



3 MoH reiterates efficacy of COVID-19 vaccines



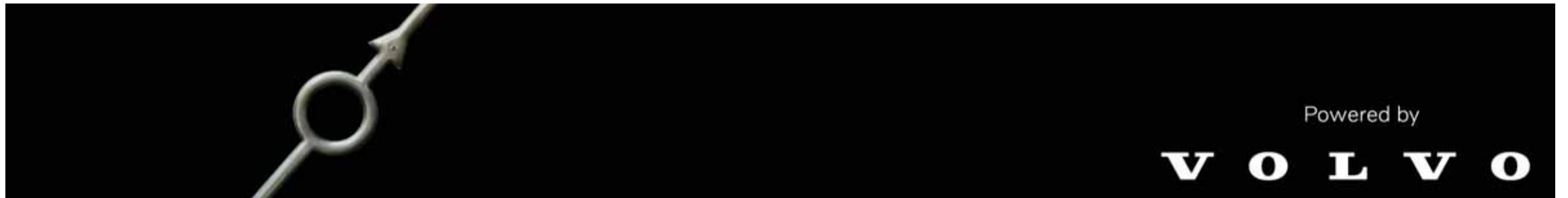
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40 MPs reiterate support for Humaidi as speaker

Three candidates to contest deputy speaker's post



KUWAIT: Newly-elected MPs meet at the diwaniya of MP Marzouq Al-Khalifa yesterday. — Photo by Yasser Al-Zayyat

By B Izzak

KUWAIT: At least 40 MPs yesterday reconfirmed their commitment to vote for MP Bader Al-Humaidi as the speaker of the newly-elected National Assembly, effectively meaning that incumbent two-time Speaker Marzouq Al-Ghanem will not be able to lead the Assembly for a third time. Holding their third meeting since election results were announced a week ago at the diwaniya of MP Marzouq Al-Khalifa, the lawmakers did not finalize their candidate for the deputy speaker's post, but unanimously agreed on MP Osama Al-Shaheen to become the Assembly supervisor.

Opposition MP Hassan Jowhar announced yesterday his intention to contest the deputy speaker's post, joining MP Ahmad Al-Shuhoumi, who is not part of the gathering, and incumbent deputy speaker Essa Al-Kandari. MPs Hisham Al-Saleh and Muhannad Al-Sayer declared their support for Jowhar, who requires at least 33 votes to win.

Thirty-six lawmakers attended the meeting yesterday but a number of other MPs declared their support, saying they could not attend for personal reasons. The government's position with its 16 Cabinet ministers, who can vote, will make no difference unless at least eight MPs change their mind on the inaugural day of the Assembly. Ghanem, who has been speaker since 2013, has not made any comment on the issue since he retained his seat as a member of parliament.

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Carbon neutrality by 2050: World's most urgent mission

Op-ed



By Antonio Guterres
UN Secretary-General

As the world marks the fifth anniversary of the adoption of the landmark Paris Agreement on climate change, a promising movement for carbon neutrality is taking shape. By next month, countries representing more than 65 percent of harmful greenhouse gasses and more than 70 percent of the world economy will have committed to achieve net zero emissions by the middle of the century.

At the same time, the main climate indicators are worsening. While the COVID-19 pandemic has temporarily reduced emissions, carbon dioxide levels are still at record highs - and rising. The past decade was the hottest on record: Arctic sea ice in October was the lowest ever, and apocalyptic fires, floods, droughts and storms are increasingly the new normal.

Biodiversity is collapsing, deserts are spreading, oceans are warming and choking with plastic waste. Science tells us that unless we cut fossil fuel production by 6 percent every year between now and 2030, things will get worse. Instead, the world is on track for a 2 per cent annual rise.

Pandemic recovery gives us an unexpected yet vital opportunity to attack climate change, fix our global environment, re-engineer

Continued on Page 2

Iran opposition figure executed

TEHRAN: Iran authorities yesterday executed Ruhollah Zam, a former opposition figure who had lived in exile in France and was implicated in anti-government protests, days after his sentence was upheld. State television said the "counter-revolutionary" Zam was hanged in the morning after the supreme court upheld his sentence due to

"the severity of the crimes" committed against the Islamic republic.

Judiciary spokesman Gholamhossein Esmaili had on Tuesday said Zam's sentence was upheld by the supreme court "more than a month ago". London-based human rights group Amnesty International, in a statement after his verdict was confirmed, described Zam as a "journalist and dissident". It said the confirmation marked "a shocking escalation in the use of the death penalty as a weapon of repression".

Iran's Revolutionary Guards announced

the arrest of Zam in Oct 2019, claiming he had been "directed by France's intelligence service". State television said he was "under the protection of several countries' intelligence services". The official IRNA news agency said he was also convicted of espionage for France and an unnamed country in the region, cooperating with the "hostile government of America", acting against "the country's security", insulting the "sanctity of Islam" and instigating violence during protests in 2017.

Continued from Page 2



Ruhollah Zam

US executes another death row inmate

WASHINGTON: US authorities on Friday carried out their 10th execution of the year, the last in a series of capital punishments that President Donald Trump's administration has carried out

before he leaves office. Alfred Bourgeois, a black man sentenced to death for the murder of his two-year-old daughter, was executed by lethal injection at a prison in Terre Haute, Indiana.

"Bourgeois was pronounced deceased at 8:21 pm Eastern Standard Time by the Vigo County Coroner," the federal prison said in a statement. The execution occurred a day after another convicted prisoner, Brandon Bernard, was also executed in Terre Haute. Following a paternity test, Bourgeois, a 55-year-old former truck driver, took temporary custody of his daughter and

brought her on a trucking route for part of the summer of 2002.

He severely abused her and eventually smashed her skull on the windshield. Since the crime took place on a military base where he was making a delivery, he was tried in federal court and sentenced to death in 2004. He remained on death row, with the United States having suspended federal executions beginning in 2003, in particular because of questions over the legality of drugs used in injections.

Continued on Page 2

Biden and Harris named as Time 'Person of the Year'

NEW YORK: US President-elect Joe Biden and Vice President-elect Kamala Harris have been named Time magazine's 2020 "Person of the Year" for their election victory over Donald Trump. "For changing the American story, for showing that the forces of empathy are greater than the forces of division, for sharing a vision of healing in a grieving world," Time said, explaining its choice.

The Democratic pair was chosen ahead of three other finalists: Frontline healthcare workers and Anthony Fauci, the racial justice movement and President Trump. Time's magazine cover has portraits of Biden, 78, and Harris, 56, with the subtitle "Changing America's story". "Together, they offered restoration and renewal in a single ticket. And America bought what they were selling,"

the publication said.

Biden beat Trump by 306 electoral college votes to Trump's 232 to end the real estate tycoon-turned-politician's presidency after one term. Biden received roughly seven million more votes than his Republican adversary, who is yet to concede, claiming widespread fraud of which there is no evidence. Time praised the Democratic ticket for ousting an incumbent president for the just the 10th time in US history.

"Biden and Harris had to revive the party's fading strength with white voters without college degrees; energize its emerging base of diverse, urban young voters; and motivate the hordes of angry suburbanites, particularly college graduates and women, who had fled the Trump-era GOP," it wrote.

Time magazine's award - handed out annually since 1927 - honors the person or people who most impacted the news, for better or worse, during the calendar year. When asked by Time what he would like people to say about him after four years in the White House, Biden replied: "That America was better off and average Americans are better off the day we left than the day we arrived. That's my objective." — AFP



Local

Kuwaiti police martyr laid to rest



KUWAIT: Deputy Prime Minister, Minister of Interior and Minister of State for Cabinet Affairs Anas Al-Saleh consoles with the martyr's family.



The martyr is carried to his final resting place.



Undersecretary of the Interior Ministry Lt Gen Essam Al-Nahham consoles with the martyr's family.

KUWAIT: The Ministry of Interior held a funeral service at Sabhan cemetery for Warrant Officer Raden Al-Khaledi, from the General Directorate of Traffic, who was martyred due to

a tragic accident while on duty. Deputy Prime Minister, Minister of Interior and Minister of State for Cabinet Affairs Anas Al-Saleh, Undersecretary of the Interior Ministry Lt Gen

Essam Al-Nahham and Assistant Undersecretary Maj Gen Jamal Al-Sayegh as well as other senior police officers attended the funeral. Saleh prayed for Allah Almighty to bless the martyr's soul in

Paradise and expressed sincere condolences for his family, according to a statement from the General Directorate of Security Relations and Media. — KUNA

Kuwait affirms necessity of boosting UN relief aid

NEW YORK: The State of Kuwait has reaffirmed necessity of UN-provided humanitarian aid's rapid coordination in catastrophe-afflicted regions to save as many lives as possible. Relief assistance has become much more significant in view of mounting conflicts and catastrophes throughout the world, thus international partnerships at this level has turned very much warranted, said Counselor Tahani Al-Nasser. Counselor Al-Nasser was addressing the State of Kuwait statement in front of the United Nations General Assembly session, tackling means of boosting coordina-

tion of humanitarian and relief help given by the UN worldwide. Passion for philanthropic action has characterized Kuwait since its establishment and has turned into a feature of its foreign policy, known as "the humanitarian diplomacy." Counselor Nasser affirmed, noting that the UN designation of the late Amir Sheikh Sabah Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah as Leader of Humanitarian Action deeply underscored necessity of Kuwait's humanitarian aid for more than half a century.

Kuwait has shouldered its regional-international responsibility as Center of Humanitarian Action (also designated by the UN), with continuous support for diverse humanitarian cases across the globe, staying abreast of events, crises and disasters. Proportion of the humanitarian aid provided by Kuwait doubled as compared to the internationally agreed quotas, she said, affirming keenness in this respect on bolstering Kuwait's humanitarian and development approach at the official and grass-root levels, ultimately to deliver Kuwait's aloft

humanitarian message that depicts genuine values and principles of the Kuwaiti people. The Counselor has continued, saying that Kuwait since 2008, has addressed 10 percent of the whole allotted aid through UN agencies to the UN emergency response fund, with \$1 million. Its voluntary contribution for next year amounted to \$1 million, intended for the Higher Commission for Refugees and \$2 million for the UN agency for Palestinian refugees, UNRWA.

Regarding the novel coronavirus (COVID-19), Counselor Nasser said Kuwait had hurriedly contributed with \$290 million to ensure continuity of the fight against the contagion, backing stricken nations and the World Health Organization (WHO). Moreover, Kuwait Fund for Arab Economic Development (KFAED) has given assistance to sisterly and friendly countries, supported establishment of an epidemic treatment center in Africa and delayed due payments for the fund from May 1 to December 31. In total, Kuwait's contributions at this level have



NEW YORK: Counselor Tahani Al-Nasser addresses the UN General Assembly session. — KUNA

US executes another death...

Continued from Page 1

Trump however restarted federal executions in July - even though states still using capital punishment have delayed theirs due to the dangers posed to prison staff and witnesses by the COVID-19 pandemic. Seven federal executions occurred before the Nov 3 election that Trump lost to Democrat Joe Biden, who is due to be sworn in on Jan 20 despite the outgoing president's refusal to concede. Biden has pledged to work with Congress to bring an end to federal executions.

For 131 years, outgoing presidents traditionally suspended federal executions during the transition

period. But the Trump administration had announced six executions between November and January, including Bourgeois. His lawyers had asked the US Supreme Court to intervene, saying he suffers from a mental disability.

"The jury that sentenced Mr Bourgeois to death never learned that he was a person with intellectual disability because his trial lawyers did not present the evidence that was available to them," said his new lawyer Victor Abreu. After the execution, his legal team issued a statement saying that "tonight, the United States killed a man with intellectual disability in spite of clear directives from the US Supreme Court and federal laws that prohibited it".

Bourgeois was the 17th person executed in the United States in 2020, a historic low linked to the suspensions at the state level. He was the 10th executed at the federal level, the highest in more than a century. — AFP

Goals, the world's blueprint for a better future. It is time to put a price on carbon: end fossil fuel subsidies and finance; stop building new coal power plants; shift the tax burden from income to carbon, from taxpayers to polluters; make climate-related financial risk disclosures mandatory; and integrate the goal of carbon neutrality into all economic and fiscal decision-making. Banks must align their lending with the net zero objective, and asset owners and managers must decarbonize their portfolios.

Third, we must secure a breakthrough on adaptation and resilience to help those already facing dire impacts of climate change. That's not happening enough today: adaptation represents only 20 per cent of climate finance. This hinders our efforts to reduce disaster risk. It also isn't smart: every \$1 invested in adaptation measures could yield almost \$4 in benefits. Adaptation and resilience are especially urgent for small island developing states, for which climate change is an existential threat.

Next year gives us a wealth of opportunities to address our planetary emergencies, through major United Nations conferences and other efforts on biodiversity, oceans, transport, energy, cities and food systems. One of our best allies is nature itself: Nature-based solutions could provide one-third of the net reductions in greenhouse gas emissions required to meet the goals of the Paris Agreement. Indigenous knowledge can help to point the way. And as humankind devises strategies for preserving the environment and building a green economy, we need more women decision-makers at the table.

COVID and climate have brought us to a threshold. We cannot go back to the old normal of inequality and fragility; instead we must step towards a safer, more sustainable path. This is a complex policy test and an urgent moral test. With decisions today setting our course for decades to come, we must make pandemic recovery and climate action two sides of the same coin.

90 percent of MPs are supporting one candidate for the speaker's post.

A number of MPs stressed they will push for resolution of several issues, topped by the plight of tens of thousands of bedoons or stateless people, and issuing legislation to offer a general amnesty for a number of activists, some of whom are living in exile. Others said they will stress on the need to change the voting system and to press the government to forgive hundreds of millions of dinars in consumer loans for citizens. The new Assembly holds its first meeting on Tuesday.

Morocco savors Western Sahara breakthrough

RABAT: Morocco basked in US recognition of its sovereignty over Western Sahara after outgoing President Donald Trump changed policy on the decades-old dispute in return for Rabat agreeing to normalize relations with Israel. For the Polisario Front, which has campaigned for independence for the former Spanish colony since the 1970s, Trump's announcement marked a major setback and drew a promise to fight on until Moroccan forces withdraw.

Meanwhile, Algeria's prime minister yesterday criticized "foreign maneuvers" he said were aimed to destabilize it. Algeria, Morocco's neighbor and regional rival, is the key foreign backer of the Polisario Front. "There are foreign maneuvers which aim to destabilize Algeria," Prime Minister Abdelaziz Djerad said, in Algeria's first reaction to the US decision. "There is now a desire by the Zionist entity to come closer to our borders", he added, in reference to Israel. "We are seeing today at our borders... wars and instability around Algeria," Djerad said, in a speech to mark the anniversary of demonstrations against French colonial rule.

Moroccan Foreign Minister Nasser Bourita hailed US recognition of Western Sahara's "Moroccan identity" as a "historic diplomatic breakthrough". "Several years of work" had been "crowned with the recognition of the United States, the major power on the (United Nations) Security Council," he told AFP in an interview. Fellow permanent UNSC member Russia,

historically close with Algeria, denounced the US move on Friday. Deputy Foreign Minister Mikhail Bogdanov called the decision "unilateral" and "a violation of international law".

The US move sparked fears in Algeria that Morocco's deal will allow Israeli forces to operate along its frontier. "The Israeli army is at our borders," Algerian journalist and analyst Abed Charef wrote. "The rapprochement between Morocco and Israel opens the way, if it has not already happened, for Israeli aid to support Morocco's army". Algeria's military magazine, El-Djeich, called in its December editorial for Algerians to "stand ready to face" imminent threats. It warned of a "deterioration of the regional situation along our border and the threat that certain enemy parties pose".

Algerian political scientist Mansour Kedidir warned that if Israel does establish a presence along the frontier it would be a "provocation". But he added that US recognition did not necessarily change the situation on the ground in Western Sahara, which was in the hands of the United Nations. The UN - which has its MINURSO mission in Western Sahara - said its position on the territory was "unchanged". UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres believed "the solution to the question can still be found based on Security Council resolutions," his spokesman said.

Morocco's official MAP news agency published commentaries from an array of Moroccan and foreign analysts trumpeting the US announcement as "vindication of the Moroccan cause" and the "beginning of the end for the Polisario gang". Prince Moulay Lhicham Alaoui, a cousin of King Mohammed VI, tweeted his appreciation of the "courageous" decision by Trump. Support for the Palestinian cause runs deep in Morocco, but criticism of the monarch remains a red line even after a decade of reforms. — AFP

Carbon neutrality by 2050: World's...

Continued from Page 1

economies and re-imagine our future. Here is what we must do: First, we need build a truly global coalition for carbon neutrality by 2050. The European Union has committed to do so. The United Kingdom, Japan, the Republic of Korea and more than 110 countries have done the same. So, too, has the incoming United States administration. China has pledged to get there before 2060.

Every country, city, financial institution and company should adopt plans for net zero - and act now to get on the right path to that goal, which means cutting global emissions by 45 per cent by 2030 compared with 2010 levels. In advance of next November's UN Climate Conference in Glasgow, governments are obligated by the Paris Agreement to be ever more ambitious every five years and submit strengthened commitments known as Nationally Determined Contributions, and these NDCs must show true ambition for carbon neutrality.

Technology is on our side. It costs more to simply run most of today's coal plants than it does to build new renewable plants from scratch. Economic analysis confirms the wisdom of this path. According to the International Labor Organization, despite inevitable job losses, the clean energy transition will create 18 million net new jobs by 2030. But we must recognize the human costs of decarbonization, and support workers with social protection, re-skilling and up-skilling so that the transition is just.

Second, we need to align global finance with the Paris Agreement and the Sustainable Development

40 MPs reiterate support for...

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MP Osama Al-Munawer said the meeting reaffirmed the lawmakers' support for Humaidi and discussed options for voting during the session. Munawer said the meeting is sending a message to the political leadership that around

Iran opposition figure...

Continued from Page 1

At least 25 people were killed during the unrest in Dec 2017 and Jan 2018 that was sparked by economic hardship. Zam, who was granted political asylum in France and reportedly lived in Paris, ran a channel on the Telegram messaging app called Amadnews. Telegram shut down the channel after Iran demanded it remove the account for inciting an "armed uprising".

Zam was charged with "corruption on earth" - one of the most serious offences under Iranian law - and sentenced to death in June. As his trial started, state television broadcast a "documentary" about Zam's "relations" with the Islamic republic's foes. The broadcaster also aired an "interview" with him in July, in which he is seen saying he believed in reformism until he was detained in 2009 during protests against the disputed re-election of ultra-conservative president Mahmoud Ahmadinejad. He also denied having instigated violence through his Telegram channel.

Amnesty has repeatedly called on Iran to stop broadcasting videos of "confessions" by suspects, saying they "violate the defendants' rights". Yesterday, the rights group called his execution a "deadly blow" to freedom of expression. Diana

Eltahawy, Amnesty's deputy director for the Middle East, said she was "shocked and horrified" at his death, adding that the organization believed it was "a reprehensible bid to avoid an international campaign to save his life".

Zam had lived in exile in France for several years before being arrested by Iran's Revolutionary Guards under unclear circumstances. Paris-based press rights group Reporters Without Borders (RSF) said yesterday it was "outraged" by the execution. RSF had previously claimed that Zam had disappeared on a trip to Baghdad in Oct 2019, and accused Iran of abducting him in Iraq to face trial back home.

Zam is one of several people to have been sentenced to death over participation or links to protests that rocked Iran between 2017 and 2019. Navid Afkari, a 27-year-old wrestler, was executed at a prison in the southern city of Shiraz in September. The judiciary said he had been found guilty of "voluntary homicide" for stabbing to death a government employee in August 2018. Shiraz and other urban centers had been the scene of anti-government protests at the time.

