 22)
An attractive neighbor with whom you seem to share a bond could become a friend. A group you're affiliated with could be expressing highly idealized goals and purposes. These goals are likely to be admirable, Cancer, but they may not be all that realistic. Bear that in mind before committing to any course of action. You need more facts before you can proceed.

Libra (September 23-October 22)
Lovely dreams could spark your imagination and get your artistic abilities going. You could learn a lot about yourself and whatever has been limiting you. Write down whatever comes your way so you can work with it later, but don't try to make sense of it today. Wait a while and then consider everything in a more practical light. You may be surprised at the difference in you.

Capricorn (December 22-January 19)
A journey by air to a distant place might be on your mind, though you might not make it for a long time. Knowledge is important to you, and you can be insatiably curious. This is likely to be one of those days, Capricorn. A friend or lover could bring some new information that sparks your curiosity, perhaps something related to astrology or the occult. You will want to pursue it.

Taurus (April 20-May 20)
You're feeling especially loving, attractive, and romantic, so romance is likely to be on your mind. Romantic novels and movies could seem especially appealing. If you're currently involved, you will probably receive a lot of attention from your mate. If not, expect to receive admiring glances from those around you, including strangers! You could meet a potential date but take care to get to know this person before getting too excited.

Leo (July 23-August 22)
Dreams of a new career could fill your mind today, perhaps because of too much stress in your current one. You might even think of becoming a movie star! Go for your dream if you feel it's what you want, Leo. Remember that any moneymaking enterprise, no matter how creative, is still a business. Make use of your natural business talent to find out what you need to know.

Scorpio (October 23-November 21)
A new friend could arrive today, Scorpio. You're probably going to like this person very much. He or she probably shares many of your interests. You could become close friends. The downside is that you aren't likely to see anyone as they really are, only an idealized picture. When you meet this person, try to see the real person behind the mask and accept them as they are.

Aquarius (January 20- February 18)
The desire to beautify your home could hit you full force today, Aquarius. Perhaps you're expecting future visitors or house guests and want to make a good impression. You could prowl through online antique stores looking for knickknacks. You might set your sights on doing something a bit more ambitious than you originally planned. Enjoy yourself but be careful. You don't want to tire yourself out.

Gemini (May 21-June 20)
An increased level of ESP and imagination could have you feeling more creative and artistic. You might want to channel this energy into writing, painting, or adding touches to your living room. You're likely to be especially attuned to the thoughts and feelings of others, particularly family. You could grow closer, especially if you sense what they need even before they do.

Virgo (August 23-September 22)
Spiritual goals may be at the top of your priority list now, Virgo. You may be looking for online metaphysical seminars or meditation workshops, perhaps taking place in a distant state or foreign country. You're likely to find it difficult to make a decision about any options right now. Whatever you're considering, make sure you know all the facts before making a choice of any kind.

Sagittarius (November 22-December 21)
If you've been thinking about a job change or even a new career, a chance interaction could provide the opportunity. However, Sagittarius, remember, "If something seems too good to be true, it probably is." Get the facts as clearly as you can. Consider all the ins and outs before committing yourself or getting too excited about it. If you still want to pursue the opportunity, go for it.

Pisces (February 19-March 20)
A new neighbor could arrive who you feel especially drawn to, Pisces. You might have high hopes for a friendship with this person. He or she may seem especially congenial and share a lot of your interests, and this could seem almost too perfect. However, you're in just the mood to idealize new relationships, so don't get too excited until you get to know this person better.

Lifestyle | Features

Independent musicians thrive as pandemic silences Bollywood

Bollywood movie songs normally dominate India's music charts. But when the coronavirus epidemic put paid to new film releases, it created a huge opportunity for independent musicians to make a name for themselves—sometimes from their bedrooms. Singer Carlton Braganza saw his popularity skyrocket when the country went



India's hip-hop artist Palak Parnoor Kaur also known as 'Lil Malai' (Lil Cream) does her make-up before recording a song video at the Bandra Bandstand Promenade in Mumbai. — AFP photos

into lockdown in March, and his phone is now ringing almost non-stop with offers from agents. For more than three months, the 48-year-old spent nights performing for an online audience from his small bedroom, gaining tens of thousands of new fans in the process. "I performed live every night for 70 days on

Facebook, taking audience requests," the Bangalore-based musician told AFP.

He has clocked up to 1.5 million views on Facebook, with around 125 online shows under his belt. His free performances are now paying off, with private bookings and venues lining up as India loosens restrictions. Experienced musicians like Braganza are not the only ones profiting from the unexpected pandemic-induced vacuum in India's entertainment calendar. Hip-hop artist Palak Parnoor Kaur, who has used a small GoPro to shoot videos inside rickshaws and buses under the moniker 'Lil Malai' ('Lil Cream') since 2018, has also seen an uptick in online followers. Her videos focusing on India's millennials and the issues that trouble them struck a chord with young audiences on Instagram and YouTube, with fans praising her for tackling difficult subjects like gender violence. "Independent artists fill the empty spot created by Bollywood music with original and organic content that audiences can relate to. Now they are more aware of our existence", the Mumbai-based Kaur told AFP.

Sea change

Data from audio streaming platform JioSaavn reveals the sea change that has taken place, with their Top 30 weekly chart dominated by non-film music since the lockdown. Until mid-October, the top five songs streamed in India were all non-film tracks, according to the platform. The expansion of independent



Bollywood actress Urvashi Rautela performs during the shoot for her upcoming music video album in Mumbai.

music labels such as the US-based CD Baby and TuneCore into India has made it easier for musicians to release albums online. But experts caution that it is only a matter of time before Bollywood claws its way back into the spotlight.

"Once movies start, audiences might just go back to Bollywood music and non-film numbers will tank," Priyak Dhar, editor of MusicPlus.com, told AFP. Many artists are still struggling to make money, despite acquiring social media followers, said Atul Churamani, managing director of music publishing firm Turnkey. "Although artists have started online concerts, most of them are free," Churamani told AFP. "With coronavirus-

led lockdowns, even if artists have views and a huge fan following, there are no offline gigs and hence no revenue."

Social issues

But for some, money isn't the main motivation behind their desire to grab the mic. Rapper Duleshwar Tandil's furious videos about the plight of millions of migrant workers in India's lockdown went viral in April, bringing the former waiter unexpected fame. The videos, shot on a mobile phone in his village in eastern India, attacked the government for its apathy towards the poor. "When the lockdown was imposed, my family almost starved as there was no work or

money," said the 27-year-old, who raps under the pseudonym 'Dule Rocker'. "I started rapping to channel my anger with the governmental system and everyone responded strongly." He has rejected offers from the film industry, telling AFP he refuses "to write rap music objectifying women". But in a story arc worthy of a Bollywood movie, he is now working on an album for US titan Universal Group Music. "I want to bring changes to how society looks at poverty," he said. — AFP



India's Hip-hop artist Palak Parnoor Kaur (center) also known as 'Lil Malai' (Lil Cream) performs during the recording of a song video at the Bandra Bandstand Promenade in Mumbai.

'Monster Hunter' movie pulled in China after race row

The fantasy action movie "Monster Hunter" has vanished from Chinese cinemas just days after its release, after a brief line of dialogue was targeted by local social media users as racist. The movie, an adaptation of a popular role-playing video game of the same name, premiered in China on Friday but quickly became embroiled in online controversy, the latest example of the sensitivities of operating in the huge but heavily censored Chinese movie market. In the scene, a character played by Asian-American rapper and actor Jin Au-Yeung tells his companion, "Look at my knees!" The white male character replies, "What kind of knees are these?" and Jin jokes, "Chi-nese."