Three young men were also sentenced to death over links to deadly 2019 protests, but Iran's supreme court said last week that it would retry them at the request of their defense teams. Their sentences were initially upheld, with the judiciary saying evidence had been found on their phones of them setting alight banks, buses and public buildings. Amnesty International said Iran executed at least 251 people last year, the world's second highest total after China. — AFP

Local

Ministry reassures public as registration for COVID-19 vaccination goes online in Kuwait

Kuwait registers 549 new cases, one death over the weekend

KUWAIT: Kuwait's Ministry of Health (MOH) reiterated the efficacy of the COVID-19 vaccines as the country has opened online registration to the public for vaccination against the deadly virus. The new service, available via a link on the Ministry's website, went operational Thursday, allowing people to register in order to be inoculated at a future date to be determined later.

"As part of preparation for the vaccination campaign, the Ministry developed an operating mechanism and a detailed plan outlining the segments of the public who have priority access to the vaccine," Spokesman of the Ministry of Health said Thursday evening as he announced launching a campaign for online registration for vaccination through the link https://cov19vaccine.moh.gov.kw/SPCMS/CVD_19_Vaccine_Registration.aspx. "Early registration does not necessarily lead to early vaccination or priority; it only provides the ministry with the data that could help identify the prioritized segments of the public and the required quantity and distribution of the vaccine," he explained.

"It can help conduct the vaccination in an easy and orderly way, taking into account of the numbers of citizens and foreign residents, including illegal residents," Dr Sanad further noted. The public vaccination campaign targets everybody and will be conducted in coordination with all competent state bodies, he said, voicing hope that all people will register in the coming few days.

One death

Kuwait had listed 255 new coronavirus infections yesterday, raising total cases to 146,044, while the death toll reached 911 after one fatality was recorded over the previous 24 hours. Meanwhile, total recoveries reached 141,825 with 256 new ones announced yesterday. On Friday, Kuwait announced it registered 294 new cases, zero deaths and 310 recoveries.

The number of patients hospitalized stood at 3,308 yesterday, including 68 in intensive care units, up from 66 the previous day. Health workers conducted 4,824 swab tests in the previous 24 hours, Dr Sanad said yesterday, compared to 6,725 registered the previous day. The total number of swab tests taken since the outbreak of the disease stood at 1,176,983 yesterday.

The rollout of the vaccine in Kuwait remains pending approval by international and local regulators, the health ministry explained in a separate statement after a condition in the application form requiring people to bear responsibility over the personal information they enter



BRISTOL: In this file photo taken on December 8, 2020 a member of staff draws the Pfizer-BioNTech COVID-19 vaccine out of a phial at the Southmead Hospital, Bristol. —AFP

raised some public concerns about the vaccine's potential safety. "An attached declaration to complete pre-registration for immunization from the virus on the ministry's official website is not intended to disclaim responsibility for the safety of the vaccine," read a ministry press release.

through means of prevention and the treatment of diseases and pandemics. It noted that some "complications" have resulted from the request leading to a change in the declaration's wording to prevent confusion.

Multi-phased approach

Health Minister Sheikh Dr Basel Al-Sabah had stated on Thursday that Kuwait would start administering shots of a coronavirus vaccine to its population as soon as the job is given the green light by regulatory agencies around the world, hoping that would happen before the end of the year. Kuwait's vaccination campaign would be a multi-phased approach likely to last for a year, starting with "priority groups" first, he explained.

Kuwait has signed deals with drug manufacturers AstraZeneca PLC and Pfizer Inc for the delivery of their respective COVID-19 vaccines, in addition to some nine others to be chosen shortly, he revealed. He cited the International Fairground in Mishref area as the country's designated vaccine center, where an estimated 10,000 people could be given their COVID-19 shots in a single day. A digital certificate would be given to show who has been vaccinated for coronavirus, the minister added, promising a "smooth and seamless" process. —KUNA



Early registration does not give priority

The admission is intended to remove liability in the event the applicant chooses to provide incorrect information about their medical history or to conceal necessary information about their health condition, which may lead to complications as a result, the ministry further explained. The ministry went on to underline its commitment to the role it was entrusted with to maintain public health

News in brief

No plans to resume visas

By Nawara Fattahova

KUWAIT: Brig Gen Tawheed Al-Kandari, Director General of Relations and Security Media at the Ministry of Interior, told Kuwait Times that there are no plans or intentions for allowing the issuance of any kind of new visa (family, visit, tourist, etc), even upon arrival, anytime soon. "This issue depends on the pandemic and how it develops. If the situation gets better, then the country will be open again to visitors. But I don't have information this will happen this year," he told Kuwait Times.

Kuwait oil price up

KUWAIT: The price of Kuwaiti oil went up by \$1.37 to \$50.06 per barrel on Friday after being at \$48.69 pb the previous day, Kuwait Petroleum Corporation (KPC) said yesterday. At the global level, the price of the Brent crude went down by 28 cent to \$49.97 pb, the same case with the West Texas Intermediate, which went down by 21 cent to \$46.57 pb. —KUNA

Aid to Lebanon

BEIRUT: Kuwait's Red Crescent Society on Friday continued to send copious amounts of aid meant for thousands of needy families, in addition to Syrian and Palestinian refugees across Lebanon, describing the initiative as a "humanitarian obligation." The aid includes some 1,500 food baskets for needy families still reeling from a devastating port blast that tore through the Lebanese capital in August, said Dr Msaad Al-Enezi, the head of the charity's delegation in the country, adding that around 2,000 blankets were given to them to bring warmth amid the winter chill. Palestinian refugee families received the same number of food supplies as well, while another 1,500 Syrian refugees languishing in northern camps were the beneficiaries of similar aid, said the official. —KUNA

Four Kuwaiti sites nominated for Islamic heritage list



Al-Sadu traditional weaving.



An archive photo showing the ruins of the Sheikh Abdullah Al-Jaber Palace.



Kuwait Towers

RABAT: The Islamic World Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization has announced that four Kuwaiti sites had been inscribed on the tentative list of Islamic heritage sites. The ICESCO Heritage Committee has approved in a special online session held on Friday the nomination of 66 cultural sites: 22 from 12 countries to the final list of the Islamic heritage sites list; and 44 sites from six countries, including four Kuwaiti sites, to

the tentative list of the Islamic heritage sites. The four nominated Kuwaiti sites are: Kuwait Towers, Sheikh Abdullah Al-Jaber Palace, Boubyan Island and Mubarak Al-Kabeer Marine Reserve. The committee also nominated Kuwait's Al-Sadu traditional weaving skills for the list. Furthermore, the committee adopted a Kuwaiti proposal to compile a book on Islamic heritage sites worldwide. —KUNA

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As its name suggests, the Aqua Terra crosses many boundaries. Developed from a long line of ocean-watches, it shares DNA with our most rugged sports chronometers, yet is infused with the design sensibility of a classic dress watch. Continuing that spirit, today's Master Chronometer models are tested and certified at the highest level by the Swiss Federal Institute of Metrology (METAS). This guarantees more accuracy, reliability and supreme resistance to magnetism from electronic devices such as phones and laptops, making the Aqua Terra the ultimate everyday watch.

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COMMERCIAL : 24835618
P.O.Box 1301 Safat, 13014 Kuwait.
Email: info@kuwaittimes.com
Website: www.kuwaittimes.net

News in brief

Italy hails Kuwait's efforts

ROME: Head of the Italian Parliament's Foreign Affairs Committee Piero Fassino hailed Kuwait's role in resolving the Gulf crisis and other conflicts through dialogue. His remarks were made during his meeting with Kuwaiti Ambassador to Italy Sheikh Azzam Al-Sabah in the house of representatives on Friday. The two sides also discussed the recent regional and international developments, as well as bilateral ties. Fassino affirmed Italy's support to Kuwait's request at the European Union (EU) to exempt Kuwaiti citizens from entry permits to the Schengen area. — KUNA

India welcomes Kuwait's statement

NEW DELHI: The Indian Government on Friday welcomed Kuwait leadership's efforts to resolve rifts in the Gulf region. Indian Ministry of External Affairs Spokesperson Anurag Srivastava said: "We have seen the statement from Kuwait side that fruitful discussions have taken place towards resolving the rift in the region. We have also seen statements from other countries in this regard. We welcome these announcements. India shares close civilizational, economic, political and cultural ties with all the Gulf countries. We hope for harmonious relations between all the countries in the region." — KUNA

Cyprus lauds resolution talks

BEIRUT: Cyprus on Friday welcomed Kuwait leadership's efforts to resolve the Gulf crisis and overcome differences between brothers of the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC). In a statement, Cyprus foreign ministry appreciated Kuwait's mediating efforts to help resolving the rifts in the Gulf region, supporting the efforts of Kuwait, the United States, and the international community in boosting fruitful cooperation between the Gulf countries. — KUNA

Photo of the Day



KUWAIT: Members of the Kuwaiti knights team carry a national flag as they perform with their horses on the sea side, 70 kms west of the capital Kuwait City on December 11, 2020.

stc concludes 'Move for Movember' campaign

KUWAIT: Kuwait Telecommunications Company - stc, a world-class digital leader providing innovative services and platforms to customers, enabling the digital transformation in Kuwait, announced that it has concluded its annual campaign to raise awareness on men's health issues. The campaign focused on different methods men can adopt into their lifestyles to maintain their health and fitness levels, held under the title 'Move for Movember' during the month of November.

Upon concluding its prostate cancer awareness campaign in line with the internationally recognized awareness month, stc recognized employees who won the weekly challenges set within the program's framework, receiving prizes for their dedication and active participation. The Company also acknowledged the individuals who participated and excelled in the annual sponsored stc competition held at Flare Fitness Gym.

During the month of November, stc organized a series of initiatives to support the cause under the #Because_We_Care umbrella, led by Yousef Al-Maqroun, from stc's Corporate Communications team. The campaign focused on informing the public through tips and valuable information on ways to stay healthy and fit. To achieve the set objective, the Company launched a full-fledged campaign on its digital plat-



forms in support of the cause while shedding light on the battle against this disease.

Additionally, stc launched an internal competition under the 'Move for Movember' initiative. The competition drew employees to register their daily and weekly step counts through a fitness application or device and send their data to the dedicated team within the Corporate Communications department at stc responsible for this staff initiative.

stc highly values its employees, and in line with the 'Move for Movember' initiative, the Company produced a video that comes close to the heart of the stc family dedicated to an employee who survived prostate cancer. The video captures the employee's journey as he battled the harmful disease and heroically became cancer-free.

Raising awareness on widespread causes and health related issues comes as a key pillar in stc's corporate social responsibility (CSR) agenda. stc's contri-



buton and dedication in spreading awareness on health-related issues over the years has been a continuous and ongoing commitment that the Company stands by to support the community.

stc continues to build on its CSR framework, focusing on causes that affect societies both worldwide and locally. The company launched this campaign with the goal of not only spreading awareness to the public regarding this harmful disease, but also to engage its employees in entertaining activities that promote adopting a healthier lifestyle.

stc concluded: "We will continue to contribute, organize and participate in activities that will offer customers, employees and our society actionable guidance and valuable information that we believe will create a positive impact for our community. Prostate cancer is one of the most common cancers among men, yet it is also one of the most treatable if detected at an early stage."

Logo design contest to celebrate 50th anniversary of China-Kuwait relations

KUWAIT: The year of 2021 marks the 50th anniversary of the establishment of diplomatic relations between the People's Republic of China and the State of Kuwait. To commemorate this momentous and historic occasion, the Chinese Embassy in Kuwait is pleased to announce a logo design contest. The winning logo design may be used on posters, publications, souvenirs, decorations, or anywhere else the Embassy may deem appropriate for the purpose of celebrating the 50th anniversary of China-Kuwait diplomatic relations.

The Terms and Conditions for the competition are stated as follows:

1. Theme

All submitted entries must reflect and incorporate the theme "50th anniversary of the establishment of diplomatic relations between China and Kuwait" in the logo design, highlighting the China-Kuwait traditional friendship and strategic partnership.

2. Eligibility

The logo design contest is open to all individuals residing in Kuwait.

3. Entry requirements

1) All submitted entries must be original, unpublished, in compliance with the laws of China and Kuwait, and not infringe intellectual property rights (including copyrights) of others.

2) Entries should be capturing the theme prominently, unique, concise, far-reaching, visually appealing and distinctive.

3) The individual or the team (no more than 3 members) submitting the entry will be considered the contestant. Each contestant can submit a maximum of two (2) entries but must be separate submissions.

4) Entries should be submitted as JPG, JPEG or PNG files (no more than 10 MB) with a minimum resolution of 300 dpi and at least 1200 x 1200 pixels, in order to meet quality printing purposes.

5) Contestants must fill out the registration form, accompanied by a brief description (up to 200 words) of the design concept and significance of the submitted entry in either Chinese, Arabic or English.

6) Winners must provide the original files of their entries in editable AI/PSD/EPS format upon the request of the Chinese Embassy in Kuwait.

4. Submission of entries

1) All entries along with completed registration forms must be sent via email at chinakuwait50@gmail.com with the subject line "CK50LOGO + contestant name".

2) Last date for entries: Sunday, 10th January 2021.

5. Judging Criteria

The winning logo design will be selected by the Chinese Embassy in Kuwait based on the following criteria: originality and uniqueness of the design, adherence to the theme, quality of design and visual appeal.

6. Prizes and announcement of results

1) One (1) Grand Prize, two (2) 1st Runners-up, three (3) 2nd Runners-up and 10 Honorable Mentions will be selected for the contest, and the awards are as follows:

- Grand Prize: Huawei Matebook X Pro (1) and certificate
- 1st Runner-up: Huawei P40 Pro 256GB 5G Smartphone (1) and certificate
- 2nd Runner-up: Huawei Watch GT2e (1) and certificate
- Honorable Mention: HUAWEI Smart Band 4 Pro (1) and certificate

2) The prize-winners will be announced on the website and twitter page of the Chinese Embassy in Kuwait in mid-January 2021, and will also be notified via email.

7. Supplementary rules

1) Contestants affirm that their submissions are original, not plagiarized nor copied, and do not violate the intellectual property rights of any other person or entity.

2) Contestants acknowledge and agree that the Chinese Embassy in Kuwait shall have the right to publicize, reproduce, publish, display and exhibit all submitted entries, without prior consent of contestants nor paying fees to contestants.

3) The Chinese Embassy in Kuwait owns the copyrights and the exclusive right to use of all prize-winning logo designs, and shall have the right to adapt, edit, modify, or otherwise use the logo designs in part or in its entirety in whatever manner it deems necessary.

4) In the event that any submitted entries are found to infringe the laws and regulations of either China or Kuwait, contain defamatory contents, infringe the intellectual property rights of any third party, etc., the contestants shall be responsible for all related legal liabilities. The Chinese Embassy in Kuwait shall assume no responsibility whatsoever for any loss, inconvenience or damage that may arise as a result of the aforementioned cases, and reserves the right to disqualify such entries and proceed legal action against them.

5) The decision of Chinese Embassy in Kuwait on the contest will be final and no appeal against the decision will be considered.

6) Personal data and information provided by contestants will be used by the Chinese Embassy in Kuwait for the purposes of enrollment, statistical use, correspondence and publicity only.

7) In the event of any question or difference of views regarding compliance with, interpretation, or application of the Terms and Conditions of the activity, the Chinese Embassy in Kuwait reserves the exclusive right of final interpretation of the activity in its sole discretion.

8) By submitting entries, contestants are deemed to have read and accepted the Terms and Conditions as established above, which can be amended or modified at any time by the Chinese Embassy in Kuwait.

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India farmers, police in road showdowns as protests worsen

Fauci says Biden 'attuned to science,' credits Trump for vaccines

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NEW YORK: Photo dated Dec 9, 2020 shows a lab technician putting on protective gloves before opening the vaccine freezer during a dry run at Mount Sinai Hospital ahead of an expected Pfizer COVID-19 vaccine shipment over the weekend. — AFP

US approves Pfizer COVID vaccine

Millions of doses begin shipping • White House told FDA chief to approve vaccine or quit

WASHINGTON: The US green-lit the Pfizer-BioNTech Covid-19 vaccine late Friday, paving the way for millions of vulnerable people to receive their shots in the world's hardest-hit country. President Donald Trump immediately released a video on Twitter, where he hailed the news as a "medical miracle" and said the first immunizations would take place "in less than 24 hours".

It comes as infections across America soar as never before, with the grim milestone of 300,000 confirmed deaths fast approaching. The US is now the sixth country to approve the two-dose regimen, after Britain, Bahrain, Canada, Saudi Arabia and Mexico. The move came earlier than expected and capped a day of drama after it was widely reported that the White House had threatened to fire Food and Drug Administration chief Stephen Hahn if he did not grant emergency approval Friday.

Trump's intervention reinserts politics into the scientific process, which some experts have said could undermine vaccine confidence. The US is

seeking to inoculate 20 million people this month alone, with long-term care facility residents and health care workers at the front of the line. The government also said Friday that it is buying 100 million more doses of the Moderna vaccine candidate, amid reports the administration passed on the opportunity to secure more supply of the Pfizer jab.

The purchase brings its total supply of Moderna doses to 200 million, enough to immunize 100 million people with the two-shot regimen that could be approved as early as next week. Both frontrunners are based on mRNA (messenger ribonucleic acid), a major victory for a technology that had never previously been proven. Two other vaccine candidates stumbled Friday: France's Sanofi and Britain's GSK said their vaccine would not be ready until the end of 2021.

In Peru, clinical trials of a vaccine made by Chinese drug giant Sinopharm were suspended after neurological problems were detected in a test volunteer. And in Australia the development of a vaccine at the University of Queensland was

abandoned Friday after clinical trials produced a false positive HIV result among subjects involved in early testing.

Sputnik mix

The mixed news on the vaccine front came as infections accelerated fast in North America and parts of Africa but started to stabilize in Europe and drop in Asia and the Middle East. Around the world more than 1.58 million lives have been lost to COVID-19, according to an AFP tally from official sources. Brazil on Friday crossed 180,000 deaths, despite President Jair Bolsonaro's insistence the crisis was at the "tail end."

But across the Pacific Ocean, New Zealand, which has been praised for its handling of the virus, took its first tentative steps towards reopening its borders with the tiny Cook Islands. Less good news arrived in South Korea - a country previously held up as a model of how to combat the pandemic - which reported its highest daily number of new cases so far, with a surge centered

around Seoul, sparking fears the country could lose control of the spread.

Officials there announced 950 new infections after several days reporting numbers ranging from about 500 to 600. And in China, where the virus first emerged a year ago but has since been brought under control, two cities on the border with Russia reported one local infection each, sparking mass tests in both and a full lockdown in one of them. Countries which have approved the Pfizer-BioNTech jab meanwhile were preparing for rollout, as the World Health Organization warned of a potentially grim Christmas season.

Following Britain's lead, the first vaccine shipments to 14 sites across Canada are scheduled to arrive tomorrow with people receiving shots a day or two later. Israel, which accepted its first shipment of the Pfizer vaccine on Wednesday, is targeting a rollout on Dec 27. And Hong Kong said Friday it had struck deals for two vaccines - one from Pfizer and the other from Beijing-based Sinovac - with plans to launch a campaign in early 2021. — AFP

Morocco's Jews toast Israel deal

CASABLANCA: Casablanca's "Madame Falh" bakery is famed for its delicious kosher bread, but in its busy queue there was only one thing on people's lips - a deal between Morocco and Israel. "Everyone is talking about it, whether it's our Jewish clients, who make up half of our customers, or Muslims," said Kevin Falh, the 36-year-old grandson of the founder of this baking institution. Morocco on Thursday became the fourth Arab nation this year to agree to normalize relations with Israel, following the United Arab Emirates, Bahrain and Sudan.

Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu said liaison offices would be reopened in Tel Aviv and Rabat, which Morocco closed in 2000 at the start of the second Palestinian uprising, and establish full diplomatic relations "as rapidly as possible". Morocco confirmed the deal, saying King Mohammed VI had told outgoing US President Donald Trump his country had agreed to establish diplomatic rela-

tions with Israel "with minimal delay".

Falh, speaking in the middle of the rush for Madame Falh's special bread baked according to religious requirements ahead of Shabbat, Judaism's holy day of rest, said it was a moment to celebrate. "Since the normalization announced by the United Arab Emirates and Bahrain, we had to be on the list. Finally, it came," said Falh, who is especially eager for direct flights to Israel to begin.

'Greatest respect'

As customers waited for their fresh bread, one lady in her 40s described how people had reacted to the news of the deal. "The entire Jewish community in Morocco was in joy," said the woman, who asked not to be named. "This is a very strong and very courageous gesture on the part of King Mohammed VI," she said, adding that the deal "will have a positive impact on Moroccans in general, not only for Jews."

But she said it also worried her. In Muslim-majority Morocco, the Jewish community - once the largest in North Africa - has dwindled from more than a quarter of a million in the 1950s down to less than 3,000 today. "I'm afraid that protests will break out, that a rift will be created between the communities, that misunderstandings



CASABLANCA: Members of the Moroccan Jewish community buy pastries at a kosher shop in this western Moroccan port city on Friday. — AFP

will prevail," she said.

But a worker in the store smoothed over concerns. "We have had very cordial relations for a very long time," said the man in his 60s. "We have never had any problems. We work together with the greatest respect." At the Amsellem butchery, another culinary institution in central Casablanca's district with the last Jewish stores, owner Jacques Bitton said he did "not stop receiving calls from Moroccans-Jews and Muslims - all satisfied with this decision".

Bitton said he was "very happy" at the development of relations between his country and the Jewish state. "I have family in Israel, a first cousin who is in the government," said Bitton. "I spoke with him; he was ecstatic." In Israel, there are some 700,000 Jews of Moroccan origin - many of whom have kept strong links with the kingdom, including celebrating its culinary and musical traditions. Most Moroccan Jews left with their families in the early 1950s, after Israel declared its independence. — AFP

Austria court overturns school headscarf ban

VIENNA: Austria's constitutional court on Friday struck down a law introduced last year which banned the headscarf in primary schools, saying the measure was unconstitutional and discriminatory. In a statement explaining the decision, the court said the law "contravened the principle of equality in relation to freedom of religion, belief and conscience". The law prevented girls younger than 10 from wearing the headscarf and had been challenged by two children and their parents.

The measure was passed in May 2019 under the previous coalition of the center-right People's Party

(OeVP) and the far-right Freedom Party (FPÖ), just days before that government collapsed due to a corruption scandal. Both parties had made anti-immigration rhetoric and warnings against "parallel societies" a key part of their political messaging and their spokespersons made it clear at the time that the law was targeting the headscarf.

However, the text of the legislation attempted to avoid charges of discrimination by banning "ideologically or religiously influenced clothing which is associated with the covering of the head". Nevertheless, the court said that the law could only be understood as targeting Islamic head coverings. The OeVP-FPÖ government had itself said that the patka head covering worn by Sikh boys or the Jewish kippa would not be affected. The new OeVP-Green party coalition that took office in January had planned to extend the ban for girls under 14. The current OeVP Education Minister Heinz Fassmann said that the ministry would "take note of the judgment and look into its argu-

ments". "I regret that girls will not have the opportunity to make their way through the education system free from compulsion," he added.

In its statement the court said that far from promoting integration, "the ban could... lead to discrimination as it runs the risk of making it more difficult for Muslim girls to access education and socially excluding them". The IGGÖe, the body officially recognized as representing the country's Muslim communities, welcomed the judgement and said the court had ended "the populist politics of bans".

IGGÖe President Umit Vural said in a statement: "We don't condone disparaging attitudes towards women who decide against the headscarf... and we also cannot agree with the curtailing of the religious freedom of those Muslim women who understand the headscarf to be an integral part of their lived religious practice." The IGGÖe had said at the time of the ban that in any case only a "minuscule number" of girls would be affected. — AFP

'Shrine factions' look to peel away from Hashed

NAJAF: Around the corner from Iraq's holiest shrines, a years-long struggle over allegiances and resources is coming to a head - threatening a dangerous schism within a powerful state-sponsored security force. The growing fissure pits the vast Iran-aligned wing of the Hashed al-Shaabi network against four factions linked to the shrines of Iraq's twin holy cities, Karbala and Najaf. Those factions, dubbed "the Shrine Hashed" and comprising around 20,000 active fighters, held their first strategic planning meeting earlier this month.

Throughout the packed three days, spokesmen for the shrine groups leaned on two sources of legitimacy: a patriotic, "Iraq-only" discourse, and the blessing of the "marjaiyah," Iraq's Shiite spiritual leadership. "The Shrine Hashed are the origin of the broader Hashed," Hazem Sakhr, a spokesman for the four factions, told AFP. "We are committed to Iraqi law and the marjaiyah's orders."

Maytham Al-Zaidi, the prominent commander of the largest shrine group known as the Abbas Combat Division, struck a nationalistic, reformist tone. "The main reasons for establishing the Shrine Hashed is to serve our country, and to correct both its track record and trajectory," he said. Ali Al-Hamdani, who heads the 3,000-member Ali al-Akbar Brigade, said the meeting - held in Najaf and Karbala - was "exclusively" for the Shrine Hashed, setting their future apart from the rest. Hamdi Malik, a London-based expert on Shiite factions, said the shrine groups were now publicly insisting on a separation. "They are escalating with this new conference, and want to accelerate that process," Malik told AFP.

The Hashed al-Shaabi network was formed in 2014 when Iraq's top Shiite cleric, Grand Ayatollah Ali Sistani, issued an edict urging citizens to fight the advancing Sunni extremists of the Islamic State group. His call brought together already-existing paramilitary factions and new formations, including the Shrine Hashed. But internal disputes emerged as early as 2016, with Malik pointing to three main fault lines. — AFP

International

UN fears for Eritrean refugees caught in Ethiopia conflict

First foreign aid convoy reaches Tigray capital

ADDIS ABABA: The United Nations and rights groups have expressed growing alarm over the plight of Eritrean refugees caught in the conflict in Ethiopia, warning their safety and survival are at great risk. The UN refugee agency UNHCR said late Friday it had received "an overwhelming number of disturbing reports" of refugees being killed or kidnapped and forcibly returned to Eritrea, which borders Ethiopia's battle-scarred Tigray region.

"If confirmed, these actions would constitute a major violation of international law," said Filippo Grandi, the UN High Commissioner for Refugees. Ethiopia has restricted access to Tigray, where aid groups fear a humanitarian disaster is unfolding, and the UN has not been able to reach four refugee camps housing nearly 100,000 Eritreans since fighting began between federal and regional forces on November 4.

"I am strongly urging the government of Ethiopia to continue to uphold their responsibility towards refugees under international law, and to ensure the protection and safety of all refugees in the country," Grandi said. The International Rescue Committee said Friday that one of its staff members was killed last month at a refugee camp for Eritreans in Tigray. The Danish Refugee Council, which also assists the Eritreans, said three of its guards were killed, but did not specify where.

'Harm and hunger'

Humanitarian agencies have warned of drastic supply shortages and appealed for urgent access to assist the Eritreans and an estimated 600,000 others in Tigray who were dependent on food rations before the conflict even began. A government communica-

tions blackout combined with tight restrictions on access to Tigray has made it very difficult for aid agencies to confirm the whereabouts and safety of their staff, as well as the refugees and civilians they support.

Ethiopia said Friday it was returning "misinformed" Eritrean refugees making their way south to Addis Ababa back to the camps in Tigray to receive aid and live "lawfully and peacefully".

"Forcibly sending Eritrean refugees back to camps in Tigray places them at unnecessary risk of harm and hunger," Laetitia Bader, Horn of Africa director for Human Rights Watch, said yesterday.

"Eritrean refugees shouldn't be forced to be in a conflict zone where humanitarian assistance is still restricted and international access to the refugee camps still cut off." The UN migration agency IOM on Friday denied that its buses were used to transport refugees "to an unknown destination" and rejected allegations that Eritreans were being held at one of its transit centers in Addis Ababa and processed for forcible return. The International Organization for Migration said it was "extremely concerned" by reports of Eritreans being relocated against their will and "does not under any circumstances conduct the forced return of migrants and refugees".

Meanwhile, the first international aid convoy arrived yesterday in the capital of Ethiopia's Tigray region since fighting broke out more than a month ago, triggering a refugee crisis and humanitarian disaster. The International Committee of the Red Cross said seven trucks brought medicines and medical equipment for 400 wounded as well as relief supplies to Mekele, a city of half a million which had been all-but cut off to foreign aid since



Trhas Gabrihals, 28, an Ethiopian refugee who fled Ethiopia's Tigray conflict, weeps next to her two children as she could not find her younger brothers after a month of searching, at the entrance of Um Raquba refugee camp in Sudan's eastern Gedaref state, Friday. — AFP

the conflict began on November 4.

"It is the first international aid to arrive in Mekele since fighting erupted in Tigray more than one month ago," the Geneva-based ICRC said, describing health care facilities in the city as "paralyzed".

Patrick Youssef, ICRC regional director for Africa, said the supplies would "reduce those impossible life-or-death triage decisions" for doctors and nurses in

Mekele who had endured for weeks without running water and electricity, let alone essential medicines.

The convoy arrived as the United Nations expressed growing alarm over the plight of nearly 100,000 Eritrean refugees in Tigray and appealed for urgent access to assist them and 600,000 others who were dependent on food rations before the conflict even began. — AFP

Hunger and trauma: Lives of Mozambicans who fled insurgency

METUGE, Mozambique: Sinamangue Tamu is still just a teenager, but now has the responsibility of parenting her three little brothers after they fled a brutal Islamist insurgency in which their northern Mozambican town was seized. They were separated from their father while escaping the port town of Mocimboa da Praia—his whereabouts are still unknown.

"I don't know if he's alive or dead," Tamu said, avoiding eye contact. Their mother had died of an illness. Tamu is sitting on a mat in a camp for internally displaced people on the outskirts of Pemba, the capital of Cabo Delgado province, where the insurgency was launched three years ago.

Her youngest brother is under two years old and always clings to her, whether sitting in her lap or strapped to her back with a capulana—a colorful Mozambique sarong.

Pausing between sentences, Sinamanga told AFP she was worried about her toddler brother.

"He is refusing to eat the food we have here. At the hospital they say he has anaemia. He doesn't eat," she said. The diet of chickpeas and corn flour is monotonous for the around 600 families at this dilapidated former agriculture training college in Metuge, 45

kilometers (28 miles) from Pemba.

They are just a few of the half million people forced from their homes by the vicious jihadist campaign in northern Mozambique, which is estimated to have killed more than 2,400 people.

'We are hungry'

For women and adolescent girls at the camp, life is a daily grind of chores—washing, cooking, caring for children. Men meanwhile gather idly under trees worrying about their future, having left everything behind.

The Islamist insurgency has intensified in recent months, with torched villages and atrocities including beheadings increasing. The painful memories of such atrocities can be seen etched on the faces of many at the camp. Isa Ali, 53, fled when the Islamist militants set fire to his village near Mocimboa da Praia. He hid in the bush until they left, returning to discover that he had lost everything.

He walked until he ended up at the camp. He has no news of his wife and 10 children. Now he says sleeping on the concrete floor is making him sick.

"We are not animals, animals sleep in the sand," he said. "Here we don't eat properly; they give us a bag of 50 kilos (110 pounds) of peas for 30



A fisherman balances a crate of fishes on his head outside on the coast of the Paquitequete district of Pemba where internal displaced people are fleeing from unrest in the northern part of the Cabo Delgado area in Mozambique. — AFP

days... without oil. It's just water and salt and peas."

He is not the only one struggling. "Mr journalist, in this centre we are hungry," said a man who only gave a first name, Ramadan. He warned that it would not be a surprise if people start dying from hunger "because the food is not enough—and the government knows that."

Unacceptable conditions

Bartolomeu Muibo, the former administrator of Quissanga district, is among those displaced and living in the camp after fleeing his home in April. He acknowledged the govern-

ment is struggling to meet everyone's needs. "We have just the basics to survive. But it's not enough. The diet is an important component to ensure health and food security, especially for children," he said.

Charities offering humanitarian aid say they are working hard to ensure supplies reach those in need, but insecurity hampers access to some areas.

"The humanitarian situation here in Cabo Delgado as well as the neighboring provinces of Niassa and Nampula is really challenging at the moment," Sascha Nlabu, the International Organization for Migration's operations chief in Mozambique, said. — AFP

Biden 'attuned to science': Fauci

WASHINGTON: The United States' top infectious disease official Anthony Fauci has said he has always known President-elect Joe Biden as someone "attuned to following science" and expects the incoming administration will be guided by evidence.

The widely respected physician and scientist, who has been named as Biden's chief medical advisor on COVID-19, also praised the work of the Trump administration in delivering on its vaccine promises. Asked by AFP how things might change when Biden takes office on January 20, he said: "I know that they are very closely wedded to following the science."

"That has been something that President-elect Biden has done from when I knew him during the Obama administration, when he was the vice president of the United States. "He is very much attuned to following science and scientific data and scientific evidence. So I would imagine that the plan, as it proceeds with the new administration, would be very much steeped in science."

Praise for vaccine program

President Donald Trump has been panned by the scientific community for his inconsistent messaging on public health measures such as masking and social distancing, and has led several super-spreader events himself. The outgoing leader has also frequently criticized Fauci and publicly toyed with the idea he might fire him.

Fauci, for his part, has remained non-partisan and diplomatic, a skill he has honed serving under six presidents while leading the country's response to every disease outbreak since 1984. The 79-year-old praised "Operation Warp Speed," the more than \$11 billion US program for expedited COVID vaccine and treatment development. "Operation Warp Speed has been very successful," he said, "and I'm



In this file photo, Director of the National Institute of Allergy and Infectious Diseases, Anthony Fauci, speaks during an unscheduled briefing after a Coronavirus Task Force meeting at the White House in Washington, DC. — AFP

certain that we will continue the pathway of Operation Warp Speed.

"I think, in credit to what has gone on in the current administration, I think that is a quite successful endeavor. "I mean, to come up with a vaccine that is ready for distribution in less than a year, from the time the virus was identified is really an unprecedented speed."

The Pfizer-BioNTech vaccine, which has already been green lighted in Britain and several other countries, is expected to receive emergency approval in the United States imminently after an expert committee voted in its favor. A second vaccine, developed by Moderna and the National Institute of Allergies and Infectious Diseases, which Fauci heads, could be approved next week, and the US hopes to use both to immunize 20 million people this month.

Vaccines by other makers could soon follow, including some based on technologies that do not require the extreme cold storage that the two frontrunner messenger RNA vaccines need.

This would make them more suitable for developing countries. — AFP

US Congress passes defense bill despite Trump veto threat

WASHINGTON: The US Senate overwhelmingly passed a sweeping defense budget bill Friday with a veto-proof majority, defying President Donald Trump who has threatened to block the legislation six weeks from leaving office. With both chambers having now passed the measure by sizable majorities, lawmakers from both parties have collectively thrown down the gauntlet before the Republican leader and signaled he would face an override if he moves to veto the bill.

The must-pass \$740.5 billion measure has earned Trump's ire in part because it does not abolish a law granting social media firms liability protection for third-party content on their platforms.

Trump has railed repeatedly against the law, known as Section 230, and says giants like Facebook and Google are biased against him. He has also voiced disapproval of the bill's language calling for renaming US military bases that honor Confederate commanders from the pro-slavery South in the Civil War.

Both chambers cleared the legislation with well beyond the two-thirds "super majority" needed to override a presidential veto: 84 to 13 in the Senate, and a 335-78 vote Tuesday in the House. "This is great news for our troops and the security of our nation," Senate Armed Services Committee chairman James Inhofe said in a statement on the bill's passage.

"I look forward to it becoming law before the end of the year." The measure, formally known as the National Defense Authorization Act, puts Trump in an awkward position on multiple fronts.

It mandates that the US president slap sanctions on Turkey within 30 days for its acquisition of the Russian-made S-400 missile defense system, even as Trump has resisted such punishments against Turkey and its president, Recep Tayyip Erdogan. — AFP

News in brief

French hits €200m jackpot

PARIS: A record jackpot of 200 million euros (\$242 million) was won Friday in France by a ticket holder who has 120 days to claim the prize, the EuroMillions lottery said. The win is the biggest ever scooped by a player of the EuroMillions lottery with the previous record standing at 190 million euros, won a number of times, most recently in October 2019. Friday's staggering prize went up for grabs after the jackpot rolled over twice last week. Players in France have picked up 110 out of 499 EuroMillions jackpots—nearly a quarter—since it began in 2004, followed by Britain which has had 108 winners and Spain with 105. —AFP

NZ reopens border with Cook

WELLINGTON: New Zealand took tentative steps yesterday towards reopening its borders for the first time in the COVID era, but only with the tiny Cook Islands in the South Pacific. The government announcement made no mention of any plans for a broader expansion to take in Australia, which introduced a one-way travel bubble in October allowing quarantine-free travel from New Zealand to Australia but not vice-versa. New Zealand has been widely praised for its strict handling of the coronavirus which has caused just 25 deaths in a population of five million. —AFP

Mexico OKs Pfizer vaccine

MEXICO CITY: Mexico's health regulator on Friday granted emergency authorization to the Pfizer-BioNTech coronavirus vaccine, deputy health minister Hugo Lopez-Gatell said. "Mexico is the fourth country whose health regulatory agency, Cofepris, has granted emergency use authorization to the Pfizer-BioNTech vaccine," he told a news conference. In fact, Britain, Canada, Saudi Arabia and Bahrain have already given the vaccine emergency approval, making Mexico the fifth country to do so. The Mexican government announced this week that it would begin vaccinations against the coronavirus at the end of December, with a first batch of 250,000 doses to immunize 125,000 people, since the vaccine requires two shots. —AFP

Canada to beat 2030 target

OTTAWA: Canadian Prime Minister Justin Trudeau announced Friday an annual hike of his country's carbon tax by Can\$15 (US\$12) per ton after 2022, and billions in new investments to try to beat its climate target. The price on carbon pollution introduced last year is already set to rise incrementally to Can\$50 per ton in 2022. After 2022, Trudeau said, annual increases in the tax under the revised climate plan would jump from Can\$10 to Can\$15. By 2030, the price is to reach Can\$170 per ton—from the current Can\$30 per ton—enough, according to officials, to increase the price of gasoline by nearly 28 cents a liter. —AFP

International

Series of rockets hits Afghanistan capital, killing one, wounding two

Despite peace talks, Taliban attacks surge across Afghanistan

KABUL: A series of rockets struck Kabul yesterday, killing one person and wounding two, officials said, the second such attack to rock the Afghan capital in less than a month. Violence has surged across Afghanistan in recent months, with several deadly attacks carried out in Kabul, despite the Taliban and the government engaging in peace talks since September 12 in Qatar.

"This morning, 10 rockets were fired from the Labe Jar neighborhood of Kabul," interior ministry spokesman Tariq Arian told reporters. He said three rockets landed near Kabul airport and seven in residential areas, leaving one civilian dead and two wounded. No group has claimed responsibility for the attack so far and the Taliban denied any involvement. The barrage of rockets yesterday was the second such attack in less than a month in Kabul. On November 21, eight people were killed and 31 were wounded when 23 rockets hit the capital in an attack claimed by the Islamic State group. IS has also claimed two brutal attacks on educational centers in the capital that killed mostly students, including one on Kabul University during which gunmen sprayed classrooms with bullets.

Authorities blamed the attacks on educational centers on the Haqqani network, an affiliate of the Taliban. Afghan Vice President Amrullah Saleh said on his Facebook page on Saturday that he had

received a warning from IS that it would "transform Kabul into a slaughterhouse for Shiites" if any of the jihadist group's militants arrested by government forces were executed.

In recent months, Saleh and his aides have pushed for public trials of "terrorists" arrested in connection with deadly attacks and for those found guilty to be hanged publicly. IS has regularly claimed attacks targeting the minority Shiite Hazara community in Afghanistan.

Yesterday, in a separate statement, the interior ministry said attacks such as yesterday's were aimed at "soft targets". "The enemies of the people of Afghanistan have intensified the violence," it said.