Criticism of the line went viral on Chinese social media over the weekend, with many saying it was racist and some calling for a boycott. China's censors do not act as a matter of course announce when films are pulled, but following the controversy the movie disappeared from the country's ticket-booking sites. Entertainment news site Deadline.com said Constantin Film, a German company that co-produced the movie with Chinese tech giant Tencent and Sony Pictures, issued an apology on Sunday for the line of dialogue.

"There was absolutely no intent to



discriminate, insult or otherwise offend anyone of Chinese heritage," the company said, according to the site. It said the line had been removed from the film. Many users of China's popular Twitter-like Weibo platform said they were offended by the apparent linking of "Chinese" with the symbolism of someone being brought to their knees. "The lines may not be a big deal for westerners but in the Chinese context 'knees' has a humiliating connotation," said one user. No public statements from either Tencent or Sony Pictures on the movie or the controversy were seen

as of yesterday. China has some of the world's most restrictive censorship and the Communist Party's Central Propaganda Department approves only a handful of foreign films for release each year. Those that are approved sometimes screen with major cuts. Last year, multiple scenes in the film "Bohemian Rhapsody" referencing iconic musician Freddie Mercury's sexuality - a pivotal part of his biography - were dropped in its China release. — AFP



This picture shows a cleaner preparing to abseil from a glass skywalk to collect litter at Tianmen mountain in Zhangjiajie.



A cleaner abseiling from a glass skywalk to collect litter at Tianmen mountain.— AFP photos

CHINA'S
'SPIDERMEN':
LITTER-PICKING
OVER THE ABYSS

Dangling 400 meters (1,300 feet) over a void, suspended only by a cord, Yang Feiyue is not your average litter-picker. The 48-year-old's job is to abseil down cliffs on central China's Tianmen mountain—an area famed for its natural beauty but plagued by plastic and other waste. "Am I afraid?" says Yang as he steps over a guardrail. "No, I'm used to it." Local media call Yang and his team

"the Spidermen", after the skyscraper-scaling superhero, and it's easy to see why. Yang descends and hangs off the steep cliff face, patiently picking up rubbish thrown off the side by tourists. His colleagues at the top hold firmly onto his rope, attached to hooks in the rock. When he is finished, he is hauled up via a system of pulleys. Yang's rubbish bag is full of water bottles, packaging, and tissues.

"When it rains, we get single-use ponchos—and since the pandemic, we get face masks as well," he explains. Yang's team was created in 2010 by the Tianmen mountain management to deal with waste accumulating on its sides, an unfortunately common occurrence at Chinese beauty spots. Numerous stands selling food and drinks at tourist attractions are a major source of packaging that sometimes ends up being thrown on the ground or off a cliff. Campaigns in schools and the media have boosted people's environmental consciousness, along with an increase in recycling bins in public spaces. "In the

last 10 years, we've seen less and less littering," says Ding Yunjuan, vice-director of marketing for the mountain.

"Before, our 'Spidermen' collected five tons of litter a year. Tourists nowadays are more civilized." Even so, Yang and his colleagues collected two tons in 2020 — despite the fact that the coronavirus pandemic significantly reduced visitor numbers. Unsurprisingly, the job is physically demanding. "At first, my hands were incredibly painful after a day's work—I could barely use my chopsticks to eat. But it's a lot better now!" laughs Yang. He says he will keep abseiling down the mountainside as long as it is necessary. While Yang admits that he enjoys the nickname 'Spiderman', his real motive is the preservation of the mountain. "We're acting for the beauty of the site," he said. "So I don't mind working away at it!" — AFP



Helen Mirren

Virus could leave
theatre workers
homeless:
Helen Mirren

People working in Britain's theatre industry risk homelessness because of the coronavirus outbreak, stage and screen star Helen Mirren warned in an interview published on Monday. The curtain came down on theatres across the country in March as the pandemic took hold. Lockdown rules have now eased, but many venues cannot afford to reopen with limited audience numbers. Some have been forced to close permanently. That has left many employees—from actors to stagehands—in dire straits, given that many are self-employed and live "from wage packet to wage packet", Mirren said. She told Britain's Press Association news agency that people in the arts were "really suffering". "The worry is simply people not being able to pay their rent," she said.

"When those wage packets aren't there, which has been the case for the last year, it is very, very, very problematic and I'm sure a lot of them are looking at homelessness. They have bills to pay, they have rent to pay and they very often are not the kind of people who have been able to create a nice little security fund for themselves." The government earlier this year announced a £1.57 billion (\$2.1 billion, 1.7 billion euro) funding package to help the arts on top of a wage support scheme for furloughed workers. But freelancers working in the sector have not always been eligible, leaving them struggling to make ends meet or forced to take jobs in other industries.

"People need financial support and they need food support," said Mirren, who won an Oscar for her portrayal of Queen Elizabeth II in the 2006 film "The Queen". She is currently fronting a Christmas food appeal to provide up to 200,000 meals for the homeless and vulnerable over the festive period. Poverty and job losses caused by the pandemic have become major issues this year. The government has been forced to provide free meals to the poorest children during school holidays after a high-profile campaign by Manchester United footballer Marcus Rashford.— AFP

Universal Music
buys Bob
Dylan's entire
back catalog

Universal Music has bought the entire back catalog of Bob Dylan's songs, it announced Monday, in a purported nine-figure deal for one of the most prized rights' collections in music history. The deal covers more than 600 song copyrights spanning 60 years including "Blowin' In The Wind," "The Times They Are a-Changin'," "Like A Rolling Stone," "Lay Lady Lay" and "Forever Young," Universal Music said in a statement. The music company gave no financial details of the purchase but the Financial Times reported it was a "nine-figure deal." The New York Times estimated the price at more than \$300 million. "The deal is the most significant music publishing agreement this century and one of the most important of all time," Universal Music said in its statement.



This file photo shows US singer Bob Dylan (front) performing at the 44th Annual Grammy Awards in Los Angeles. — AFP

The value of owning music rights has soared in recent years with the surge in popularity of streaming sites such as Spotify, a trend that has grown during the pandemic lockdowns. Dylan, who burst onto the folk scene in New York in the early 1960s, has sold more than 125 million records around the world. His songs, which include some of the most popular ever written, still feature in movies and in advertisements decades after they were released. The US folk and rock legend's songs are also frequently covered by other artists, generating massive royalties. Before the pandemic brought live performances to a halt, the 79-year-old was still regularly performing in concert.

Dylan won the Nobel Prize for Literature in 2016 "for having created new poetic expressions within the great American song tradition." "To represent the body of work of one of the greatest songwriters of all time—whose cultural importance can't be overstated—is both a privilege and a responsibility," said Universal Music CEO Jody Gerson. "We look forward to working with Bob and the team in ensuring his artistry continues to reach and inspire generations of fans, recording artists and songwriters around the world," she added.

The purchase is the latest high-profile deal in a battle for back catalog rights that has been a trend of the music industry in recent years. New groups backed by powerful investors, notably Primary Wave Music and Hipgnosis Songs Fund, have signed major deals that were previously the preserve of the industry's traditional big players. —AFP

Lifestyle | Features



A paramotorist flies over the Korek Mountain resort near the city of Rawanduz north of Arbil, the capital of the autonomous Kurdish region of northern Iraq.