"But they have failed to capture districts and they have lost in the battlefields, so they have resorted to hitting at soft targets," it said. Violence has surged amid an ongoing withdrawal of US troops as President Donald Trump pushes to end America's longest war. In November, the Pentagon said it would pull 2,000 troops out of Afghanistan, speeding up the timeline established in a February agreement between Washington and the Taliban that envisions a full withdrawal by May 2021. That deal also stipulates that the Taliban will not target key cities in the country, although Afghan authorities have blamed them for such attacks. —AFP



KABUL: Onlookers watch a municipal worker clean and remove debris along a street after multiple rockets were fired in the Afghan capital Kabul yesterday. —AFP

Indian farmers, police in road showdowns

NEW DELHI: Indian police stopped farmers blocking major highways and taking over more roads into the capital yesterday as a two-week campaign against market reform laws intensified. Police deployed in large numbers stopped groups of hundreds of farmers from blocking the main highways from Delhi to the northern cities of Agra—the home of the Taj Mahal—and Jaipur.

Some farmers were detained on the expressway to Agra while other groups took over at least two toll booths and let cars and trucks pass without paying. Thousands of farmers have already blocked two key roads into Delhi and tried to take over more Saturday but were again stopped by police who put up security cordons.

Farmers squatted in the service lane at Ghazipur

on the edge of Delhi chanting slogans against the right wing government. Farmers' leaders and ministers have held several rounds of talks but they have broken down without agreement.

Agriculture unions want three laws which allow farmers to sell their produce on free markets to be repealed and a decades-old guaranteed minimum price system to be maintained.

The government has said it is only ready to make some amendments. Food and Consumer Affairs Minister Piyush Goyal said Friday that the protests had been hijacked by "Maoist elements" but Prime Minister Narendra Modi sought to reassure farmers that the changes would boost their incomes.

"Reforms will help draw investment in the agriculture sector and benefit farmers," he told an industry body yesterday. "The aim of all government reforms is to make farmers prosperous. When farmers prosper, the country will prosper." Economists say reforms are needed in the rural sector which provides jobs for about 70 percent of the 1.3 billion population but only contributes about 15 percent of the \$2.7-trillion economy. Farmers leaders say the reforms will only benefit



AMRITSAR: Students hold placards as they shout slogans in support of farmers during a protest against the recent agricultural reforms in Amritsar yesterday. —AFP

big corporations who will be allowed to buy produce. Their protest has been backed by some Indian diaspora communities in Britain, Canada and other countries who have staged their own protests. —AFP

Why are Indian farmers protesting

NEW DELHI: As an army of resolute Indian farmers keeps up its blockade of New Delhi, Prime Minister Narendra Modi faces potentially the trickiest challenge yet to his authority and reform agenda.

With the protests entering their third week, AFP looks at the background to new farm laws, why they are sparking such opposition and Modi's limited options.

*** What is the state of Indian agriculture? - India's farming sector is vast and troubled. It provides a livelihood to nearly 70 percent of the country's 1.3 billion people and accounts for around 15 percent of the \$2.7-trillion economy.**

The "Green Revolution" of the 1970s turned India from a country facing regular food shortages into one with a surplus—and a major exporter. But for the past few decades, farm incomes have remained largely stagnant and the sector is in sore need of

investment and modernization.

More than 85 percent of farmers have less than two hectares (five acres) of land. Fewer than one in a hundred farmers own over 10 hectares, according to a 2015-16 agriculture ministry survey. India hands out an estimated \$32 billion in subsidies to farmers annually, according to the finance ministry.

***How are farmers coping?**

Water shortages, floods and increasingly erratic weather caused by climate change, as well as debt, have taken a heavy toll on farmers. According to a Punjab government report in 2017, the northern state will use up all its groundwater resources by 2039. More than 300,000 farmers have killed themselves since the 1990s. Nearly 10,300 did so in 2019, according to the latest official figures.

Farmers and their workers are also abandoning agriculture in droves — 2,000 of them every day according to the last census in 2011.

***What did Modi promise?**

Indian governments have long made big promises to farmers—a crucial vote bank—and Modi is no exception, vowing to double their incomes by 2022. In September, parliament passed three laws

that enabled farmers to sell to any buyer they chose, rather than to commission agents at state-controlled markets. These markets were set up in the 1950s to stop the exploitation of farmers and pay a minimum support price (MSP) for certain produce.

The system has led to farmers sometimes growing crops unsuited to the local climate, such as thirsty rice in Punjab, and can be fertile ground for corruption. But many farmers see the MSP as a vital safety net, and fear being unable to compete with large farms and being paid low prices by big corporations.

"The laws will harm the farmers and in turn destroy our livelihood," said Sukhwinder Singh, a farm worker who cycled 400 kilometers (250 miles) to the protests.

"Land, cattle and farmers will be enslaved by rich people. This government wants to finish us," he said.

***What can Modi do?**

Modi has drawn fire before—a disastrous withdrawal of large banknotes in 2016, for example—but his popularity has held up, winning a landslide re-election in 2019. From late 2019, there were months of protests against a citizenship law imposed by Modi's Hindu-nationalist

BJP government that was seen as discriminatory to Muslims.

But the BJP, with its clout in traditional and social media, was able to depict the demonstrators as "anti-nationals" before COVID-19 eventually snuffed out the protests. Modi, 70, has tried to brush off the current agitation as being stoked by an opportunistic opposition "misleading" the farmers.

Some in his party have upped the ante by branding the protesters—many of whom are Sikhs—as "hooligans, Sikh separatists and anti-nationals".

But with the farmers, it is different. They enjoy widespread support among Indians and ignoring them clashes with Modi's self-styled image as a champion of the poor. In rural areas, where 70 percent of Indians live, there is already a growing perception that Modi is cozy with big business and billionaire industrialists such as Mukesh Ambani, Asia's richest person. "There are many things which are outdated in the agriculture sector. But reforms cannot be pushed like this," Arati Jerath, a political analyst, told AFP. "This is so far the biggest challenge to the government. It will have to find a way to walk back and save face at the same time." —AFP

China virus cases on Russia border spark lockdowns, tests

BEIJING: China has put one northern city in lockdown and launched citywide coronavirus testing in another, after two local infections involving workers at a port and trade zone respectively, authorities have said. There was one new case each in Dongning and Suifenhe, which both sit on the country's border with Russia.

In Dongning, a 40-year-old maintenance worker at a port tested positive on Thursday, triggering the latest measures. Officials there said yesterday it would enter "wartime mode"—temporarily suspending public bus services and road transport, while requiring anyone leaving the city to produce a neg-

ative Covid-19 test from the preceding 24 hours.

Schools will suspend classes and dine-in will be banned at restaurants, while in higher-risk areas only one member of each household will be allowed to leave the home once every two days to buy daily necessities—for no longer than two hours each time. In the Suifenhe case, a 39-year-old man who works as a loading and unloading worker at a trade zone tested positive. Both cities on Friday announced the launch of citywide testing, expected to be completed in three days. China—where the virus first surfaced late last year—has largely brought domestic transmission under control but recently reported local outbreaks in several cities.

State media blamed the recent clusters on imports of frozen food and other shipments. After a recent outbreak in Chengdu, officials said the virus was found on food stored in an elderly couple's fridge. There is currently no evidence that people can catch COVID-19 from food or food packaging, according to the World Health Organization. —AFP



BEIJING: China has put one northern city in lockdown and launched citywide coronavirus testing in another, after two local infections involving workers at a port and trade zone respectively, authorities have said. —AFP

Chile awaits total eclipse of the sun as COVID curbs rise

SANTIAGO: Chileans will turn their eyes to the sky tomorrow to admire a total eclipse of the sun, but

unlike last year's phenomenon their numbers will be severely reduced by coronavirus restrictions.

Some 300,000 people turned out in July 2019 in the Atacama desert in Chile's north, home to several observatories. Tomorrow it will be the turn of the Araucania region in the south that is home to the Mapuche indigenous community to observe the eclipse. Their ability to do so will be severely hampered by the latest measures announced on Thursday by the government, restricting the move-

ment of people outside of the Santiago metropolitan area after a spike in positive virus cases.

To observe the phenomenon, when the moon passes between the Earth and the sun, entirely blocking the latter, one needs to be in the exact 90-kilometer long area that will enjoy the full effect. And they will only have two minutes, nine seconds at around 1:00 pm (1600 GMT) to see the eclipse, framed by the backdrop of the Villarrica volcano—one of the most active in the country. —AFP

News in brief

Armenian separatists hurt

YEREVAN, Armenia: Separatist officials in the breakaway region of Nagorno-Karabakh said yesterday that three fighters were wounded in a skirmish with Azerbaijani forces, undermining a recent peace deal brokered by Russia. The defense ministry in the ethnically Armenian province said in a statement that Azerbaijani troops attacked Friday evening and that "three Armenian servicemen were injured during the ensuing gunfire". It added that the fighters were in a stable condition and an investigation into the incident was under way. Six weeks of fighting between separatists backed by Armenia and Azerbaijan over the disputed Nagorno-Karabakh region ended last month after the two sides agreed to a peace deal. —AFP

HK media tycoon appears in court

HONG KONG: Hong Kong media tycoon and Beijing critic Jimmy Lai appeared in court yesterday morning to face a charge under the national security law that could put him in jail for life. He is accused of colluding with foreign countries, by calling on overseas governments to sanction Hong Kong and China in response to the crackdown on pro-democracy activism in the city. Lai, 73, is the most high-profile figure charged under the sweeping law, which has targeted the city's pro-democracy movement but brought a semblance of calm to the finance hub after months of often-violent protests. The police's new national security department charged him Friday with "collusion with a foreign country or with external elements to endanger national security" under the security law. —AFP

South Korea virus cases spike

SEOUL: South Korea yesterday reported its highest daily number of coronavirus cases so far, with a surge centered on the capital region sparking fears the country could lose control of the spread. Officials announced 950 new infections after several days reporting numbers ranging from about 500 to 600. Some 669 were reported in the greater Seoul area on Saturday, according to the Korea Disease Control and Prevention Agency, prompting worries about a major outbreak in the densely populated area-home to half the country's 52 million people. "This is the last hurdle before the roll-out of vaccines and treatments," President Moon Jae-in said in a statement, calling the situation "very grave." —AFP

Peru suspends trials of Chinese vaccine

LIMA: Peru has temporarily suspended clinical trials of a Covid vaccine made by Chinese drug giant Sinopharm after detecting neurological problems in one of its test volunteers. The National Institute of Health said Friday that it had decided to interrupt the trial after a volunteer had difficulty moving their arms, according to local media. "Several days ago we signaled, as we are required, to the regulatory authorities that one of our participants (in trials) presented neurological symptoms which could correspond to a condition called Guillain-Barre syndrome," said chief researcher German Malaga in comments to the press. —AFP

Canada, US border closed until Jan 21

OTTAWA: The longest international border in the world, between Canada and the United States, will remain closed until January 21 due to the COVID-19 pandemic, Prime Minister Justin Trudeau announced Friday. "Canada and the United States agreed today to keep our shared border closed until January 21," Trudeau told a news conference. The border was initially closed in March to slow the spread of the novel coronavirus. The closure has been renewed monthly since then. Only trade in goods and merchandise and essential travel are allowed. A second wave of COVID-19 infections in Canada—with a total of nearly 450,000 cases reported as of Friday—has forced several regions to reintroduce pandemic measures. —AFP

Business

SUNDAY, DECEMBER 13, 2020

Boursa Kuwait reflects on its response to COVID during 'Investing in Kuwait' forum

Company continues to go from strength-to-strength with record-setting revenues

KUWAIT: Boursa Kuwait participated in the 'Investing in Kuwait' virtual forum, the third in a series of digital briefing events held from London Silicon Valley, and online. Jointly presented by Financial Times Live, fDi Intelligence and the Kuwait Direct Investment Promotion Authority (KDIPA), the forum provided an outstanding platform for the discussion of investment opportunities in the country's post-COVID-19 business environment.

Boursa Kuwait's Head of Markets Sector, Noura Al-Abdulkareem, took part in a lively and informative panel discussion titled 'Kuwait's Capital Markets and Economic Development', which also featured fellow industry experts and business leaders.

During the discussion, Al-Abdulkareem shed light on the impact of COVID-19 on the Kuwaiti capital market. She emphasized that Boursa Kuwait had succeeded in remaining operational with minimal impact on trades and transactions, thanks to the swift adoption of effective health and safety protocols that adhered strictly to government guid-

ance. "Throughout the pandemic, Boursa Kuwait and the capital market apparatus have been taking every step necessary to allow our operations to continue normally with no interruption, working closely with our partners across the international investment community to ensure that the key projects we had in the pipeline were completed," Al-Abdulkareem stated.

She added: "During 2020, we oversaw the self-listing of Boursa Kuwait on the exchange and successfully managed the inclusion of seven listed companies into the MSCI Emerging Markets Index." The inclusion of Kuwait in the MSCI Emerging Markets Index generated unprecedented inflows, with the successful inclusion of seven listed companies resulting in more than 961.6m Kuwaiti dinars traded during a single day. The company has also successfully introduced its first offering of real estate investment trusts (REITs).

Boursa Kuwait's position as a regional leader among stock exchanges also continued to be reinforced with the listing of the bourse on the local

stock exchange, continuing a series of firsts for the company. It is the first stock exchange to be at least 90 percent owned by the private sector in the Middle East and the first government entity in Kuwait to successfully undergo privatization.

Al-Abdulkareem commented: "The listing represented a major milestone in our journey that will elevate the country's stature regionally, making it undoubtedly one of the biggest success stories of the last five years for the Kuwaiti financial scene. Despite the challenges of the pandemic, we are attracting more investments and have achieved record-setting revenues and profits. We aim to continue to roll out new products and services to further develop the capital market and attract investors and issuers from all classes."

Boursa Kuwait's participation in the 'Investing in Kuwait' virtual forum comes as part of its ongoing efforts to engage virtually, with key partners across the investment community. Since the beginning of the pandemic, the company has successfully organized a series of virtual roadshows



بورصة الكويت
BOURSA KUWAIT

and corporate days, as well as conducting its Annual General Meeting and Extraordinary General Meetings online.

EU flexes muscle against big tech 'gatekeepers'

BRUSSELS: US tech giants such as Facebook and Google face unprecedented regulation in Europe, as the EU prepares to unveil landmark proposals that could change the face of life online. The EU wants the Digital Services Act and its accompanying Digital Markets Act to set strict conditions for internet giants to do business in the bloc's 27 countries. The biggest tech firms will be designated internet "gatekeepers", subject to specific regulation, in a proposal that will be unveiled by EU vice president Margrethe Vestager and commissioner Thierry Breton on Tuesday.

Google, Facebook, Apple and Amazon and maybe a few others will almost certainly be slapped with the designation, which could be compared to big banks that are deemed "too big to fail" and subject to special oversight. "We've come to a point where the power of digital businesses—especially the biggest gatekeepers—threaten our freedoms, our opportunities, even our democracy," said Vestager.

"So for the world's biggest gatekeepers, things are going to have to change. They are going to have to take more responsibility." The proposals will go through a long and complex ratification process, with the EU's 27 member states, the European



Parliament, and a lobbying frenzy of companies and trade associations, influencing the final law. France and the Netherlands have already come out in favor of Europe having all the tools it needs to rein in the gatekeepers, including the power to break them up.

'Blunt and rigid'

Big Tech, unsurprisingly, is asking for moderation and wants companies to be judged not simply by their size. "What we could end up having would be blunt and rigid rules targeting size instead of problematic conduct," said Kayvan Hazemi-Jebelli, an expert at the Computer and Communications Industry Association, a big tech lobby group. For the past decade the EU has taken the lead worldwide in trying to grapple with the insurmountable power of big tech, slapping billions in antitrust fines against Google, but critics believe the method has done little to change its behavior.

The EU has also ordered Apple to pay billions of euros in back taxes to Ireland,

but that decision was quashed by the EU's highest court. In the meantime, US authorities have taken up the call and are themselves reassessing the role of big tech, with several major antitrust cases putting Google under the gun in addition to a legal bid to strip Facebook of its Instagram and Whatsapp products.

The details of the proposal have been carefully guarded by the European Commission, the EU's executive arm, even though a few details have leaked. What is certain is that gatekeepers will face built-for-purpose dos and don'ts that may include a ban on companies prioritizing their own services on their platforms or chasing away rivals by exploiting data inaccessible to others.

Control their power

The Digital Services Act is expected to give the commission sharper teeth in pursuing social media platforms when they allow illegal content online, with the power to inflict fines, possibly through a newly created EU authority, instead of the voluntary system that exists now. Tech giants will be especially vigilant to maintain their exemption from liability when it comes to illegal content on their platforms, a status they say preserves free speech since it prevents over-enforcement and creates fertile ground for the innovation that triggered the internet revolution.

The proposal may not go as far as reversing that exemption, but it will clearly increase the platform's responsibility by setting out clear rules and incentives for ad transparency and online information. —AFP



Turkmenistan President Gurbanguly Berdimuhamedov and former Japanese Prime Minister Shinzo Abe.

Shinzo Abe gets Turkmen medal for investments

ASHGABAT: Turkmenistan's autocratic leader has awarded Japanese ex-premier Shinzo Abe with a state medal, state media reported yesterday, after Tokyo invested heavily in the gas-rich country to counter China's clout. Abe, who resigned his post earlier this year owing to poor health, was among the more than 20 foreign dignitaries to receive medals from Gurbanguly Berdimuhamedov as Turkmenistan celebrated a quarter-century of neutrality.

Other recipients included UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres, his predecessor Ban Ki-moon and the Russian ambassador to Turkmenistan Alexander Blokhin. There were no Chinese nationals on the medal list. Under Abe, Japanese banks and firms began pouring money into

Turkmenistan, mostly in industrial projects that tapped the desert nation's vast gas reserves.

Experts saw the trend as part of Tokyo's bid to balance China in ex-Soviet Central Asia, which has fallen firmly under Beijing's economic sway during the last decade.

China imports more than 30 billion cubic meters (1.1 trillion cubic feet) of Turkmen natural gas annually via the Central Asia-China Gas Pipeline that was completed in 2009 and saw Beijing displace Moscow as the region's top gas purchaser. Turkmenistan's reserves are the fourth largest in the world but the republic of six million people has struggled to diversify export routes and remains heavily reliant on sales to Beijing. Abe became the first Japanese leader to visit the isolated country in 2015, signing deals with Berdimuhamedov worth more than \$18 billion.

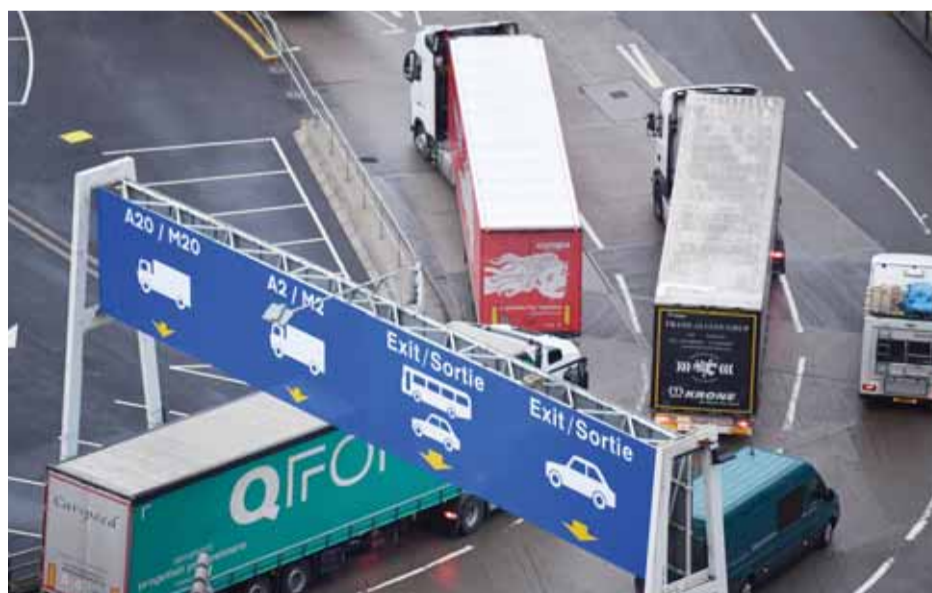
Notable projects completed with finance from Japanese banks since then include a \$1.7 billion gas-to-liquids plant and a \$3.4 billion petrochemical plant. —AFP

UK puts navy on standby to protect fishing if talks fail

LONDON: Britain yesterday readied armed Royal Navy ships to patrol its fishing waters if tempers flare after a "no-deal" Brexit as a make-or-break deadline approached for talks with the European Union. Four 80-metre (260-foot) vessels have been placed on standby to guard British waters from EU trawlers in case the two sides decide to abandon efforts to secure a free-trade agreement today.