A paramotorist poses for a picture as she prepares to fly over the Korek Mountain resort.



An Iraqi Kurd prepares to fly his powered parachute over Korek Mountain resort. — AFP photos

Hazem Amin inhaled deeply and ran towards the cliff edge. His parachute swept up smoothly, floating him above the scrubby plains, jagged mountains and quaint villages of northern Iraq. The Korek mountain, about 120 kilometers (75 miles) northeast of the Iraqi Kurdish capital Arbil, has become a hotspot for paragliding—the newly found sport of wind enthusiasts. “It’s a magical sport. I feel so happy as I’m taking off,” said Amin, a 30-year-old member of the Arbil Aeroclub. Speaking in his native Kurdish, Amin told AFP he completed an intensive paragliding course with the club two years ago and has been hooked ever since.

“This kind of sport needs courage, physical strength and a lot of mental concentration,” he said, as he prepared his harness, triple-checked his parachute and donned a helmet. “There’s adventure, danger and fun all at once.” The Arbil Aeroclub, founded in 2008, has more than 40 members, including trainers and solo jumpers—among them, a growing number of women. While traditional sports usually receive backing from the Iraqi state, the relatively new activity of paragliding is fuelled by passion, said Ali



LOVE OF WIND SPORTS TAKES FLIGHT IN NORTHERN IRAQ

A paramotorist flies over the Korek Mountain resort.

al-Atrushi, a Kurdish businessman and one of the club’s founders. “Our love for this sport pushed us to establish this club, without any government support. All we got from the state was the licence,” he said. Atrushi said the founders have paid out of their own pockets for 30 paragliders and safety gear—dishing out up to \$5,000 for each—as well as one hot air balloon.

‘Dream come true’
On weekend afternoons, cars can be seen driving up to a 2,000-metre (6,500-foot) plateau in the village of Rawanduz that serves as a flight deck for paragliders. They usually take off facing west to catch the sunset and then glide down towards green pastures. Most of the

imported parachutes are rainbow-coloured, but at least one features the colours of the autonomous Kurdish flag—red and green stripes on either side of a yellow sun. Car window repairman Mohammad Abbas, 35, spends his weekends here. Five years ago, he took a month-long paragliding course with the club and was impressed with their professionalism and commitment to international standards.

“The training goes on for 30 days. You start with ground training, then move to hills, then to the mountains,” he said. Abbas loved the sensation of flying so much he wanted to share it with others and kept working with the club until he became an instructor himself. “The hardest thing is taking off. When you can do that on your own, you can do the rest solo.” Rawez Mustafa, one of four women who have joined the club, now has four solo flights under her belt. “I’ve loved this sport since I was a little girl. I dreamt of it, of taking off into the sky and enjoying the beautiful views,” the 27-year-old teacher said. “Now my dream has come true, and I hope the club can accept even more female members.”

Wind and passion
Arbil’s Aeroclub isn’t the oldest one in Iraq, but it seems to be the most successful. Founding member Haydar al-Saidi, who began flying in 1994 with Baghdad’s Fernas Aeroclub, said that wind quality was better in the Arbil region. “There were many factors that encouraged us to start the club (in Arbil), including the great flying wind, the mountain heights and the passionate people,” the 52-year-old said. Clubs have also opened in Duhok, Sulaimaniyah and Halabja in the Kurdish autonomous region but they are not as popular as the one in Arbil. A team from the Arbil Aeroclub even scored third place in a regional competition in Morocco in 2018.

Ahmad Shaker, secretary general of Iraq’s Wind Sports Federation, said the new clubs could serve as an incentive to boost the sport and pave the way for a national team. “The way these activities in the Kurdish region developed so quickly and noticeably will hopefully contribute to an Iraqi national team that can take part in international events,” he said. — AFP

#Covid19, #Black LivesMatter top Twitter themes in 2020



The coronavirus pandemic and the Black Lives Matter movement topped the list of conversation topics on Twitter in a tumultuous year, the messaging platform said Monday. In a summary of trends, Twitter said the hashtag #Covid19 and other variations were tweeted nearly 400 million times, while #StayHome was the third biggest hashtag of the year. The number two hashtag of 2020 was #BlackLivesMatter, which spread worldwide after the death of George Floyd at the hands of police in Minneapolis, according to Twitter. “People continued to utilize Twitter to publicly advocate for political change and demand accountability from world leaders this year,” a Twitter blog post said.

“Over 700 million Tweets were sent in

2020 about elections around the world and Donald Trump, Joe Biden, Barack Obama, Narendra Modi and Kamala Harris were among the most Tweeted-about global figures.” The most retweeted message was the announcement of the death of Chadwick Boseman, star of the ground-breaking superhero movie “Black Panther,” in August. Tweeted by the actor’s family with his account, the message garnered 7.5 million likes—the most all-time—and 2.1 million retweets. Former US president Barack Obama’s tweet about the death of NBA star Kobe Bryant was the second-most like tweet of the year, with 3.9 million. Bryant’s death made his former Los Angeles Lakers team the most tweeted-about sports team followed by Manchester United and FC Barcelona. But the NFL’s Super Bowl LIV was the top sports event on Twitter this year. — AFP

Forget panettone, Pope giving paracetamol for Christmas

A practical pontiff who has eschewed consumerism, Pope Francis is giving Vatican employees boxes of cold and flu relief pills for Christmas this year. A Vatican source confirmed to AFP that the unconventional gift has already begun to be sent out

to the Vatican state’s 4,000 employees. A photograph in Il Messaggero daily showed stacks of pills for cold and flu in boxes labeled “Gift of the Holy Father to Vatican employees (five boxes per employee).” Cold and rainy weather has spread over Rome and the flu vaccine

has been late in arriving this year in Italy. Experts are concerned a surge in flu cases in January will exacerbate strains on a health care system already struggling to overcome the second wave of coronavirus cases. — AFP



A handout picture released courtesy of the Twitter feed of @AlexiaRFishwick shows an obelisk standing on Compton Beach on the southern western coast of the Isle of Wight. — AFP



A mysterious metal monolith, similar to the one found in Utah and Romania, was discovered in a nature reserve near Oudehorne, Netherlands. — Newsflash

SOTHEBY’S EYES \$1MN FOR RARE SNEAKERS

A unique pair of sneakers designed by Adidas and German porcelain maker Meissen that could become the first to fetch \$1 million went on sale at a Sotheby’s auction Monday. The leather shoes—based on Adidas’s popular ZX8000 model and painted by craftsmen from Meissen—are tipped to set a new record for a pair of trainers. The record has already been broken several times this year, most recently by a set of Nike Air Jordan 1s that Christie’s sold for \$615,000 in August. Sotheby’s has set the pre-sale estimate high at \$1 million

for the Adidas-Meissen shoes, which are not meant to be worn.