The development is part of increased contingency planning on both sides of the Channel, and evokes memories of the "Cod Wars" with Iceland over fishing rights in the North Atlantic in the 1960s and 70s. Prime Minister Boris Johnson has said it is "very, very likely" the talks will fail, and Britain will revert to World Trade Organization (WTO) terms with its largest single trading partner. European leaders have also been told the chances of a deal are slim with both sides at loggerheads over rules to govern fair competition and fishing rights in British territorial waters.

Deal or no deal, Britain will leave the EU single market and customs union on the evening of December 31, more than four years after a landmark referendum on membership of the bloc. Meanwhile, British and EU negotiators began what may prove to be their final hours of trade talks yesterday with



In this file photo, freight lorries leave the port of Dover, Kent on the south coast of England. —AFP

a decision imminent on whether a post-Brexit deal is possible. Both sides have promised a decision today as to whether there is still time to close the gap in expectations before Britain leaves the EU single market at the end of the year.

Prime Minister Boris Johnson's Brexit frontman David Frost and EU chief Ursula von der Leyen's chief negotiator Michel Barnier met in a Brussels conference center from early afternoon. Britain left the European Union on January 31 and the two sides have been wrangling over a trade agreement as the days count down to the end of a post-Brexit transition.

Without a deal, Britain leaves the EU single market and customs union on December 31 and tariffs will be imposed on cross-

Channel trade after a half-century of integration. Johnson flew to Brussels this week for a working supper with von der Leyen but there was no breakthrough, with both sides promising that today would be decision day.

Hardline Brexit-supporting Conservative MPs have sought assurances from Johnson that the navy should be deployed to protect British waters. Lawmaker Daniel Kawczynski said it would help "prevent illegal French fishing" when EU access ends. Former Tory party chairman Chris Patten voiced concerns about a "runaway train of English exceptionalism" after headlines backing the military threat in the Daily Mail—"We'll send in gunboats"—and Daily Express—"Gunships to guard our fish". —AFP

Oracle leaving Silicon Valley for Texas

SAN FRANCISCO: Business computing giant Oracle on Friday said it is leaving Silicon Valley for Texas as it embraces a remote work model made common by the pandemic. "We believe these moves best position Oracle for growth and provide our personnel with more flexibility about where and how they work," Oracle said in response to an AFP inquiry. "Depending on their role, this means that many of our employees can choose their office location as well as continue to work from home part time or all the time."

Oracle is moving its headquarters from Redwood Shores in Northern California to Austin, which has long been attracting tech firms and is home to the South by Southwest Festival which has an "interactive" portion devoted to internet innovations. "Another day, another global giant moving to Texas," the state governor, Greg Abbott, said in a tweet.

"Welcome to the Lone Star State, @OracleHQ!" Oracle has offices in an array of US cities, including Austin. Word of Oracle's move comes as internet firms that have been letting workers do their jobs remotely due to the pandemic embrace the practice, which frees them to hire people who live far from offices and leaves companies less tethered to Silicon Valley campuses.

Colorful entrepreneur Elon Musk this week confirmed his move to Texas. Tesla co-founder and chief executive Musk said left California after a heated squabble earlier this year with local authorities, who ordered one of his auto factories closed to stop the spread of COVID-19. Texas also offers a lower cost of living and no state income tax, both of which may appeal Oracle as well as South Africa-born Musk, 49, who overtook Bill Gates to become the world's second-wealthiest person last month as Tesla stock reached ever-greater heights.

Musk justified the move by saying he needed to be closer to two of his biggest projects: the development of rockets by his company SpaceX in the southern part of the state, and construction of a Tesla automobile plant near state capital Austin. —AFP

Business

Britain vows to stop funding fossil fuel projects abroad

Johnson pledge comes on eve of international climate change summit

LONDON: Britain is to end government funding for fossil fuel projects overseas, Prime Minister Boris Johnson said Friday, on the eve of an international climate change summit. Johnson announced a halt to funding of new crude oil, gas and coal projects before opening the Climate Ambition Summit co-hosted by Britain, the United Nations and France yesterday.

"I'm pleased to say today that the UK will end taxpayer support for fossil fuel projects overseas as soon as possible," Johnson said in a statement released by his office. Britain has been criticized for sending billions of pounds abroad to help extract and refine fossil fuels and build power stations.

It has promised to end this soon, while saying there will be "very limited exceptions".

"Calling time on financing overseas fossil fuel projects really is a welcome move," said the policy director at Greenpeace UK, Doug Parr. Christian Aid's head of campaigns and UK advocacy Pete Moorey said to tackle the climate crisis, 80 percent of known fossil fuels needed to be left in the ground.

"The UK government is right to heed this warning and end support for fossil fuels overseas," he added.

"Developing countries need investment to leapfrog the dirty energy that has led us into this crisis and access the clean renewable that can both accelerate their development and tackle the climate emergency." Downing Street said it intends to implement the policy by November next year, when

Britain will host the UN summit on climate change COP26, in Glasgow.

'Unacceptably high'

Over the last four years, the British government "supported £21 billion (\$28 billion, 23 billion euros) of UK oil and gas exports through trade promotion and export finance", it added. Britain has been criticized by watchdogs and activists including Swedish campaigner Greta Thunberg for financing dirty energy projects abroad.

UK Export Finance (UKEF), a government department, provides British companies with export credit guarantees to help them trade overseas. In 2019, an Environmental Audit Committee (EAC) report concluded that UKEF's support for fossil fuel energy projects was "unacceptably high" in developing countries. It said Britain had supported projects worth £2.6 billion between 2013 and 2018, most in "low and middle-income countries". By contrast, just £104 million went on renewable energy projects, it said, recommending an end of support for new fossil fuel projects by the end of next year.

The prime minister in January announced an immediate end to support of coal mining and coal-powered power stations abroad in developing countries.

Britain is not alone among wealthy nations in backing such projects abroad under the radar.

A study released in January by the market monitor Oil Change International and Friends of the Earth



British Prime Minister Boris Johnson announced a halt to his country's funding of new crude oil, gas and coal projects before opening the Climate Ambition Summit. —AFP

America found that export credit agencies of G20 countries provide more than 10 times as much state-

backed financing to oil, gas and coal projects abroad as they do to renewable energy schemes. —AFP

Markaz participates in 'Kuwait Investment Outreach' webinar

KUWAIT: Kuwait Financial Centre "Markaz" participated in the 'Kuwait Investment Outreach' webinar, themed 'Investing in Kuwait - Capitalizing on Transformation', as a Supporting Partner. The webinar, which was held on 9 December, was organized by the Kuwait Direct Investment Promotion Authority (KDIPA), in collaboration with The Financial Times and FDI Magazine, and is the third in a series of digital dialogues held in London and Silicon Valley. Markaz's support for this webinar is in line with its Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) strategy, and its strong belief in the importance of the role played by the private and public sectors in developing an attractive investment environment that will elevate the performance of the private sector specifically, and the nation's economy as a whole.

M. R. Raghu, Executive Vice President of Published Research at Markaz, took part in a dynamic panel discussion titled 'Kuwait's Capital Markets and Economic Development' that addressed the effect of the pandemic on the Kuwait capital markets, and how the recent developments have impacted investor perception. It also shed light on the sectors that provide the greatest opportunities for investors and possibilities to capitalize on the opportunities of a Kuwait investment.

London Heathrow Terminal 4 to stay shut for most of 2021

LONDON: London's Heathrow airport on Friday said its Terminal 4 will remain closed until the end of next year because of a slump in passenger numbers caused by the coronavirus pandemic. The west London hub said passenger numbers fell by 88 percent last month from November 2019 due to continued travel restrictions and curbs on movement to cut Covid-19 infection rates across England.

Just 747,000 people used the airport in November and cargo volumes were also down year-on-year, it added. "Based on current forecasts and continued decline in passengers, the decision has been taken for Terminal 4 to remain non-operational until the end of 2021," it said in a statement.

During the UK-wide coronavirus lockdown from

Biden's trade chief brings long experience on China

WASHINGTON: President-elect Joe Biden's pick to head US trade policy brings extensive experience in dealing with a key point of tension: China. Attorney Katherine Tai, whom the president-elect announced this week would be his nominee as US Trade Representative (USTR), is also the rare political appointee who has the full-throated backing of business groups, politicians and labor leaders alike.

The decision puts an experienced trade lawyer on the frontline of repairing relations with US trading partners upended by President Donald Trump's aggressive "America first" policy, which included a damaging trade war with China. "I've gotten more calls complimenting me on your appointment than you can imagine," he said at an event Friday unveiling his latest batch of cabinet members.

On taking over from Trump's USTR Robert Lighthizer, Tai would become the first Asian-American, the fourth woman and the first woman of

Kuwait capital markets

From a fund manager perspective, Raghu highlighted the resilience of Kuwait capital markets, as a result of the series of reforms seen over the past few years and the importance of the recent MSCI inclusion, on the back of which great foreign investor interest is seen. Mr. Raghu expressed his hopes in seeing more active inflows, which will in turn further elevate the performance of Kuwait capital market, creating a positive impact on all market participants. From international fund manager perspective, he pointed out that few markets present bargain hunting, and Kuwait is certainly one of them, as it is yet to participate in the global equity rally.

Kuwait economy outlook, COVID19 impact and vaccine

Despite the challenges seen throughout 2020 as a result of the pandemic, and the decline in GDP, Raghu stated that Kuwait is surely in a safe position, and strongly believes that it will be able to maintain its strong credit rating. When looking at the size of Kuwait's sovereign funds, oil revenues and even in light of the current deficit, it will surely survive the downfalls seen in 2020. Raghu also expressed his positive views for the coming year, in light of the potential vaccine and on the back of a resilient 2020.

Sustainability and ESG factors

On the topic of Sustainability and ESG, Raghu highlighted that the development of these factors

March, Heathrow shut Terminal 3 in April and Terminal 4 in May, switching all flights to terminals 2 and 5. The airport, which is seeking cost-savings and has put an investment project on hold, appealed to the government for more support to protect jobs.

It wants a full business rates tax relief for all UK airports, and for plans to end tax-free shopping for international travellers from January 1 to be scrapped. Heathrow chief executive John Holland Kaye called the end to duty-free a "tourist tax", which could be the death knell for struggling businesses in the hospitality reliant on tourism. The scrapping of duty-free shopping would likely see 2,000 jobs lost at Heathrow alone, he said.

"To make 'Global Britain' a reality, the government should be helping the aviation sector to survive, to develop routes to our key trading partners, and attract businesses and tourists to come to Britain to spend their money," he added. Before the global health crisis, Heathrow was the biggest airport in Europe but it has since lost business to other hubs including Paris Charles de Gaulle.

color to serve in the cabinet-level role, continuing Biden's track record of promoting women and minorities to key positions.

Tai, a graduate of Yale and Harvard Law, was previously working as the chief trade lawyer for the House Ways and Means Committee-indicating she is well versed in the challenges of getting legislation through a divided Congress. She also spent seven years in the office of the USTR general counsel under former president Barack Obama, where she handled enforcement of cases filed against China with the World Trade Organization (WTO).

Tai speaks fluent Mandarin and was the first child born in the United States to parents who were born in mainland China.

Broad support

Legislators of both parties, impressed by Tai's work in Congress on the USMCA free trade pact with Canada and Mexico negotiated under Trump, had recommended her for the post, according to US media reports. "It's a testament to Katherine that everyone from business groups to progressive think tanks to the AFL-CIO are applauding her nomination," said Jake Colvin, vice president at the National Foreign Trade Council.

"Katherine is an inspired choice to lead USTR,"

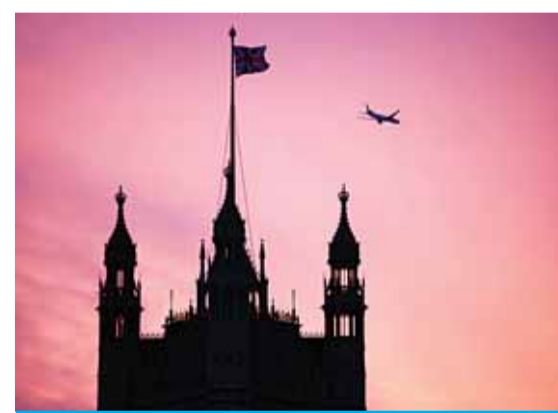
from a global sense has been phenomenal and is confident that they will gain more traction in the near future in Kuwait. Looking at sustainability as a concept, Raghu clarified that Markaz has integrated it within its due diligence process, when researching a company and assessing how sustainable its business model is over the span of three to five years. From an ESG perspective, and especially from an environment, social and governance view, Raghu believes it is beginning to take shape however; he emphasized that in order to see a drastic upturn in these factors, there must be a shift in dominance of the investment scene from retail to institutional investors.



M R Raghu

Talent and human capital

From a talent and human capital perspective, and the importance of attracting local and foreign talent to the private sector, Raghu voiced that it is a key aspect that requires critical human capacity training in order to achieve the transition aspired, when shifting from an oil economy to a non-oil economy. He added that the results aspired will surely be evident on the long term.



LONDON: The sun sets behind the Victoria Tower, part of The Palace of Westminster, as a jet comes in to land at Heathrow in London. —AFP

Heathrow has introduced pre-departure passenger testing with airlines including British Airways, Virgin Atlantic, American Airlines and United Airlines as a way of ending quarantine. —AFP



Attorney Katherine Tai, whom the president-elect announced this week would be his nominee as US Trade Representative (USTR)

he told AFP, echoing similar comments from other supporters. Richard Trumka, head of the AFL-CIO labor federation, call Tai "a worker-champion."

Her selection "is a resounding victory for our families and communities." Tai herself embraced that role, saying Friday she will be "an advocate for American workers." Trade is "not an end in itself, it is a means to create more hope and opportunity for people," she said.

"I look forward to harnessing the power of our trade relationships to help communities lift themselves out of the current crisis." —AFP

Work resumes on controversial Nord Stream 2 pipeline

BERLIN: Construction work resumed Friday on the disputed Nord Stream 2 pipeline which is to bring Russian gas to Germany, the project's managers said, despite protests from the United States.

Work on the 10-billion-euro (\$11 billion) pipeline had been suspended for nearly a year because of US sanctions signed off by US President Donald Trump in late 2019 that threatened asset freezes and visa restrictions for companies involved in the construction. Trump's administration has repeatedly slammed Germany and other European nations for their reliance on energy from Russia, with the president himself calling Europe's biggest economy a "captive to Russia". But on Friday, Germany's Authority of Waterways and Shipping Management published a notice to seafarers on the resumption of building works on the final few kilometres of the pipeline.

It warned them to avoid the area up to "around December 31, 2020", and pointed out that "anchoring or fishing is not permitted in the area of the planned pipelines".

Confirming the resumption of construction, Nord Stream 2 said in a statement that "the pipelay vessel Fortuna will lay a 2.6 kilometer (1.6 mile) section of the pipeline in the German Exclusive Economic Zone in water depths of less than 30 meters (100 feet)."

Besides Russian giant Gazprom, which has a majority stake in the project, the international consortium involved in the pipeline includes European players such as Germany's Wintershall and Uniper groups, the Dutch-British giant Shell, France's Engie and Austria's OMV. News of works resuming sent Gazprom's stocks leaping 3.5 percent on the Moscow stock exchange. German Chancellor Angela Merkel has held firm on the project despite facing heavy criticism within and outside Germany over it. —AFP

S&P downgrade compounds Sri Lanka's debt woes

COLOMBO: S&P Global Ratings downgraded Sri Lanka by one notch Friday as international credit agencies worried over the island's ability to service its foreign debt. The New York-based agency said Sri Lanka's existing funding sources did not appear sufficient to cover its debt servicing needs estimated at just over \$4.0 billion next year. "This means that Sri Lanka may need external commercial funding, which can be difficult and costly," the ratings agency said in its latest report on the island.

"We see increasing indications that funding from multilateral or bilateral partners will not be sufficient to cover external financing needs over the next 12 months." The negative credit report came just two weeks after Fitch cut Sri Lanka's credit score expressing similar fears over Colombo's ability to repay its foreign loans. Two months ago, Moody's had also downgraded Sri Lanka by two notches, saying Colombo would struggle to secure funding. International agencies have also noted that Sri Lanka's economy was already weak when it went into the coronavirus pandemic which had made revenue generation even more challenging.

S&P said Sri Lanka's budget for 2021 envisaging tax cuts for local industries and individuals would only weaken the government's fiscal position. "High fiscal deficits and excessive domestic liquidity will put downward pressure on the exchange rate and worsen the risks associated with the government's already-high debt burden," S&P said.

It expected Sri Lanka's economy to shrink by a record 5.3 percent this year. Sri Lanka's junior finance minister Nivard Cabraal expressed hope that investors would not be "distracted" by rating downgrades. —AFP

Business

Trump signs one-week funding stopgap, averting shutdown

Lawmakers can continue talks over getting pandemic relief to millions

WASHINGTON: The US Senate approved and President Donald Trump signed a one-week budget stopgap Friday that avoids a government shutdown and allows lawmakers to continue negotiations over getting pandemic relief to millions of Americans.

The Senate passed the measure by voice vote days after the House of Representatives approved the so-called continuing resolution, which extends current funding for all federal agencies through December 18. Trump signed it Friday evening, the White House said, hours ahead of a midnight deadline that would have seen funding for federal operations dry up.

The one-week reprieve averts—for now—the stunning prospect of a government shutdown even as the country endures spiking COVID-19 infections and deaths without new economic relief for families and businesses struggling through the pandemic.

Lawmakers now have extra time to craft a rescue package, which many have sought to include in a sweeping omnibus spending bill. But bickering over reaching a deal on pandemic relief and federal funding for fiscal year 2021, which began October 1, is setting up an intense final few days of legislative work before the Christmas holiday.

The temporary fix had faced multiple procedural threats, including from an unlikely duo, conservative Senator Josh Hawley and far-left Senator Bernie Sanders. Both are seeking a new round of rebate

checks sent directly to Americans as part of any pandemic relief package.

Sanders on Friday backed off his threat to delay the stopgap unless it includes rebate checks of \$1,200 per adult and \$500 per child. "I am prepared to withdraw my objection for this moment, but I will not be prepared to withdraw my objection next week," Sanders warned colleagues on the floor.

"We're not going to go home for the Christmas holidays" unless direct payments to households are agreed to, he added. A bipartisan group of lawmakers has been working to finesse a \$908 billion stimulus plan that includes new unemployment aid, help for state and local governments, and limited liability protections for businesses. But party leaders remain at loggerheads over the package, with Senate Majority Leader Mitch McConnell insisting the current package is unworkable because he wants a broader liability shield for businesses vulnerable to coronavirus-linked lawsuits.

Top Senate Democrat Chuck Schumer said it was "mindboggling" for McConnell to make such a demand as millions of Americans face the worst economic downturn in decades and the greatest public health crisis in a century. Meanwhile House Speaker Nancy Pelosi signalled Thursday that she might keep lawmakers in Washington, even beyond Christmas if needed, until a stimulus deal is reached. —AFP



WASHINGTON, DC: Senate Majority Leader Mitch McConnell wears a protective mask while departing the US Capitol Friday in Washington, DC. The Senate passed a one week stop-gap bill on Friday, avoiding a partial government shutdown. —AFP

Virus bites into profits at Europe's top restaurants

MADRID: An elegant Madrid institution known for exquisite soufflé potatoes, Zalacain closed its doors last month, the latest top European restaurant to have its fate sealed by the coronavirus pandemic.