The low estimate is one dollar in an attempt to encourage bidding, but auctioneers expect the final price to be at the higher end. “There is that shift in the market looking at these sneakers as art,” said Brahm Wachter, director of e-commerce development at Sotheby’s. The sale runs online until December 16. Proceeds will go to the Brooklyn Museum in New York for its young persons program. — AFP



In these file photos an art handler from Sotheby’s holds one-of-a-kind Sneakers by Adidas and Meisse named the ZX8000 Porcelain, during a preview at Sotheby’s Auction House in New York City. — AFP

NEW METAL MONOLITH FOUND ON DUTCH HEATH

A mysterious metal monolith has appeared on a heath in the Netherlands after similar objects were found in the United States, Romania and Britain, an official said. Hikers found the object on Sunday on private land near the Kiekenberg nature reserve in northern Friesland province, a spokesman for the Dutch Forestry Commission said. “We know that it was probably placed this weekend because some hikers who were walking there found it, but we don’t know it got there,” forestry commission spokesman Imke Boerma told AFP.

Rangers went to check out the object on Monday morning and were still hunting for clues to its provenance. A similar-looking structure appeared briefly in the Utah desert late last month, then two others cropped up in southern California and Romania days later. Another appeared on a beach on the Isle of Wight off the south coast of England on Sunday. Photos in Dutch media showed the object in Friesland with a dull silver-coloured surface, standing next to a marshy pool on frosty ground.

Local broadcaster Omrop Fryslan said the Dutch object was not shiny like the other monoliths although it was a similar size and shape. “I walked up to it, but there was nothing to be seen around the monolith. Just as if it was

placed from above,” hiker Thijs de Jong, the first person to find the obelisk, told Omrop Fryslan, adding that it would “certainly have needed two or more people” to place it. The broadcaster said there were suspicions the obelisk could be a stunt by a ‘New Year’s Eve club’, a tradition in the north of the Netherlands to draw attention to a village or association.

But it quoted de Jong as saying that there was no such club in the area. “I myself am thinking more of a kind of artist collective that does something like that,” he said. The appearance of the Utah object in late November sparked wild rumors of alien visitations due to a resemblance to the black monolith in the Stanley Kubrick science-fiction film 2001: A Space Odyssey. An anonymous art collective has taken credit for the Utah installation but no one has claimed responsibility for those in Romania, the Isle of Wight and the Netherlands.

New shiny obelisk sighted on Britain’s Isle of Wight

A shiny obelisk similar to ones found in the United States and on a hilltop in Romania has been spotted by the sea off the south coast of England. The gleaming pyramid-topped pillar was discovered on Compton Beach on the Isle of Wight early on Sunday morning,

drawing large crowds and sparking speculation about how it got there. A similar-looking reflective structure appeared briefly in the Utah desert late last month, then two others cropped up in southern California and Romania days later. The initial discovery fuelled the imaginations of UFO spotters, conspiracy theorists and fans of the classic sci-fi film “2001: A Space Odyssey” which features a strange alien monolith.

An anonymous art collective has taken credit for the Utah installation but no one has claimed responsibility for those in Romania and the Isle of Wight. In Romania, some locals dismissed it as a poorly made replica while on Compton Beach locals were initially curious but suspected a similar copycat. “The person who put it there knows what they’re doing,” said Tom Dunford, who stumbled on the 7.5-foot-high (2.2-metre) mirrored object as he walked his dog on Sunday morning. “It’s someone playing a practical joke. I don’t believe in any of these conspiracy theories,” he told Sky News television. Isle of Wight resident Alexia Fishwick called it “incredibly graceful” but told the BBC: “Many people walked past it and ignored it.” — AFP

Sports

Photo of the Day



Max Verstappen on track during the F1 Grand Prix of Bahrain. — Photo taken from www.redbullcontentpool.com

Breakdancing gets Olympic green light for Paris 2024

Olympic chiefs crack down on Belarus over athlete discrimination

LAUSANNE: Breakdancing was one of four new sports along with skateboarding, surfing and sport climbing to get the Olympic green light on Monday for inclusion at the 2024 Paris Games. The four sports were included as the International Olympic Committee (IOC) executive board met to confirm the Paris 2024 program. Skateboarding, sport climbing and surfing have already been added to the program for the 2020 Tokyo Olympics, which will take place in 2021 after being postponed by a year because of the coronavirus pandemic.

The introduction of breaking was "one of the results of the Olympic Agenda 2020", Bach said. "We had a clear priority to introduce sports (that are) particularly popular among the younger generation and taking into consideration the urbanisation of sport." Breakdancing, which grew up alongside hip hop in the South Bronx of New York in the 1970s and is officially known in sport terms as "breaking", appeared at the 2018 Youth Olympics in Buenos Aires, in the form of head-to-head "battles".

Russia's Sergei Chernyshev, competing under the nickname Bumblebee, won the first breakdancing gold medal for boys in that event, while Japan's Ramu Kawai won the girls' title. "Today is a historic occasion not only for b-boys and b-girls but for all dancers around the world," said Shawn Tay, president of the World Dance Sport Federation (WDSF). "The WDSF could not be prouder to have breaking included at Paris 2024... It was a true team effort to get to this moment and we will redouble our efforts in the lead-up to the Olympic Games to make sure the breaking competition at Paris 2024 will be unforgettable."

Paris podiums down to 329

Federations of sports that already have Olympic

status were left disappointed in their bid to increase events within their sports as IOC president Thomas Bach said that none of the proposed 41 events would be included in Paris. While some sports substituted in some events within their existing event numbers, Bach said medal events had actually gone down from 339 to 329. He said the athletes' quota for Paris had been fixed at 10,500, including those participating in the four new sports.

That represents a decrease of 600 from Tokyo Games, while gender equality would be attained for the first time in Olympic history in Paris. The question of gender equality led to the demise of the men's 50km race walk, which first appeared at the 1932 Olympics. IOC sports director Kit McConnell said the event would be replaced by a "mixed gender event".

There was a decision to "reach gender equality by removing the men's 50km race walk", rather than introducing a women's version, McConnell said, adding that the men and women's 20km race walks would remain. The replacement event will not, however, be a mixed cross-country, which World Athletics had been pushing hard for. "The event had to fit into an existing Olympic venue," McConnell said, explaining that a potential re-fit of the equestrian or mountain-bike venues to accommodate a cross-country was shown to be "too expensive and complex".

Athlete discrimination

Meanwhile, Olympic chiefs have cracked down on the Belarus National Olympic Committee, headed by President Alexander Lukashenko, for discriminating against its athletes for their political views. Protesters have taken to the streets of Belarusian cities since Lukashenko claimed a sixth term with

80 percent of the vote in a presidential election on August 9.

Since the election, riot police have detained thousands of protesters, some of whom have reported torture and abuse in custody, prompting international condemnation and proposed EU sanctions. Several people have died in the crackdown. A number of prominent Belarusian athletes signed a petition demanding an end to violence and new elections, including two-time Olympic basketball player Yelena Leuchanka, who was detained at Minsk airport in September while trying to leave the country and jailed for 15 days over the protests.

International Olympic Committee (IOC) president Thomas Bach, speaking after an executive board meeting in Lausanne on Monday, said that "the current NOC leadership has not appropriately protected the Belarusian athletes from political discrimination within the NOC, their member sports federations or the sports movement". "This is contrary to the fundamental principles of the Olympic Charter, and therefore seriously affects the reputation of the Olympic Movement." As a result, the IOC decided to exclude the currently elected members of the Belarus NOC executive board, including President Lukashenko, from all IOC events and activities, including the Olympic Games.

Furthermore, the IOC suspended "all financial payments to the NOC of Belarus, with the exception of payments related to the preparations of the Belarusian athletes for, and their participation in, the Olympic Games Tokyo 2020 and Olympic Winter Games Beijing 2022". The IOC asked international sporting federations to "make sure that all eligible Belarusian athletes can take part in qualification events for the upcoming Olympic Games without any political discrimination". — Agencies

Australia fight off blazing Kohli to win final T20 match

SYDNEY: Virat Kohli blasted 85 but it wasn't enough to prevent Australia from fighting off a T20 series sweep with a thrilling 12-run victory in the final match in Sydney yesterday. While Kohli was at the crease in his imperious 61-ball knock, India had hopes of pulling off victory, but when he fell to a sensational diving outfield catch by Daniel Sams 11 balls from the finish India's hopes went with him.

Before a raucous crowd of over 30,000 - with attendance limits lifted in new COVID-19 protocols by the New South Wales state government - Australia set India a competitive 187-run target to chase. But India could not replicate their dynamic batting at the Sydney Cricket Ground two nights ago when they sealed the T20 series after losing the preceding one-day international series 2-1 to the home side.

"At one stage when Hardik (Pandya) started going we thought we could pull it off," Kohli said. "The middle over phase during our batting cost us the game. A partnership of 30-odd would've made it easier for Hardik. "We are finding ways to come back and give the opposition a scare and the series win is a little asterisk for us to finish the 2020 season on a high." Matthew Wade blasted his highest T20 score and an eventful Glenn Maxwell half-century lifted Australia to 186 for five after India had won the toss.

Maxwell had a night out. He survived two reviews, was caught off a no-ball, had a six prevented by athletic Sanju Samson fielding over the rope and finished with three sixes before he was out for 54 off 36 balls. Wade put on 90 with Maxwell for the third wicket before he was leg before wicket to Shardul Thakur for 80 - his highest T20 score - off 53 balls with seven fours and two sixes. "It was a great series, and we just happened to be on the wrong end of the first two," Australia captain Aaron Finch said. "It's the first time in a T20 series we've had two leg-spinners in the side, and they were bold with the short boundaries here, so credit to both of them."

Maxwell was given the new ball and got KL Rahul's wicket with his second delivery in India's innings, hitting down the throat of Steve Smith at deep mid-wicket. But Smith put down a similar catch when Kohli was on nine in Maxwell's next over in what could have been a major turning point. Sams took a superb diving catch at the second grab in the deep to dismiss Shikhar Dhawan for 28 off leg-spinner Mitchell Swepson in the sixth over. — AFP

News in brief

'Unhappy' Pogba wants to leave

ROME: Paul Pogba is "unhappy" at Manchester United and should leave in the next transfer window, his agent Mino Raiola said, in comments that may signal the exit of the one-time world's most expensive player. Raiola said the World Cup-winning France midfielder, 27, needs a "change of scene" after struggling to establish himself under United manager Ole Gunnar Solskjaer. "Paul's unhappy at Manchester United, he can't express himself any more as he would like to and as we expect of him," Raiola told Italian newspaper Tuttosport. "He has to change teams, he needs a change of scene. His contract is up in a year-and-a-half, in the summer of 2022, but I think the best solution for all sides is a transfer in the next window." He added that Pogba, who returned from a spell at Juventus for a then world record fee of £89 million (\$118 million) in 2016, has no plans to extend his contract. — AFP

English FA probes booing

LONDON: The Football Association announced on Monday that it is investigating following the booing of players taking a knee at two English Football League games at the weekend. A number of fans at the match in the second-tier Championship between Millwall and Derby and at Colchester's League Two home clash with Grimsby booed the players' anti-racism gesture before kick-off. "The FA can confirm that investigations are under way into crowd-related incidents at both The Den and JobServe Community Stadium on Saturday 5 December 2020," English football's governing body said in a statement. The booing from Millwall fans led interim Derby boss Wayne Rooney to condemn their "disgraceful and mindless behavior". And Colchester owner Robbie Cowling, whose side play in the fourth tier, has told supporters who want to boo players taking a knee they are not welcome at the club. — AFP

Black Caps' Watling declared fit

WELLINGTON: New Zealand's number one wicketkeeper BJ Watling is set to return from injury for the second Test against the West Indies, while the tourists suffered a double blow yesterday with Kumar Roach and Shane Dowrich ruled out. Pace bowler Roach is returning home following the death of his father last week while wicketkeeper Dowrich continues to be troubled by the hand injury that sidelined him after day one of the first Test. New Zealand are looking to sweep the series having wrapped up the first Test by an innings and 134 runs inside four days, on the back of a career-best 251 first innings by Kane Williamson. Watling, who had been suffering a hamstring strain, was confident he would be able to take his place in the Black Caps line up when the second Test starts on Friday at the Basin Reserve in Wellington. "It seem to be progressing pretty well," he said. — AFP



Kuwait's Football League: 11th round

By Abdellatif Sharaa

KUWAIT: The 11th round of Kuwait Football League (the ranking phase) had few surprises as teams struggled to finish strong in preparation for the start of the regular season. The premier league will be made up of the top 10 teams, while the other five will remain in the lower rank. The first match saw Salmiya defeating Al-Arabi 3-1, after being down by 1-0. Salmiya's goals were scored by Hussein Al-Mousawi in the 77th minute, then Alex Lima followed by the second in the 78th and then Patric Fabiano scored in the 4th minute of added time. Salmiya now has 21 points in second place while Arabi's total remained at 15 in 8th place.

Meanwhile, Kheitan was able to gain 3 points - raising their total points to 11 after defeating Sulaybhat which remains with 5 points. Sahel beat Tadhamon 1-0, giving them a total of 16 points and leaving Tadhamon with 8 points. In the final match of the day, Kuwait was able to hold on and defeated Jahra 3-2. Kuwait now has 18 points in fourth place while Jahra has 11 in

ninth. The first three goals of the match were scored by Kuwait in the first half. Ahmad Al-Akaishi scored twice in the 17th and 30th minutes and Jumaa Saeed scored in the 39th minute. Jahra's two goals were scored by Fahad Ayedh in the 58th minute - then Ahmad Titi scored from the spot in the 83rd minute.



Qatar WCup to open with COVID recovered fans

AL-RAYYAN: Qatar will inaugurate its latest completed World Cup stadium with a domestic fixture at which half of tickets will be reserved for fans who have recovered from coronavirus, the country's FA said Monday. The Al-Rayyan Venue, the third new stadium to be completed ahead of 2022, will host the domestic Emir Cup final on December 18 and will welcome around half of its 40,000 capacity. "Anyone who enters the stadium must return either a negative COVID-19 test or a positive Covid-19 antibodies test," Abdul Wahab Al-Musleh, Qatar's deputy chief medical officer, said in a QFA statement. "About 50 percent of the available seats will be allocated to people who have previously contracted the virus." Fans will be required to undergo tests at one of three locations where their ticket application will be linked to their national identity cards and phone number.

Fans will then be eligible for a non-transferable ticket once they receive the required test result. Once inside, fans will be required to wear a mask, show their contact tracing app, and stay in their allocated seat. "This is the first time Qatar has hosted a match on this scale under such exceptional circumstances," added Musleh. Qatar has slowly been welcoming fans back to stadiums, permitting attendances of up to 30 percent in the top-flight Qatar Stars League.