"We did everything we could," said Carmen Gonzalez, manager of Zalacain that opened nearly five decades ago and became the first Spanish restaurant to obtain three Michelin stars in the early 1980s. Other prestigious European eateries are in the same predicament, with the closure in June of two iconic London venues, The Greenhouse and The Ledbury, both of which held two Michelin stars.

"If (the crisis) continues in 2021, it will be very difficult for the sector to survive," warned Mauro Colagreco, the celebrated Argentine chef who runs the three-starred Mirazur in Menton on the French Riviera. Like other French restaurants, Mirazur will not be able to reopen until January 20 at the earliest due to the ongoing virus restrictions.

Running a prestigious restaurant "is often the project of a lifetime," explains Gwendal Poullennec, international director of the Michelin Guide.

He said that only 15 to 20 percent of Europe's top eateries are open, with the rest closed by COVID

restrictions or financial difficulties. For now, the number of permanent closures remains "comparable to previous years", Poullennec said, while noting that European restaurants are dependent on international tourists, leaving them far worse off than those in Asia where "the local clientele carries the restaurant business".

'A huge crisis'

In the kitchens at his two-starred Terraza del Casino restaurant in central Madrid, chef Paco Roncero is preparing a dish of clams with "a hint of coffee". "We are a hugely important sector for the survival of a country which is basically dependent on tourism... if we fall along the way, what will be left?" wondered the 51-year-old chef who has shelved several menus to cut costs after a 70-percent drop in numbers.

Claude Bosi, a French chef who runs the two-starred Bibendum in London that was closed for months, thinks himself lucky his landlord agreed to lower the rent and that the bank helped him out.

Even so, "this year, unfortunately, is lost," he shrugs. "With a bit of luck, we'll start up again and next year will be good."

Like most of her fellow chefs across Europe, Cristina Bowerman of



the Glass Hostaria in Rome, which has one Michelin star, has had to furlough some of her team. "For me, this is a huge crisis. This year, my earnings will be 75 percent lower," says the pink-haired 54-year-old.

Luxury lunch boxes

Like others, she has thrown herself into creating a line of luxury lunch boxes to try and cut her losses, with each costing 90 euros per person—something of a revolution within haute cuisine. In Madrid, Roncero has been doing the same since September and thinks the idea has caught on for good.

But Pepa Munoz, the chef who heads the Spanish federation of chefs and pastry chefs, says it "doesn't solve anything" because since the first lockdown there have been far too many

players in the market.

In the French port of Marseille, some star chefs have even branched out into cordon bleu food trucks, like Alexandre Mazzia, who holds two Michelin stars—an idea that could lure more local customers to his restaurant. For German haute cuisine expert Jorg Zipprick, the pandemic has highlighted the flawed approach of certain top chefs who shrugged off local customers as "not willing to pay enough, deciding instead to gamble on international tourism".

And it has exposed a "bubble" within the sector, "like the one in the property market in 2008", he says. "When you see how the offer (of the gourmet restaurant sector) has grown over the past 15 years, I don't think the number of food connoisseurs has grown quite that much." —AFP



Reining in the tech giants

PARIS: Tech giants have changed our daily lives, but governments around the world are worried that they are getting out of control. Dubbed the GAFAM—Google, Apple, Facebook, Amazon and Microsoft—they are accused of not paying enough taxes, unfair competition, stealing media content and spreading fake news.

As the European Union prepares to present measures to rein them in on December 15, here is a global overview of the attempts to regulate the companies.

Taxation

The 27-nation EU has not yet agreed to tax the digital giants, but some of its member states have forged ahead. France and Italy have imposed a three percent tax on their turnover, while Austria is imposing a five percent tax on their advertising revenues and Spain a three percent charge on some activities. Outside the EU, Britain has imposed a two percent tax on some digital services.

Beyond Europe, in 2016 India imposed a tax on online advertising, while Australia slapped a 10 percent VAT rate on some digital services, such as streaming, downloading games and applications for mobile streaming, e-books and data storage. These moves have fallen foul of the United States, the home of the digital giants. It has threatened tit-for-tat customs duties. Negotiations on a worldwide tax on multinationals led by the Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development broke down in October.

Nobbling competition

The digital giants are regularly criticized for dominating the market by elbowing out rivals. The EU slapped 8.25 billion euros (\$10 billion) in fines on Google between 2017 and 2019 for dominating the market via its Android system, which Google is now challenging in court. Microsoft was fined 561 million euros by the EU in 2013 for imposing its search engine Internet Explorer on users of Windows 7.

Amazon and Apple are also being probed for alleged violations of EU fair competition rules.

But the US is also acting on competition concerns, with US federal and state antitrust enforcers filing suits against Facebook on December 9 seeking to overturn its acquisitions of Instagram and WhatsApp.

In October the Justice Department and 11 states launched proceedings against Google, accusing it of having illegally strengthened its monopoly on online searches and advertising.

Personal data

Tech giants are regularly criticized over how they gather and use people's personal data.

Brussels has led the charge to rein them in with its 2018 General Data Protection Regulation, which has since become an international reference. They must ask for consent when they collect personal information, be transparent about how the data will be used, and allow users to delete the data, with failure to do so punishable by heavy fines. —AFP

Five things to know about the EU tech rule revolution

BRUSSELS: The European Union will unveil major proposals to regulate Big Tech on Tuesday, in what could force a revolution in the way Google and Facebook do business. The rules, packaged in a so-called Digital Services Act, will not only attempt to crack down on disinformation and hate speech, but restrain Silicon Valley's giants from making undisputed claims on new markets.

The proposal marks the start of a long process to legislation, which will include a bruising phase of negotiations with lobbyists, member states and the European Parliament that could take years. Here is a first look at what the EU executive is likely to propose on December 15.

Gatekeepers

If the world's biggest banks are too big to fail, the internet will now have "gatekeepers", digital superstars more powerful than many governments, seen as urgently needing their own rules. The EU believes that Google, Facebook, Apple and Amazon hold all the keys in the online world, with an ability to dictate their own rules and to snuff out potential rivals as soon as they emerge.

To end this, the EU is writing up a set of dos and don'ts specifically for the gatekeepers. This could stop a company like Google "self-preferencing" Google Maps in search results. It could stop Apple from forcing app-makers to use its store for payments, denying the iPhone-maker its huge cut in the proceeds. "For the world's biggest gatekeepers, things are going to have to change. They are going to have to take more responsibility," said the EU's executive vice president Margrethe Vestager.

Stop the hate

From Twitter to TikTok, all the major online actors are signed up to the EU's codes of conduct for hate speech and disinformation, but playing by the rules is voluntary. This would change with the EU's proposal: if the likes of

YouTube or Snapchat are caught allowing terrorist or criminal content to spread, this could be punished with hefty fines levied by a new European agency.

But, in a disappointment to some, the EU will not make platforms fully liable for this illegal content. Brussels fears that big tech would limit free speech to simply stay out of court.

Competition

Big tech moves very quickly, but EU competition enforcement moves very slowly. In a series of cases, it was only after nearly a decade of EU procedures that Google was slapped with billions of euros in fines, long after many of the complainants were crushed by the search engine juggernaut. "There's one thing that competition law cannot do and that is revive the dead," said Olivier Guersent, a senior EU official.

Under the rubric called the Digital Markets Act, the EU is seeking to give Brussels new powers to enforce competition laws more quickly, and also put a stop to buyouts even if the evidence is not yet entirely clear. At the back of everyone's mind are Facebook's "killer app" purchases of WhatsApp and Instagram, small companies that in hindsight could have challenged the social network's supremacy.

No black box

The proposal will also seek to open the black box of how big tech chooses the content it displays and to whom. Big tech's secret sauce for algorithms has become a growing concern, with governments seeing platforms encouraging bias, amplifying sensational or fake news and more generally posing a threat to a stable society. "One of the main goals of the Digital Services Act... will be to protect our democracy, by making sure that platforms are transparent about the way these algorithms work — and make those platforms more accountable for the decisions they make," Vestager said.

Fair shopping

In a direct shot at Amazon, the proposal will also seek to curb how gatekeepers use the business data of companies operating on their platforms. What stops Amazon from proposing its own products when it sees the success of others sold via its website? With privileged insights into transactions and communication,



platforms can use that information to fine-tune their own products, conquering new markets unfairly. —AFP

Cuba to increase minimum salary fivefold from 2021

HAVANA: Cuba will increase its minimum wage fivefold as part of reforms due to come into effect on January 1 as it unifies its two official currencies, the official gazette said on Friday. The large-scale reform of salaries and pensions had been promised for years before President Miguel Diaz-Canel announced it late on Thursday. It will see the minimum wage increase from 400 to 2,100 pesos (\$17 to \$87). The reform will also see the convertible peso, which is pinned to the dollar and was introduced in 1994 to replace the US currency, phased out over the next six months. It will leave only the regular peso that is worth 24 times less. The idea is to make the Cuban economy more efficient and easier to understand for foreign investors.

It comes at a time when the country is reeling from toughened sanctions imposed by the administration of US President Donald Trump and from the drop in tourism and remittances due to the coronavirus pandemic. Inflation is expected to soar so "it's necessary to establish a minimum salary in the country that guarantees the satisfaction of basic necessities for the worker and his family, as well as the scale of salaries applicable to all workers," said the Labor Ministry in a resolution published in the official gazette. —AFP

Classifieds

Sunday, December 13, 2020

Kuwait Times
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 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 to moderate north westerly wind to light variable wind with speed of 08 - 26 km/h .

BY NIGHT: Cold with light variable wind to light to moderate north westerly wind with speed of 08 - 28 km/h and some scattered clouds will appear later on with a chance for light fog forming over some areas.

WEATHER WATCH			Fog	
STATION	MAX. EXP.	MIN. REC.	SFC. CHART 12/12/2020 0000 UTC	
KUWAIT CITY	21 °C	14 °C		
KUWAIT AIRPORT	21 °C	09 °C		
ABDALY	20 °C	08 °C		
BUBYAN	19 °C	12 °C		
JAHRA	21 °C	10 °C		
FAILAKA ISLAND	- °C	- °C		
SALMIYAH	19 °C	16 °C		
AHMADI	- °C	- °C		
NUWAISIB	22 °C	12 °C		
WAFRA	22 °C	07 °C		
SALMY	18 °C	07 °C	<small>MSL Analysis (hPa) Valid 0000 UTC 12 DEC 2020</small>	

4 DAYS FORECAST							
DAY	DATE	WEATHER	Temperatures		Wind Direction	Wind Speed	
			MAX.	MIN.			
Sunday	12/13	Fair	21 °C	09 °C	VRB-NW	08 - 28 km/h	
Monday	12/14	Fair	22 °C	10 °C	VRB	06 - 22 km/h	
Tuesday	12/15	Fair and some scattered clouds will appear later on	21 °C	12 °C	SE	12 - 35 km/h	
Wednesday	12/16	Fair and Partly cloudy with a chance for scattered rain	22 °C	13 °C	SE	15 - 42 km/h	

PRAYER TIMES	
Fajr	05:08
Sunrise	06:33
Zuhr	11:42
Asr	14:32
Sunset	16:51
Isha	18:13

RECORDED YESTERDAY AT KUWAIT AIRPORT	
MAX. Temp.	21 °C
MIN. Temp.	11 °C
MAX. RH	97 %
MIN. RH	39 %
MAX. Wind	W 21 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

NOTICE
 December 10, 2020

Mr. Suneesh Varghese, son of Mr. Varghese Veliyil Mathew, resident of Veliyil House, Kantharuthy, Thevara PO, Ernakulam, Kerala 682013 and Ms. Elizabeth Jeena Puthukkattu John, daughter of Mr. John, resident of Puthukkattu House, Kadakkarpally PO, Cherthala, Near Thanky Church, Alappuzha, Kerala 688529 both Indian nationals presently residing in Kuwait, have given notice of intended marriage between them under the Foreign Marriage Act, 1969. If anyone has any objection to the proposed marriage, he/she may file the same with the undersigned according to the procedure laid down under the Act/Rule within thirty days from the date of publication of this notice. Communications in this regard can be made by Email (cw2.kuwait@mea.gov.in) / letters / telephonic calls (00965-22550171, 00965-22533125).

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

SHARING ACCOMMODATION

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

Automated enquiry about the Civil ID card is 1889988

EMERGENCY 112

For labor-related inquiries and complaints: Call MSALHOTLINE 128

Word Search

Banking Terms

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

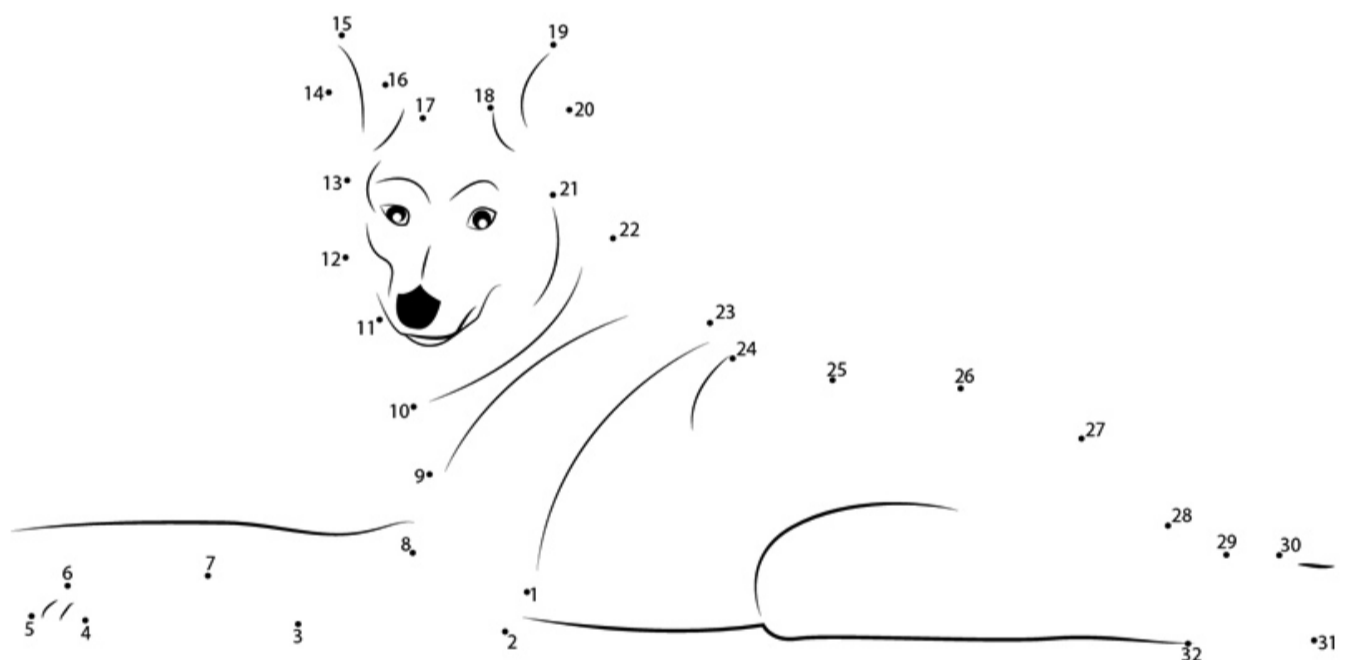
C Z Y V W I T H D R A W O N E J I B
 U I S M X N R X T E I K A M C E N P
 R B M T H E B S A I C Y D P N A V Y R
 R R O A D L U E T E S N N I A R E T Y
 E I N N T Q D E U A U O U J L S S L M
 N M E O J W G F N F P A P O A N T A D
 C L Y V Z Y E E L U V O S E B E M N J
 Y L O A N S T A T E M E N T D R E E Y
 S O R K X T U D R A C T I B E D N P R
 G W D G O T G E Z R I A P C I K T I U
 N O E W U O D Z T D C G O V A C S D S
 I V R M R E B M U N G N I T U O R D A
 V E M R X N G K S M C D R L J E M P E
 A R T M V D C T C I V O I F X C C P R
 S D Q B Y O O E L E Y I N T E R E S T
 C R N A P R L E Y A H D C Q P E U V L
 W A J N D S X X P A C C O U N T Y Y V
 V F P K U E P R I N C I P A L Q J A X
 H T M D R A C T I D E R C F C K W S P



- ENDORSE
- FEES
- INTEREST
- INVESTMENT
- LENDER
- LOAN
- MONEY ORDER
- MUTUAL FUND
- OVERDRAFT
- PAYEE
- PAYOR
- PENALTY
- PRINCIPAL
- RECONCILE
- ROUTING NUMBER
- SAVINGS
- STATEMENT
- TREASURY
- WITHDRAW

- ACCOUNT
- ATM
- BALANCE
- BANK
- BOUNCED
- BUDGET
- CHECKBOOK
- CREDIT CARD
- CURRENCY
- DEBIT CARD
- DEPOSIT
- DIVIDEND

Join the Dots



STAR TRACK

Aries (March 21-April 19)
 There are a couple important issues that you may need to resolve, Aries. Take an active role in the department of love and romance. Feel free to be aggressive about having your needs met. Make sure you're comfortable with the situation or else stand up and change it. For you, the day is all about taking action. Strive to create peace through honest assertiveness.

Cancer (June 21-July 22)
 Things should go well for you today, Cancer. Your romantic nature is piqued. You will find that an aggressive approach toward your loved one is just what's needed to jump-start the relationship. If you're single and looking for love, this is a good day to make first contact with a crush. Neaten up your appearance and wear a snazzy outfit, regardless of the situation.

Libra (September 23-October 22)
 You may be tempted to shift into high gear today, Libra, but you're likely to be unsure where to focus your energy. You may be revved up and anxious to get moving but feel lazy and unmotivated to do anything but sit back and wait for the excitement to come to you. Whatever you do, don't retreat into a hole. Dress up and show off your outer as well as inner beauty.

Capricorn (December 22-January 19)
 The prevailing tone today is a mix of conflicting energies that might put some stress on your heart. It's nothing you can't handle, Capricorn. In fact, if anyone can make the most out of today, you can. Tap into your aggressiveness and act boldly toward the object of your desire. Make sure there is harmony among those around you and everyone's needs are taken care of.

Taurus (April 20-May 20)
 You should enjoy a good mood today, Taurus, and you will find that things will go well for you in general. Perhaps the only sticky situation that could arise is one that stems from an aggressive approach in the department of love and romance. This impatient urge or petty argument by one or both parties may result in an all-out war. Try to maintain a level head in all situations.

Leo (July 23-August 22)
 Stand up and take action, Leo. Forces may be pulling on you from all angles, and your challenge will be to maintain a healthy balance among all of them. You have a chance to accomplish a great deal by directing your energies outward instead of inward. Other people may be punchy. Counteract this by being patient. Your contribution to the group will be appreciated.

Scorpio (October 23-November 21)
 There's apt to be tension between your heart and your general mood, Scorpio. Your romantic nature will incline you to adopt a selfish, impatient attitude, while the prevailing tone of the day calls for peace and balance. Try to maintain an equal amount of give and take. There's enough love to go around. Don't feel like you need to be possessive in order to maintain others' loyalty.

Aquarius (January 20-February 18)
 The key today is action, Aquarius. There's a great deal of force pressuring you to get the ball rolling. One of these forces may come from a romantic interest waiting for you to make the next move. You may have many projects on the table and be unsure where to focus your energy. Don't feel like you need to concentrate on any one thing. They key is to maintain balance among all.

Gemini (May 21-June 20)
 Circumstances of the day may result in some tricky situations for you, Gemini. You could be caught between a rock and a hard place. The instinct to make war or peace with any given issue is making you restless. On the one hand, you may want to smooth things out in a reasonable manner. On the other, there is a part of you that is eager to declare all-out nuclear warfare.