The human body produces antibodies when it fights off viruses such as SARS-CoV-2. They are proteins that are programmed to target specific pathogens. It is thought likely that if re-exposed to the virus, most people's immune systems will produce new antibodies, as well as immune cells that target and destroy cells that have been infected. Qatar, which has tested 41 percent of its 2.75 million population, has recorded 140,086 infections since the beginning of the pandemic with the high rate attributed to aggressive testing and unsanitary accommodation for workers. — AFP

Sports

Southampton beat Brighton to climb to fifth in Premier League

Ings scores controversial VAR penalty

BRIGHTON: Danny Ings returned from injury to score a controversial winner from the penalty spot as Southampton came from behind to beat Brighton 2-1 on Monday and climb to fifth in the Premier League. Brighton took the lead from the spot, with Pascal Gross sending goalkeeper Alex McCarthy the wrong way after James Ward-Prowse handled the ball in the area.

Ralph Hasenhuttl's men found an equaliser just before half-time, when Jan Vestergaard produced a towering header from a Ward-Prowse corner. Then, with nine minutes remaining, substitute Ings fired home after Southampton were awarded a spot-kick, with Brighton players claiming the foul took place outside the area. Hasenhuttl was delighted to see his team grind out a win while not at their best.

"I didn't see the first penalty," he said. "For the second one, that is why we have VAR, especially when it is about decisions if it is in or not then you need this. "I think it was clear inside the box. It is not nice to get a penalty against you but the decision from what I have seen was relatively clear." Brighton started the match brightly in front of 2,000 supporters-back in the stadium for the first time in nine

months after the easing of coronavirus restrictions. They took the lead in the 26th minute when referee David Coote pointed to the spot after a Danny Welbeck cross hit the raised arms of Ward-Prowse and Gross converted.

Brighton looked to get forward at every opportunity while Southampton struggled to get going but Saints were level just before the break. Ward-Prowse continued his impressive record from set-pieces, crossing the ball from a corner for Vestergaard to head past powerfully past Mat Ryan. Ings, who had been out of action for five weeks, was brought on at the start of the second half. With 13 minutes to go, Kyle Walker-Peters was brought down by Solly March. The referee initially awarded a free-kick before a lengthy VAR intervention changed the decision to a penalty.

Ings made no mistake and his side held on for the victory, which lifts Southampton to 20 points, one behind fourth-placed Leicester. Brighton stay 16th on 10 points. Disappointed Brighton boss Graham Potter said the first challenge appeared to take place outside the box. "I don't know if there was a second



BRIGHTON: Brighton's English defender Adam Webster (center) shoots at goal during the English Premier League football match between Brighton and Hove Albion and Southampton at the American Express Community Stadium in Brighton on December 7, 2020. —AFP

but that's what the referee seemed to think," he told Sky Sports. "I thought it was quite an even game so I'm disappointed with the result. If it's factual and

the offence is inside and they've proved that's the case, then that's what it's there for and it's what you have to accept." —AFP

Iniesta on target as Vissel Kobe edge out Shanghai SIPG 2-0

DOHA: Andres Iniesta and Daigo Nishi struck either side of the break as Vissel Kobe edged out Shanghai SIPG 2-0 to reach the quarter-finals of the Asian Champions League on Monday. But fellow Japanese side Yokohama F. Marinos will not be joining them in the last-eight phase after they were stunned 3-2 by South Koreans Suwon Bluewings, who bounced back from a goal down to clinch a thrilling win with two of their goals coming in the final eight minutes.

Vissel Kobe flew to Doha with mixed feelings, having broken new ground in the domestic top flight by winning the Emperor's Cup and the Super Cup early in the year but also suffering five straight morale-shattering defeats in the J1 league in November. But Monday's spirited show put them just three wins short of the continental title, a possibility they would not have contemplated when they set out for their very first appearance in the competition.

"This victory is not just for us, but

for all the fans back in Japan who sent us their messages of support," said Vissel Kobe coach Atsuhiro Miura. The only concern was the possibility of Iniesta missing the next match after he had to be substituted in the 65th minute with a thigh injury. Vissel Kobe lagged marginally when it came to ball possession but were more incisive with their forays keeping the Shanghai SIPG defense busy for long spells of time.

Iniesta shines

Spain and Barcelona legend Iniesta, who had scored his first goal in the tournament to help Vissel Kobe reach the round of 16 with a 3-1 win over Guangzhou Evergrande on November 25, was again in his element on Monday. Playing behind lone striker Douglas, the 36-year-old produced trademark passes besides enjoying taking occasional potshots at the Shanghai SIPG goal, keeping goalkeeper Chen Wei on his toes.

But Wei couldn't come to his team's



DOHA: Kobe's midfielder Andres Iniesta (center) watches his shot go in next to SIPG's midfielder Yang Shiyuan (right) and defender Wei Zhen (left) during the AFC Champions League round of 16 football match between Japan's Vissel Kobe and China's Shanghai SIPG on December 7, 2020. —AFP

rescue in the 31th minute when Iniesta pounced on a perfect pass from Hotaru Yamaguchi just outside the box and dribbled his way up before placing a low drive between three defenders, the ball streaking under the keeper's body and into the goal. Shanghai SIPG had a fine chance to draw level five minutes later from a free-kick but Oscar's shot from

just outside the box went marginally wide to the left. Vissel Kobe doubled their advantage five minutes after the break, Nishi lunging forward to make contact with a Kyogo Furuhashi cross from the left and leaving Chen flummoxed. Iniesta had another dash at the goal from 35 yards in the 65th minute before he was substituted. —AFP

Reigning champs Seattle stun Minnesota to reach MLS final

WASHINGTON: Seattle's Gustav Svensson headed in the winning goal three minutes into stoppage time Monday to lift the defending champion Sounders over Minnesota United 3-2 and into their fourth MLS Cup final in five seasons. The Sounders became the first MLS playoff team in 18 years to rally from a two-goal deficit, crushing the visiting Loons to sustain hopes of a third title after 2016 and last year. "That locker room is a bunch of winners. Those guys are champions," Sounders coach Brian Schmetzer said. "We've gone through so much adversity from 2016 to now. The guys never quit. They find ways to win."

The Western Conference champion Sounders, who stretched their home playoff win streak to 15 matches, will

face the Eastern Conference champion Columbus Crew in Saturday's MLS Cup final at Columbus, Ohio. Minnesota's Emanuel Reynoso scored on a free kick in the 29th minute. The 25-year-old Argentine midfielder lofted a free kick into the penalty area to set up Mali defender Bakaye Dibassy's header in the 67th minute.

Seattle's Will Bruin answered in the 75th minute, and Peruvian forward Raul Ruidiaz blasted in the equalizer off an 89th-minute corner kick, setting the stage for the closing heroics. Uruguayan midfielder Nicolas Lodeiro blasted a corner kick from the right side into the crowded penalty area in the tension-packed dying moments of stoppage time. It found the head of 33-year-old Swedish reserve forward Svensson, who nodded it inside the far post for the deciding goal, which sparked a celebration among the Sounders but silence from the stands, as spectators were banned as a Covid-19 precaution.

It was Svensson's first goal since scoring in last year's playoffs on a corner from Lodeiro. "They are in there throwing champagne around. But we'll clean it up," said Schmetzer. "I'll give them tomorrow off and then



SEATTLE: Cristian Roldan #7 of Seattle Sounders and Chase Gasper #77 of Minnesota United react after their collision in the second half during the Western Conference Final of the MLS Cup Playoffs on December 07, 2020. —AFP

we'll get right back at it. We've got another game to win." Schmetzer said Bruin's entry in the 73rd minute sparked the fightback and that Seattle must improve in order to beat the Crew.

"We'll have to be able to possess the ball against Columbus, just be a little bit more clinical in our transition

moments," he said. "We were almost there until Will got there and Raul was really happy when Will was in there." Minnesota lost for the first time since August 2019 when scoring first. Reynoso produced his seventh assist in three post-season matches for Minnesota, setting an MLS one-season playoff assists record in defeat. —AFP

Ajax, Atalanta face off for Champions League last 16 spot

AMSTERDAM: Atalanta head to Ajax with a slender advantage ahead of today's showdown for a place in the Champions League last 16 on the final day of group action. Gian Piero Gasperini's Atalanta sit second behind Group D winners Liverpool and one point ahead of third-placed Ajax, and need to avoid defeat in Amsterdam to book their place in the knockout stages for the second consecutive year.

Four-time European champions Ajax - last winners in 1995 - must win to ensure their passage after missing out last season. The encounter at the Johan Cruyff Arena features two teams who drew 2-2 in Bergamo on matchday two, when Atalanta came back from two goals down thanks to a Duvan Zapata brace. "We have the advantage of going to Amsterdam with the possibility of qualifying with a draw," said Gasperini after a disappointing 1-1 home draw with Danish side Midtjylland last time out.

Both teams have captured Europe's imagination

with their stylish play in recent years, but have shown a dip in form amid the tight schedule of games. In 2019 Erik ten Hag's young guns stunned Juventus and Real Madrid on their way to reaching the semi-finals for the first time since 1997, but last season they failed to make it past the group stage after selling some of their biggest stars. Atalanta pulled off the improbable by reaching the quarter-finals last season on their debut in the European competition, despite losing their three opening group games.

In their first campaign, the northern Italian side played their European home games at San Siro because their own stadium was undergoing renovation work. But despite playing this season in Bergamo, they have not won a European match at home, with draws against Ajax and Midtjylland, and a heavy 5-0 defeat to Liverpool. On the road the Italians have had more success, beating Midtjylland 4-0 and shocking Liverpool 2-0 at Anfield. Ajax lost 1-0 home and away to Liverpool, and won their two games against Midtjylland. However Atalanta have picked up just one win in their last six games in Serie A and the Champions League. Forwards Zapata, Luis Muriel and captain Papu Gomez - who have 15 goals between them this season - have gone six games without scoring. —AFP

Live		Matches on TV
		(Local Timings)
UEFA CHAMPIONS LEAGUE		
Ajax Amsterdam v Atalanta	20:55	
beIN Sports HD 1		
FC Midtjylland v Liverpool	20:55	
beIN Sports HD 2		
Bayern Munich v Lokomotiv Moscow	23:00	
beIN Sports HD 5		
Red Bull Salzburg v Atletico de Madrid	23:00	
beIN Sports HD 3		
Real Madrid v Borussia Monchengladbach	23:00	
beIN Sports HD 1		
Inter Milan v Shakhtar Donetsk	23:00	
beIN Sports HD 4		
Manchester City v Olympique Marseille	23:00	
beIN Sports HD 2		
Olympiacos Piraeus v Porto	23:00	
beIN Sports HD 6		

Inter Milan look to Lukaku for survival

MILAN: Inter Milan are counting on prolific striker Romelu Lukaku to power the former three-time winners into the Champions League last 16 today in a must-win clash against Shakhtar Donetsk. The Belgian scored a double in a 3-2 win over Borussia Muenchengladbach last time out to keep the Italian giants alive in the continental competition whose knockout rounds they have not reached since the 2011-2012 season.

Bottom of Group B, Inter need to win at the San Siro and for Gladbach and Real Madrid not to draw their match. "I've never played so well in my life," said Lukaku after bagging four goals in as many European games this season. In total, the Belgian has scored 12 goals in 13 games this season, including the opener at the weekend in a 3-1 Serie A win over Bologna. For 27-year-old Lukaku it is the first time in his career that he has scored more than seven goals in his first 10 league games of the season.

Lukaku has come into his own since joining Antonio Conte's side from Manchester United in 2019 for 80 million euros (\$89 million). In his first season Lukaku scored 34 goals in all competitions, matching the performance of Brazilian Ronaldo in his debut season for Inter in 1997-1998. The Belgian's high energy levels and sharp play at Inter are in contrast to United where he spent two seasons, scoring 42 goals in 96 appearances, but just 15 goals in his final season. He was never far from fan criticism, over his weight and professionalism, as he fell down the pecking order once Ole Gunnar Solskjaer replaced Jose Mourinho.

But Lukaku has found a rich vein of form at Inter alongside Argentine Lautaro Martinez and former United teammate Alexis Sanchez. Conte had been a long-time admirer of Lukaku, who started his career at Anderlecht, and tried to sign him for Chelsea before the Belgian's move from Everton to United. His move to Italy at the same time as Conte, was also eased by the presence of his brother Jordan Lukaku, 25, who played as a defender for Lazio. Inter finished second in Serie A last season, one point behind Juventus, although Lukaku's own goal in the Europa League final handed Sevilla victory.

'Rough diamond'

Inter have scored 26 goals from their first 10 matches, their best haul at this stage since the 2009/2010 campaign when they won an unprecedented treble under Mourinho. "Romelu can still get better," predicted Conte whose side are second in Serie A, five points behind city rivals AC Milan. "I described him as a rough diamond when he arrived. I felt that by putting in the work, he could become one of the best strikers in the world."

"He's like an American football player. He's on the right track because he's a humble player who works hard for the team and has everything in his locker - physical qualities and also the running ability to make a mark on an open pitch. "I'm happy with him, the team, with Lautaro and with Sanchez, who could become even more decisive and score a few more goals given the qualities he possesses. "However, he previously barely played at all for two years while at Manchester United, now he's playing a lot of games and can also be a decisive player when coming off the bench."

Former Juventus and Chelsea manager Conte is bidding to avoid a financially-damaging fourth group stage exit from the Champions League. The 51-year-old's best result as a coach was leading Juventus to the 2012/13 quarter-finals, and he reached the last 16 with Chelsea in 2017-2018. —AFP

14 Australia fight off blazing Kohli, win final T20 match



14 Kuwait Football League: Kuwait defeat Jahra 3-2



15 Southampton beat Brighton, to climb 5th in Premier League



PITTSBURGH: Logan Thomas #82 of the Washington Football Team attempts to gain yardage against Minkah Fitzpatrick #39 of the Pittsburgh Steelers during the second half of their game at Heinz Field on December 07, 2020.—AFP

Washington stun undefeated Pittsburgh

NFL shocker - Steelers prevented from clinching playoff berth

WASHINGTON: Alex Smith threw for 296 yards and a touchdown Monday, and the Washington Football Team stunned previously unbeaten Pittsburgh 23-17, preventing the Steelers from clinching an NFL playoff berth. Washington's Dustin Hopkins kicked a 45-yard field goal with 2:07 to play and - after Jon Bostic intercepted a deflected Ben Roethlisberger pass - added another 45-yard field goal with 17 seconds remaining to seal the shocking victory.

"It was well earned. Our guys played pretty doggone good," Washington coach Ron Rivera said. "This really does rank right up there because of who we beat, in Pittsburgh. To come in and win, it was big for our guys. Real proud of them." Rallying from a 14-point deficit, the team that dropped its nickname this year over Native American racism issues improved to 5-7, winning its third consecutive game to match the New York Giants for the NFC East division lead.