Virgo (August 23-September 22)
 You will find that you relate very well to others today, Virgo, and your communication will prove to be quite valuable. You may find yourself in the position of arbiter simply because you have the detached mind that people need to resolve disputes. Take an active role in the lives of those around you and see how your own life benefits from the generosity of your actions.

Sagittarius (November 22-December 21)
 Adjustments may be in order for you to flow easily with the energy of the day, Sagittarius. The prevailing tone calls for a more outwardly directed solution to all situations. You will discover that it's easy to start up new projects today, especially those involving creative or romantic elements. The tricky part will be follow-through. This is your specialty, so don't worry about it. You've got that part covered.

Pisces (February 19-March 20)
 Ignite the fire in your heart, Pisces, and make it burn more brightly than before. Keep in mind that you may need to make compromises in order to be on the same page with your lover in the way you relate emotionally. Make sure everyone gets a chance to be on center stage. Don't hog the podium. Maintain a working balance by letting others have their turn in the spotlight.

Lifestyle | Features



Spanish flamenco dancer Joaquin Cortes (left) looks at dancers during the rehearsal of his show 'Esencia' in Madrid. — AFP photos



Dancers perform during the rehearsal of his show 'Esencia' in Madrid.



Spanish flamenco dancer Joaquin Cortes (left) talks to a dancer during the rehearsal of his show.



Spanish flamenco dancer Joaquin Cortes (right) takes part in the rehearsal of his show 'Esencia' in Madrid.

FLAMENCO ARTIST'S SHOW 'A BALM' FOR PANDEMIC-WEARY SOULS

Music and dance as a healing balm for pandemic-weary souls is what Spain's Joaquin Cortes had in mind for his new show that opens this Christmas ahead of a global tour. After a year away from the stage, the legendary flamenco artist who has been dancing for nearly four decades, returns to the spotlight on December 23 when his new show debuts at Madrid's WiZink auditorium.

"Culture is both necessary and vital for everyone, and dance and music are medicine for the soul," he told AFP between rehearsals in the Spanish capital. Acutely aware of the damage caused to the arts by the pandemic which has cancelled countless shows, tours and

concerts, Cortes wants his new act to encourage people back into theatres. The idea is to show that "it's safe, that people have to get out and watch shows," said the 51-year-old who was born into a gypsy family in the southern city of Cordoba.

"Just like when you go to the supermarket or in the metro and nothing happens, it's a lot safer," he said, referring to restrictions on numbers in theatres and the mandatory use of masks. "We have to move forward, life goes on," said this UNESCO goodwill ambassador who was nominated for his support for and defense of Roma culture. Entitled "Esencia" ("Essence"), the new show

fuses flamenco with jazz dance and salsa, with music composed by Cortes and well-known flamenco musicians the Carbonell brothers.

'My fantasy world'

The idea was to fuse "everything I've learned and experienced through my global travels" over a decades-long career that began when he was admitted to Spain's National Ballet at the age of 14. "It's the maturing of an artist... your own fragrance, your own essence, your life, your way of expressing the many things you've absorbed that comes out in your dance and the way you express yourself as choreographer, as creator,"

said Cortes, known for fusing flamenco with classical and contemporary dance.

The plan is to take the show around the world starting in March or April, although he admits much will depend on the rollout of anti-Covid vaccines. Produced entirely on his own without any third-party backing, "Esencia" will see him performing alongside artists like flamenco singer Estrella Morente. "For me returning to the stage is very important, I cut my teeth on a stage. The stage is my bedroom, it's my fantasy world," he says. "I'm looking forward to getting back because for me, it's essential." — AFP

Barbara Windsor, UK star of 'Carry On' films, dies at 83

Actress Barbara Windsor, best known as the buxom, blonde-haired star of Britain's hit "Carry On" film franchise, has died at the age of 83, her husband said Friday. Windsor made nine appearances in the innuendo-laden comedy films, and later became a mainstay as pub landlady Peggy Mitchell in the popular television soap opera "EastEnders". She was diagnosed with Alzheimer's in 2014 and campaigned for better care for those suffering with dementia and associated diseases.

Her husband, Scott Mitchell, who was at her side in the London care home when she died, said Windsor's "final weeks were typical of how she lived her life". He added she was "full of humor, drama and a fighting spirit until the end". Mitchell said he, her family and friends would remember her with "love, a smile and affection for the many years of her love, fun, friendship and brightness she brought to all our lives and the entertainment she gave to so many thousands of others during her career".

Prime Minister Boris Johnson, who met Windsor at Downing Street last year to highlight concerns over dementia care and once had a cameo with her in "EastEnders", led the tributes. "So sad about Barbara Windsor, so much more than a great pub landlady & Carry On star," he tweeted. "She campaigned for the lonely and the vulnerable and cheered the world up with her own British brand of harmless sauciness & innocent scandal." Windsor-often known as "Babs"-was made a dame by Queen Elizabeth II in 2016 for her work with charities supporting the elderly and veterans, and her services to entertainment.

Born in the east London area of Shoreditch, the actress changed her



British actress Barbara Windsor

name from Barbara Deeks in 1953, taking inspiration from the queen's coronation in the same year. She made her debut in London's West End at the age of 13 but it was the "Carry On" films, which ran from the 1950s to 1970s, that made her name and turned her into a very British sex symbol. The "Carry On" humor mined a particular British tradition of saucy seaside postcards, and was rich with innuendo, double entendres and high camp.

Windsor, who never modified her Cockney accent, recalled it was a single scene in "Carry On Camping" (1969) when her bikini top flew off during an exercise scene that made her famous. But she was also a tabloid favorite, not least because of her colorful love life, which included affairs with "Carry On" co-star Sid James and marriage to Ronnie Knight. Knight, whom she later divorced after he fled to Spain while wanted in connection with a security van robbery, was an associate of notorious gangland figures Ronnie and Reggie Kray. She married Mitchell in 2009. — AFP

Chadwick role in 'Black Panther' will not be recast for sequel

There will be only one T'Challa: Disney paid tribute to the late Chadwick Boseman Thursday by announcing that his pioneering role in "Black Panther" will not be recast in the sequel, as the company set out details of its upcoming Marvel superhero films and series. Boseman died in August after a four-year battle with colon cancer, having never publicly discussed his condition, throwing the follow-up to one of the record-breaking Marvel films' most acclaimed movies into doubt.

"His portrayal of T'Challa the Black Panther is iconic and transcends any iteration of the character in any other medium from Marvel's past and it's for that reason that we will not recast the character," Marvel Studios president Kevin Feige told Disney's investor day. "His portrayal of T'Challa the Black Panther is iconic and transcends any iteration of the character in any other medium from Marvel's past and it's for that reason that we will not recast the character," Marvel Studios president Kevin Feige told Disney's investor day. "His portrayal of T'Challa the Black Panther is iconic and transcends any iteration of the character in any other medium from Marvel's past and it's for that reason that we will not recast the character," Marvel Studios president Kevin Feige told Disney's investor day.

"To honor the legacy that Chad helped us build through his portrayal of the king of Wakanda, we want to continue to explore the world of Wakanda," with returning director Ryan Coogler "hard at work on the sequel now," added Feige. The original "Black Panther," set in the fictional African kingdom of Wakanda, was adored by critics and audiences, becoming the first comic book film to be nominated for best picture at the Oscars and grossing over \$1 billion worldwide.

The sequel is due in theaters in July 2022. In a packed presentation covering more than 20 upcoming Marvel films and series, Feige announced that a new "Fantastic Four" movie will be directed by Jon Watts, who helped to reinvigorate the "Spider Man" films. Disney acquired the movie rights to the "Fantastic Four" characters with its recent takeover of the rival Fox film studio, which had produced a 2015 flop based on the comic books.

Big screen return

Among other Marvel film announcements, Christian Bale joins "Thor: Love and Thunder" as the sequel's villain, with filming due to start next month. Samuel L Jackson reprises his role in the franchise for "Secret Invasion" on the Disney+ streaming service, which Feige hyped as "arguably the biggest crossover comic event in the last 20 years."

With Robert Downey Jr's popular Iron Man character having seemingly departed the Marvel films, "If Beale Street Could Talk" actress Dominique Thorne will star in new series "Ironheart" about a female genius inventor with an advanced suit of armor. Marvel films veteran Don Cheadle will reprise his role for "Armor Wars," also a Disney+ series. Amid fears Disney could emulate rival Warner Bros in sending next year's blockbusters straight to streaming, Feige confirmed the long-delayed "Black Widow" superhero movie starring Scarlett Johansson will "return to the big screen" in May.

At the start of Disney's investor day Kareem Daniel, head of the company's distribution unit, previewed plans to "release roughly 10 Marvel series, 10 'Star Wars' series" as well as 15 Disney series and 15 Disney films on Disney+ "over the next few years." Disney also set out plans for a Pixar "origin story" for popular "Toy Story" character Buzz Lightyear, and a new "Sister Act" sequel with Whoopi Goldberg returning. A new series based on the "Alien" films but set on Earth will be overseen by Noah Hawley (" Fargo") along with original director Ridley Scott, while "Hamilton" creator Lin-Manuel Miranda will pen songs for "Encanto," Disney's 60th animated film set in a Colombian world of magic realism. — AFP

RAPPER LIL WAYNE PLEADS GUILTY TO FIREARMS CHARGES

US rapper Lil Wayne pleaded guilty Friday to possession of a firearm by a convicted felon over an incident dating back to last year, US media reported - a federal offense that could see him sentenced to up to 10 years in prison. The 38-year-old artist, whose real name is Dwayne Michael Carter Jr, was found to be carrying a gun and bullets when police searched a private plane in Miami in December last year. "Your honor, I plead guilty," he reportedly told US District Judge Kathleen Williams during a virtual hearing. The Miami Herald said that Lil Wayne - who has a home in south Florida - admitted the gold-plated pistol found in his luggage was his. He told police the weapon had been given to him as a Father's Day gift.



Lil Wayne

Police also found what was believed to be cocaine, marijuana, ecstasy, heroin, painkillers and more than \$25,000 in cash, the newspaper said. But the sole federal weapons charge filed in federal court in Miami stems from the fact that Lil Wayne was convicted more than a decade ago on a separate firearms charge. Convicted felons are barred from owning firearms under federal law. The five-time Grammy winner - who more recently made headlines for meeting with and voicing support for President Donald Trump - will face sentencing on January 28. — AFP

PRAISE, CRITICISM; SOUTH KOREANS REACT TO DEATH OF DIRECTOR KIM KI-DUK

There were mixed reactions yesterday in South Korea to the death of acclaimed director Kim Ki-duk, whose cinematic legacy was tarnished by allegations of sexual assault. Kim, who won global fame with his bold portrayal of extreme violence and human brutality, died nine days shy of his 60th birthday in Latvia on Friday.



In this file photo, South Korean director Kim Ki-Duk poses with the Golden Lion for Best Film during a press conference in Seoul after he won the best film award at the Venice film festival with 'Pieta'. — AFP

He faced a number of sexual assault and abuse allegations from actresses who worked in his films as well as other staffers in recent years, all of which he denied. "Spring, Summer, Fall, Winter... and Spring" directed by Kim is a masterpiece. I wish him peace in heaven," wrote one user on Naver, South Korea's biggest web portal. "I have watched many of his films. May he rest in peace," said another user. But many on social media criticized the controversial director, pointing to the abuse allegations against him.

"A big loss and grief for Korean cinema," read the headline of the report on Kim's death in South Korean daily The Financial News. Some responded to the piece saying such praise was not deserved. "Kim does not and should not represent the Korean cinema," read one comment. "Directors who respect actors on the set and entertain the audience in theatres are those who represent the industry, not Kim." Another user said: "I hope the victims of Kim's abuses overcome their struggles and live a happy life."

Coverage of his death in other South Korean media reflected the conflicting views on the director. "Kim Ki-duk: Golden Lion winner, alleged abuser and died of the coronavirus... a life filled with ups and downs," read a headline by News 1, a local news agency, referring to the top prize at the Venice Film Festival. — AFP

Lifestyle | Features



Stand-up comedian Qiqi performs at a shopping mall in Beijing. — AFP photos



Stand-up comedian Qiqi



Stand-up comedian Qiqi sets off on her e-bike to a second show after performing at a theatre in Beijing.

China's trailblazing female comedians tackle taboos

Strutting onstage with well-honed confidence, 23-year-old comedian Qiqi is part of a new wave of young, female stand-up acts in China, crashing into what has always previously been a man's world. Her jokes were met with roars of laughter from the well-heeled young professionals watching in a packed Beijing theatre.

"I've always liked making people laugh ever since I was small, it gives me a sense of accomplishment," Qiqi told AFP, using her stage name. She is among those benefiting from a surge of interest in stand-up in China, thanks to a wildly popular new web series called "Rock & Roast". It racked up hundreds of millions of views this summer, and made viral sensations of several of its female stand-ups-their refreshingly outspoken anecdotes about awkward romantic encounters, body image and annoying male traits clearly striking a chord with audiences.

Millennial gripes

"My boss can't even properly describe the tasks he wants me to do," Qiqi, sporting dyed strawberry blonde pigtails and dangling cherry earrings, riffed to knowing chuckles from the crowd. "He said, 'Hey, can you arrange a meeting with so-and-so?' The person, time and place are all missing. It's like he expects us to have some kind of telepathic connection!"

Qiqi's full-time job is at an internet media company, and her sets often draw upon her daily life and common millennial complaints. She first dabbled in open mic performances three years ago, when stand-up was making its first inroads in China-shows where she says she "had no idea what she was doing". But the self-deprecation in her act is something fans are drawn to. "One of the biggest characteristics of female comedians is that they dare to laugh at themselves," said one audience mem-

ber after a recent performance. And Qiqi is steadily gaining fans, earning up to 9,000 yuan (\$1,400) a month from shows.

'Men swearing is normal'

"When I first arrived in Beijing after graduation, I realised Beijing has inherited an age-old traditional northern Chinese culture-swearing," ran another of Qiqi's jokes, playing on a trope well-known to her audience-the renowned surliness of the locals. Recalling her dealings with a foul-mouthed woman who runs a restaurant near her, she gleefully recounted profanity after profanity. Qiqi says she was once called "vulgar and cheap" for swearing by an online viewer, and argues that women are subjected to more scrutiny than their male counterparts. She shies away, though, from being labeled a "feminist"-seen as an inherently political term in China. Yang Mei, another Beijing-based

comedian, agrees that audiences "don't like female comedians swearing but see men swearing as normal, maybe because they think women are supposed to be more obedient."

Battle of the sexes

Yang, 27, left her film industry job last year to perform full-time. "I'm wearing a new jumper I bought for the occasion, just in case there are any hot guys in the audience," she quipped in one of her shows. "I just had a look around at the male audience members-I think I can probably take it off now."

She says web-streamed shows like "Rock & Roast" have brought the industry "forward by at least five to ten years". However, the increased exposure has also left contestants open to online criticism and abuse. One of the most prominent "Rock & Roast" contestants, Yang Li, gained legions of fans for a much-shared joke asking why men "look so

mediocre, but still have so much self-confidence?" But it prompted an angry backlash online, with a prominent Beijing law professor calling Yang and her fans "pampered little princesses".

And Yang Mei says she avoids jokes about controversial topics, because people would see it "as if their little sister or nursery school teacher suddenly decided to talk about sex". Yang and Qiqi both say overall, shows like "Rock & Roast" have encouraged women to try performing, and boosted their visibility. "I think women are natural performers, because we've been considerate of men's thoughts and feelings since we were little, but suppress our own," said Yang. "But nowadays, there are more and more channels for women to express themselves-including stand-up comedy." — AFP



Children feed donkeys in a yard at a dairy farm in the village of Paper. — AFP photos



Donkeys eat in a yard at a dairy farm in the village of Paper.

Udderly healthy: Donkey milk a hit in Albania

On a small farm south of Tirana, donkeys happily munch on hay while customers flock to scoop up bottles of their milk, a niche product winning fans who believe in its health benefits. Touted as rich in vitamins and a boost for the immune system, the high-priced milk has been flying off the shelf during the coronavirus pandemic-a time when many in Albania are looking for an extra health kick. "The demand for donkey milk is rising sharply" alongside virus infections, says 37-year-old Elton Kikia, the manager of the small farm in the village of Paper, where around a dozen of the small, knobby-kneed animals romp around a green pasture.

The high demand is good news for the donkeys themselves, whose comfortable lifestyle on the farm is a welcome respite from their traditional roles as beasts of burden. Typically enlisted to carry heavy loads and pull carts through Albania's mountainous terrain, donkeys are frequently subject to mistreatment, in the form of beatings, overwork or saddle sores. "Yet it is a very delicate animal, which to produce its milk needs tenderness and love," says Kikia.

Two years ago he left his job as a journalist to take over the family farm, which is only one of two in the country to raise donkeys for their milk. At 50 euros a litre, the price of their milk is exorbitant in a country where the average wage barely reaches 400 euros a month. But fears around Covid-19 have set off a flurry of interest. While no one is branding the milk as a cure for the virus, aficionados are convinced its nutritional profile-which is close to human milk-helps strengthen the body's natural defenses.

Klea Ymeri, a student in agro-environmental engineering, recently travelled to Paper to buy two 250 millilitre bottles to help her parents recover from COVID-19. "On top of the medicines they are taking, donkey's milk could be a good natural

remedy for the respiratory system", she told AFP. The family also uses some of the milk to make soaps, masks and other beauty products. Regina Beqiri, a relative and pharmacist who concocts the mixtures, says sales are up at a time when virus restrictions mean "people are spending more time at home and can take better care of their skin".

Two-way therapy

The farm currently has four pregnant donkeys and four milk-producing mothers, each with a calf. With a maximum production of three liters a day, "we can't meet the demand", Kikia told AFP, saying he plans to expand his herd to 100 donkeys. But that is no easy task in Albania, where the donkey population is on the decline. Waves of emigration from villages to cities, plus with the use of machines in agriculture, has shrunk the number of donkeys and breeders across the Balkan state. Milk production is thus also a way of "protecting" the species, according to the farmers, whose animals still bear the scars of their difficult past lives. "They are cared for and rehabilitated, including psychologically," says Riza Kikia, 71, Elton's father.

Geni, for example, is a white female donkey who arrived with a wounded ear and a scar-streaked back. "She was weak, sad, she didn't want to stay with the others. Now she plays, she eats well and she makes good milk", said Kikia. The donkeys are also a draw for local children from the village who come to take rides, feed and pet the animals. "This bond between the donkeys and the children is a therapy in itself," Kikia explained. "It is a psychological remedy that has magical effects, both on the behavior of the children and on that of the animals." — AFP



Donkeys stand in a yard at a dairy farm in the village of Paper.

New 'Star Wars' film 'Rogue Squadron' due in 2023

Disney announced a new "Star Wars" film from the director of "Wonder Woman" and several new TV series within the sci-fi franchise, including two spin-offs from the creators of smash hit "The Mandalorian." Patty Jenkins will direct "Rogue Squadron," which is set in "a future era of the galaxy" and will be the next "Star Wars" movie released, scheduled for Christmas 2023. "This story will introduce a new generation of starfighter pilots, as they earn their wings and risk their lives in a boundary-pushing, high-speed thrill ride," Lucasfilm president Kathleen Kennedy told Disney's investor day.

Jenkins immediately posted on Twitter a video of herself donning a "Star Wars" starfighter helmet and marching toward

an X-wing, adding she had been inspired to take on the film by her air force pilot father. "So when he lost his life in service to this country, it ignited a desire in me to turn all of that tragedy and thrill into one day making the greatest fighter pilot movie of all time," she said. Jenkins will be the first woman to direct a "Star Wars" feature film.