The only Super Bowl champion with an unbeaten

season remains the Miami Dolphins in the 1972 campaign. The Steelers fell level with reigning Super Bowl champion Kansas City at 11-1 in a fight for the top seed in the American Conference and a first-round playoff bye. Roethlisberger threw second-quarter touchdown passes of three yards to Diontae Johnson and 50 yards to James Washington as the Steelers took a 14-0 lead.

But Hopkins kicked a 49-yard field goal just before half-time, and Washington marched 82 yards in 14 plays over 6:44 to open the second half, a one-yard touchdown run by Peyton Barber pulling the visitors within 14-10. Pittsburgh responded with Matthew Wright's first NFL field goal on the opening play of the fourth quarter. But Smith flipped a 15-yard touchdown pass to Logan Thomas with 9:09 to play, lifting Washington level at 17-17. Pittsburgh turned over the ball on downs at the Washington 28-yard line, and a one-handed catch by Cam Sims on a 29-yard Smith

pass sparked the drive for the Hopkins go-ahead kick.

Thomas had a career-high nine catches for 98 yards, and teammate JD McKissic made a career-best 10 grabs for 70 yards. In the night's only other matchup, Buffalo's Josh Allen completed 32-of-40 passes for 375 yards and four touchdowns to power the Bills (9-3) over San Francisco 34-24 at Arizona. Buffalo, which entertains Pittsburgh on Sunday, stayed a game ahead of Miami atop the AFC East division, while San Francisco fell a game back of the final NFC wild-card playoff spot. The 49ers (5-7) were forced from their home stadium by Covid-19 safety measures imposed by local government officials.

Jackson back for Ravens

In off-field news, the Baltimore Ravens activated quarterback Lamar Jackson off the COVID-19 list just in time for him to start against Dallas in a game

postponed from last Thursday due to coronavirus rescheduling issues. The Ravens (6-5) hope to end a three-game losing streak at the expense of the Cowboys (3-8).

The New York Jets (0-12) fired defensive coordinator Gregg Williams on Monday, a day after the winless club allowed a last-second touchdown pass by Las Vegas to give the Raiders a 31-28 triumph.

"I just felt like that was the best thing for our team moving forward," Jets coach Adam Gase said. Williams called for an attack of the quarterback instead of tighter pass defense and Derek Carr threw the winning touchdown pass to Henry Ruggs with 13 seconds remaining. "I obviously wasn't happy about that call," Gase added. "We can't have that happen." The Carolina Panthers, 4-8 and coming off a bye week, had eight players placed on the club's COVID-19 reserve list Monday and closed the team training facility. — AFP

France handed an awkward draw in WCup qualifying

PARIS: Holders France were handed an awkward draw in qualifying for the 2022 World Cup on Monday, with Ukraine and Bosnia and Herzegovina standing in their way on the road to the finals in Qatar, while England will face Robert Lewandowski and Poland in their group. Gareth Southgate's England, semi-finalists in 2018 in Russia, will also take on Hungary and Albania as well as two of international football's minnows, Andorra and San Marino, in Group I.

France will also face Finland - who recently beat Les Bleus in a friendly in Paris - in Group D, with Kazakhstan completing the group that was drawn in a virtual ceremony at FIFA's headquarters in Zurich due to the COVID-19 pandemic. Didier Deschamps' side are in a group of just five teams because they will be involved in the finals of the UEFA Nations League in Italy next October. One of the most significant results of Deschamps' time as France coach came in qualifying for the 2014 World Cup, when his side faced Ukraine in a deciding play-off.

They lost 2-0 in the first leg in Kiev before winning 3-0 in the return. "A qualifying campaign is always a long road where there can be pitfalls," Deschamps said. "It is better to avoid them." As for England, it is the seventh time they have been drawn with Poland in World Cup qualifying. Their most recent



ZURICH: This handout picture released by the International Federation of Association Football (FIFA) shows a general view of the stage before the UEFA preliminary draw for the FIFA World Cup 2022 on December 7, 2020. —AFP

encounters came in the campaign for the 2014 finals, with the sides drawing 1-1 in Warsaw before England triumphed 2-0 at Wembley. Most famously, England missed out on a place at the 1974 World Cup after losing 2-0 in Poland and then being held 1-1 at Wembley. "There's a great history of that fixture. There was a spell when we seemed to draw them every time," said Southgate.

Fixture pile-up

The European qualifying competition begins in March, with 13 countries from the continent going through to the 32-team finals. There will be three rounds of fixtures in March, three more in September and two each in October and November. That will only increase pressure on a fixture calendar that is already packed, especially with the

postponed Euro 2020 set to go ahead in June and July.

That means a team that reaches the final of Euro 2020 can expect to play 17 competitive games between March and November next year. Only the winners of the 10 groups will qualify automatically for the finals, which are to take place in November and December of 2022. The 10 runners-up will go into play-offs alongside the two best Nations League group winners who miss out on qualifying via the traditional path.

Those play-offs, in March 2022, will produce three more qualifiers in total. Germany, whose coach Joachim Loew has been under severe pressure after poor recent results for the 2014 World Cup winners, will be expected to come through a group in which Romania and Iceland appear their main threats. — AFP

Abu Dhabi royal family member buys half of Israeli club

JERUSALEM: A member of Abu Dhabi's royal family on Monday bought half of Beitar Jerusalem, a top Israeli football team notorious for its anti-Arab fan base, the club said. Sheikh Hamad bin Khalifa Al-Nahyan signed a "partnership agreement" with club owner Moshe Hogege, said a statement from Beitar, calling it a "historic and exciting day".

The agreement comes after Israel established ties with UAE and Bahrain, only the third and fourth only Arab nations to normalise relations with the Jewish state after Egypt and Jordan. Al-Nahyan "purchased approximately 50 percent of Beitar in return for investing 300 millions shekels (\$92 million) in the club over 10 years," the statement said.

His son Mohammad will represent Al-Nahyan on the board of directors "on all matters pertaining to the club," it said. "We're marching the club together, all of us, to a new era of coexistence, achievements and fraternity for our club, our community and Israeli

sport," Hogege said in the statement. Beitar Jerusalem's fans have historically been considered anti-Muslim and anti-Arab, with their far-right "La Familia" fan group known for its chants against the Prophet Mohammed.

The first division club is the only Israeli side never to have fielded an Arab player. But it has been working to change its image in recent years and in 2017 received an award for its fight against racism. Since they normalized ties, both the UAE and Bahrain have signed a raft of deals with Israel, ranging from tourism to aviation and financial services. The accords have been condemned by the Palestinians as a "stab in the back". Nahyan said he was "thrilled" by the deal, calling it one of the "phenomenal fruits of peace and fraternity between the nations," he said.

He ended the statement with the club's trademark slogan: "Yalla Beitar!" The deal was brokered by Soviet-born, UAE-based businessman Naum Koen. In a statement, he said the deal showed "how peace between leaders seeps in and is translated into real peace between two nations." But not everyone was happy with the deal. Shai Elimelech, a longtime Beitar fan, found it hard to stomach his team being partly bought by "an Arab." "Everyone in the league will make fun of us and call us Arabs," he told AFP as he filled out a lottery form in a Jerusalem corner shop. "Money isn't everything in life." — AFP