Kennedy also announced "Rangers of the New Republic" and "Ahsoka," series for the Disney+ streaming platform that will be developed by Jon Favreau and Dave Filoni, set simultaneously and sharing storylines with their "Mandalorian" show that launched the enormously popular Baby Yoda character. "These interconnected shows, along with future stories, will excite new audiences, embrace our most passionate fans and will culminate in a climactic story event," said Kennedy. Another new series will be "Lando," based on fan favorite Lando Calrissian from the original "Star Wars" film trilogy. It will be helmed by "Dear White People" creator Justin Simien. — AFP

Disney+ streaming tops 86 million subscribers

Walt Disney chief executive Bob Chapek told investors that the company's year-old streaming TV service Disney+ had passed 86.8 million subscribers, beating its "wildest expectations." The entertainment giant is prioritizing exclusive programming, original shows and movies, and bundled streaming services to build on the momentum of its various offerings which extend beyond Disney+ to include ESPN, Hulu and Star, executives said during an investor day.

"We knew this one-of-a-kind service featuring content only Disney can create would resonate with consumers and stand out in the marketplace," Chapek said of Disney+. "This success has bolstered our confidence in our continued acceleration towards a direct-to-consumer first business model." Disney+ competes with streaming television titans Netflix and Amazon Prime in a crowded market for online entertainment. The streaming service, which will raise its US price by a dollar to \$7.99, "has exceeded our wildest expectations with 86.8 million subscribers as of December 2nd," Chapek said.

In a recent corporate reorganization, Disney split distribution from content creation in an effort to be more nimble in its delivery of shows to viewers, according to executives. Data gathered by Disney+ on audience preferences is shared with creative teams to tailor shows to viewers' tastes, the company said. "This is especially important now given consumers' rapidly changing consumption behaviors and the prolonged uncertainty due to the pandemic," Chapek said. Given the pandemic, Disney has planned film premiers on its streaming service and when feasible also at traditional theaters.

Positioning for 'future growth'

Regardless of where Disney content premiers, it will end up on Disney+ according to media and entertainment division chief Kareem Daniel. "While this has been a very tough year for all of us here at Disney, we continue to take deliberate and innovative steps in running our businesses to best position them for future growth," Chapek said. The company has an array of Marvel, Star Wars and Disney shows lined up for release on its streaming service over the next few years, according to Daniel.

Disney will expand its television streaming services in 2021 to more markets, including Hong Kong, South Korea and Eastern Europe, according to head of international operations Rebecca Campbell. Disney will also beef up its streaming service in India, where it has a partnership with Hotstar. — AFP

Photo of the Day



Johnny Collinson prepare to ski in Alaska. — Photo taken from www.redbullcontentpool.com

Football racism 'no black and white' issue in central Europe

Battlelines are being drawn in Romania

BUCHAREST: As the dust still rises on football's night of racist accusations in Paris, the battlelines are being drawn in Romania, home of the fourth official whose use of the word "negru" prompted a player walk-off during Basaksehir's Champions League match against Paris Saint-Germain.

While some believe that Sebastian Coltescu and the comments he made were the product of linguistic misunderstanding, others feel that it is simply emblematic of a society riddled with racism and homophobia. This is what happened. In the 14th minute of Tuesday's game, a touchline argument broke out over accusations that Coltescu had described Basaksehir's Cameroonian assistant coach Pierre Webo as "negru", the Romanian for "black". "It's the black over there," he said.

guists from Romania have been analysing every word from every aspect with every nuance.

In Bucharest, many voices are calling for patience until governing body UEFA releases its findings. On social networks, however, there is broad criticism of the European football authorities and suggestions of double-standards for not having reacted when Romanian sportsmen have been referred to as "Gypsies" - a pejorative term designating the Roma. But the President of the Romanian Football Federation (FRF) Razvan Burleanu is firm. "These words have no place in a stadium," he said. Ditto for Sports Minister Ionut Stroe, who quickly presented his "apologies in the name of Romanian sport".

In the local media, however, opinions are divided. "In Romanian, to say that someone is black ('negru') is not

'Laxity'

Asztalos is getting used to these matters with other incidents of supporters imitating monkey cries or throwing a banana in the direction of a Brazilian player. In an interview with AFP, he denounced the "laxity" of the clubs and of the Romanian professional football league (LFP). In neighboring Bulgaria, similar incidents punctuated a qualifying match for Euro 2020 against England in October 2019. The subsequent fall-out led to Bulgaria coach Krasimir Balakov resigning along with the country's FA chief, Borislav Mihaylov. Several Bulgarian clubs, as well as the national team, had previously been sanctioned by UEFA for "racist behavior" in the stands. In 2014, Levski Sofia supporters openly defied a campaign by the European body by deploying a banner proclaiming "Say 'Yes' to Racism". In the Balkans too, monkey noises and racist chants have repeatedly earned the Croatian, Serbian and Montenegrin federations fines and closed-door matches for the respective national teams.

If the Croatian federation regularly condemns such behavior, sometimes accompanied by Nazi chants, it also throws the blame entirely on "hooligans". In 2012, Belgrade was the scene of a mass brawl at the end of an U21 Euro qualifier between Serbia and England. Serbian fans, who had been monkey chanting England's Danny Rose, invaded the pitch while players and management of the two teams exchanged insults and blows.

Roma targeted

In Romania, analysts say the main targets of hate speech are the Roma. Gelu Dumnicu, a sociologist from the Roma minority, bristles when supporters chant "Death to the Gypsies" or brandish placards paying tribute to the pro-Nazi Marshal Ion Antonescu, who had advocated the "Final Solution" (extermination) for the Roma during the Second World War. According to Dumnicu, the sanctions that have been imposed by UEFA - largely fines and playing games behind closed doors - have partially achieved their goal, as supporters "are starting to fear being penalized". "But coercion alone does not solve the problem as long as it is not coupled with, or rather preceded by, education on the matter," he told AFP. Bulgaria, like other countries in the region, has tightened sanctions against hooligans, now liable to fines of up to 2,500 euros and 25 days in detention. Asztalos says that Romania, for its part, has "made efforts" to combat racism "but there is still a long way to go". — AFP



PARIS: A stadium employee displays a banner reading 'No to Racism' in an empty grandstand before the UEFA Champions League group H football match between Paris Saint-Germain (PSG) and Istanbul Basaksehir FK at the Parc des Princes stadium. — AFP

That has become the key line of the debate, the one that led to Basaksehir's Senegalese forward Demba Ba remonstrating with the official in English. "When you mention a white guy, you never say 'this white guy', you just say 'this guy', so why when you mention a black guy do you say 'this black guy'?" he can clearly be heard saying. The players walked off, returning the next day with a different set of officials to finish the match, since when sportsmen, sociologists and lin-

an offense, but a reference to the color of their skin, a simple precision," said veteran sports journalist Ovidiu Ioanitoaia. His younger colleague Theodor Jumata, however, takes a different view. "It is the most brutal expression of racism, the very essence of humiliation," he says. President of the anti-discrimination Council (CNCD), Csaba Asztalos, stressed that "sport, and football in particular, cannot be immune to this very present scourge of Romanian society".

Verstappen on top in Abu Dhabi practice

ABU DHABI: Max Verstappen topped the times ahead of his Red Bull team-mate Alex Albon in yesterday's third and final free practice for the Abu Dhabi Grand Prix. The Dutchman clocked a best lap in one minute and 36.251 to finish half a second ahead of the London-born Thai driver as the Milton Keynes-based team shone in perfect conditions at the Yas Marina Circuit before today's season-ending race. Renault's Daniel Ricciardo and Esteban Ocon locked out the second row ahead of Lando Norris, fifth for McLaren, and seven-time champion Lewis Hamilton who was sixth in the leading Mercedes.

In an unusual-looking top ten, as most teams prepared for the much-cooler conditions expected for qualifying later on Saturday, Lance Stroll was seventh for Racing Point ahead of Carlos Sainz of McLaren. Valtteri Bottas, who had topped the times in Friday's second session after Verstappen had been fastest in the first, was ninth in the second Mercedes ahead of last weekend's Sakhir victor Sergio Perez in the second Racing Point.

It appeared that the team were not all treating the session with the same level of competitive intent - Mercedes, in particular, seemed to be holding back on engine power to preserve their units. Ahead of the final event of the campaign, reliability may be an issue as engines and other parts reach the end of their Formula One seasonal life span. In beautiful conditions, with an air temperature of 25 and the track at 38 degrees, the session began slowly and 16 minutes had passed before Nicholas Latifi was first man out in his Williams.

Mercedes emerged five minutes later and Bottas swiftly went top on softs only to be replaced by Albon and his team-mate Verstappen. Hamilton persevered with his softs and split the Red Bulls with 15 minutes remaining. The champion continued working and trimmed Verstappen's advantage to two-tenths as both Ferraris found speed, Leclerc taking fifth and Vettel seventh ahead of a remarkable Russell, who had hoisted his Williams beyond expectations. In the final 10 minutes, a flurry of action saw a rush of improved times as the teams fine-tuned ahead of qualifying, scheduled for later in cooler conditions at dusk. — AFP

Rams move into top spot; first win over Patriots since 2001

LOS ANGELES: Rookie Cam Akers rushed for 171 yards as the Los Angeles Rams gained a measure of revenge for a 2019 Super Bowl loss with a 24-3 rout of the New England Patriots. The sting of a one-sided 13-3 defeat 22 months ago in the Super Bowl in Atlanta, Georgia was still fresh in the minds of the players and coaches for the Rams, who had not beaten the Patriots since 2001, a string of six straight losses. "For me personally it felt good to get a little payback," said Rams defensive tackle Aaron Donald. Akers more than doubled his previous best rushing effort, an 84-yard performance in a 23-20 loss to the San Francisco 49ers on October 29.

Quarterback Jared Goff threw for two touchdowns and the defense smothered the Patriots offense as the Rams moved a half game in front of the Seattle Seahawks for first place in the NFC West Division. The Rams have now won four of their last five games. Kenny Young also had an outstanding game, returning an interception 79 yards for a touchdown. He had one of a half dozen sacks for Los Angeles forcing Patriots quarterback Cam Newton to take a seat in the fourth quarter. "Our defense played lights out," said Donald.



INGLEWOOD: Cam Akers #23 of the Los Angeles Rams is tackled and pushed out of bounds by Devin McCourty #32 of the New England Patriots during the first half of an NFL game at SoFi Stadium in Inglewood, California. — AFP

Newton threw for just 119 yards before being replaced by Jarrett Stidham for the Patriots whose uphill battle to make the playoffs just got much more difficult. New England was going for a sweep of the SoFi Stadium tenants after stomping the Los Angeles Chargers 45-0 on Sunday. This was the first meeting between the two since the Patriots Super Bowl romp where Goff completed just 19 of 38 passes and failed to throw a touchdown. The Rams gained 166 yards in the first quarter on Thursday. They got a touchdown and a field goal on their first two possessions, highlighted by Goff leaping into the end zone from 11 yards out. Akers ran for 84 yards on nine carries in the first quarter.

Matt Gay added the 35-yard field goal. Young intercepted Newton's toss and scampered untouched into the end zone just 14 seconds into the second quarter and the rout was on. "Everybody is playing great football. It is fun to play. We will continue to strive for great things," said Donald. This was a clutch win for Los Angeles, with a contest against the winless New York Jets next week ahead of season-ending games against the Seahawks and Arizona Cardinals that could determine the division winner. — AFP

Rafa Nadal Academy Kuwait Masters Tennis Tournament

By Abdellatif Sharaa

KUWAIT: Rafa Nadal Academy Kuwait (RNAK) Masters Tennis Tournament was held under the patronage and presence of President of Arab and Kuwait Tennis Federations Sheikh Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Abdallah Al-Jaber Al-Sabah. The event marked the conclusion of a series of tournaments organized by RNAK in cooperation with Kuwait Tennis Federation and was held at Sheikh Jaber Al-Abdallah Al-Jaber Al-Sabah International Tennis Complex.

Kuwait's National team member (from Yarmouk Club) Essa Salman Qabazard won the men's singles title, while Yasmeen Al-Shamali won the ladies singles. Qabazard won the title after defeating Abdelrahman Al-Awadhi in the final match with the score of 6/2 - 6/4, as Al-Awadhi took second place.

Yasmeen Al-Shamali defeated Sarah Behbehani 2-1 to claim the ladies title. The final match was also attended by Deputy Chairman of KTF Abdelsamad Al-Aryan, and CEO of Tamdeen Sports Company Mohammad Mustafa Al-Marzouq, RNAK General Manager Martijn Belgraver and Head Tennis Coach Nuno Marques.

Results of the three previous tournaments were as follows: The first tournament winner in the men's singles is Abdelhameed Jumaa, and the Ladies was won by Iman Mitwalli; the second tournament was

won by Abdelrahman Al-Awadhi (for men) and Dana Al-Fulaj won the Ladies. The third was won by Essa Qabazard (for men) while Sarah Behbehani won the ladies title. The masters tournament saw the best 8 players in men and 8 in women based on their previous results in the series.



Sheikh Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Abdallah Al-Sabah thanked Tamdeen group for their efforts. He also thanked RNAK for its efforts in organizing the four tournaments. Sheikh Ahmad Al-Jaber said that players of both genders showed good technical levels and wished them best of luck.



Moyes unhappy with 'rubbish' VAR despite West Ham's win

West Ham surprise Leeds 2-1



LEEDS: West Ham United's French striker Sebastien Haller is unsuccessful with this overhead kick during the English Premier League football match between Leeds United and West Ham United on December 11, 2020. — AFP

LEEDS: West Ham boss David Moyes labeled the use of VAR as "rubbish" after his side had to come from behind to beat Leeds 2-1 and move up to fifth in the Premier League on Friday. The Hammers could not have had a worse start as Mateusz Klich opened the scoring at the second attempt from the penalty spot after Lukasz Fabianski was penalized for coming off his line in saving his Polish international teammate's first spot-kick. Moyes were left exasperated with the decision based on the smallest of margins, while the retake was allowed to stand despite encroaching by Leeds players. "Until we get the VAR sorted I don't think I'll be happy," said Moyes.

"It's a really good result but we had another setback after 30 seconds. There are some terrible decisions that are happening at the moment. "Whoever saw it must have had Fabianski's foot x-rayed. The decision was rubbish." However, West Ham exposed Leeds' struggles to defend set-pieces to move within a point of the top four. Tomas Soucek levelled by heading in Jarrod Bowen's corner, although Leeds goalkeeper Illan Meslier should have done better. The winner arrived in similar fashion as Angelo Ogbonna powered in Aaron Cresswell's free-kick 11 minutes from time.

West Ham were inches away from another set-piece goal when Fabian Balbuena hit the post, but the visitors comfortably held out to continue their impressive season so far. "It worries me because it is causing an unevenness and we are finding it hard to correct it," said Leeds boss Marcelo Bielsa on his side's struggles at set-pieces. "It was a fair defeat. We prepared ourselves to face a game of the characteristics it had today and they were superior." A fourth defeat in six games leaves Leeds in 14th on their first season back in the top flight for 16 years, but with an eight-point cushion above the relegation zone.— AFP



LEEDS: West Ham United's Polish goalkeeper Lukasz Fabianski (2nd left) concedes a penalty as he fouls Leeds United's English striker Patrick Bamford (center) during the English Premier League football match between Leeds United and West Ham United on December 11, 2020. — AFP

'No time to mope:' Inter seek Serie A lift after Euro flop

MILAN: Inter Milan turn their focus back to Serie A after their Champions League flop with a trip to Cagliari awaiting today following their group stage exit mid-week. "There's no time to sit and mope," warned captain Samir Handanovic with his side out of Europe after finishing bottom of their Champions League group. Antonio Conte's side are second in Serie A, five points behind leaders AC Milan, with the two city rivals trying to deny Juventus a 10th consecutive league title.

"We have to focus on the league and the Coppa Italia," urged Handanovic. In his second campaign, Conte now has no choice but to deliver a 19th 'Scudetto' to Inter and first since 2010. The former Juventus and Chelsea manager took Inter to second in Serie A and the Europa League final in his first season. A third consecutive group stage exit was a shock for Conte's expensively-assembled side, who are the top scorers domestically with 26 goals in 10 games.

Inter have spent nearly 300 million euros (\$363 million) in the past two years on new signings and their exit from Europe will hit hard. "There's a lot of regret," said Conte. "We haven't had much luck in the Champions League given certain incidents and refereeing decisions." AC Milan are riding high as they also target a 19th Scudetto and first since 2011. Top scorer Zlatan Ibrahimovic could return against Parma after a muscle

injury ruled him out of their last two league games. Juventus, Lazio and Atalanta return to league action having all secured their passes to the Champions League knockout rounds. Juventus, six points behind Milan in fourth, travel to lowly Genoa after their confidence-boosting 3-0 win at troubled Barcelona in which Cristiano Ronaldo scored twice. "Playing like this, we have nothing to fear until the end of the season," the triumphant Portugal captain said after the game. Seventh-placed Lazio host Hellas Verona, who are just one point behind the Roman club, with Atalanta, in ninth, hosting Fiorentina.

Tuscan side Fiorentina are hovering above the relegation zone and hoping for a first win since October 25 against Atalanta, who have taken just five points in their last six games. Third-placed Napoli, looking for a first win in their newly-named Stadio Diego Armando Maradona, host Sampdoria. Gennaro Gattuso's side are six points behind Milan, having scored eight goals in their last two games against Roma and Crotone. Sassuolo host Benevento on Friday looking to regain some of their early momentum, having dropped to fifth in the table as Roma head to Bologna just a point behind Roberto De Zerbi's flamboyant side.

One to watch: Josip Ilicic

Atalanta's Josip Ilicic chases his first league goal this season against former club Fiorentina. The 32-year-old was out for two months with personal problems after the coronavirus lockdown, but got his first goal in the Champions League win over Liverpool two weeks ago. Ilicic played 105 matches with Fiorentina in Serie A between 2013 and 2017, before joining Atalanta where he had his best season last campaign with 15 league goals.— AFP



JERUSALEM: A person throws money at Moshe Hogege, owner of Israeli Beitar Jerusalem football club, during the club's training session on Friday after a member of Abu Dhabi's royal family bought half of Beitar. — AFP

Israel soccer fans clash over UAE's investment

JERUSALEM: Rival supporters of top Israeli football team Beitar Jerusalem, notorious for its anti-Arab fan base, fought each other Friday over Emirati investment in the club. AFP journalists said. A member of Abu Dhabi's royal family, Sheikh Hamad bin Khalifa Al-Nahyan, signed a \$92 million "partnership agreement" on Monday with club owner Moshe Hogege.

On Friday, on the sidelines of training by the players, supporters who backed the investment were attacked by a dozen supporters of the far-right "La Familia" fan group, who oppose the deal. "Police arrested four people between the ages of 18 and 29 involved in public disturbances," police spokesman Micky Rosenfeld said in a statement. Beitar Jerusalem's fans have historically been considered anti-Muslim and anti-Arab, with the "La Familia" group known for its chants against the

Prophet. 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. The investment in the club comes after Israel established ties with the United Arab Emirates, signing an accord along with Bahrain in Washington in September. Since then, the UAE and Bahrain have signed a raft of deals with Israel, ranging from tourism to aviation and financial services. Sheikh Hamad bought about half of Beitar in return for investing 300 million shekels (\$92 million) in the club over the next decade, the club said in a statement on Monday.

"We are very excited about this decision and understand the tremendous opportunities Beitar Jerusalem can have with the money," said Maor Yifrah, a 26-year-old supporter, draped in a scarf from Dubai. "We can take a new path which will bring us championships and trophies," Yifrah told AFP, adding that "all of Europe will hear from us." However, "La Familia" supporters criticized the investment. Some wrote angry comments on social media, including calling for Beitar Jerusalem's name to be changed to Beitar "Mohammed".— AFP

Live Matches on TV (Local Timings)

ENGLISH PREMIER LEAGUE
Southampton v Sheffield United 15:00
beIN Sports HD 2

Crystal Palace v Tottenham Hotspur 17:15
beIN Sports HD 1

Fulham v Liverpool 19:30
beIN Sports HD 1

Arsenal v Burnley 22:15
beIN Sports HD 2

Leicester City v Brighton 22:15
beIN Sports HD 5

SPANISH LEAGUE
Real Sociedad v Eibar 16:00
beIN Sports HD 3

Real Betis v Villarreal 8:15
beIN Sports HD 3

Elche CF v Granada 20:30
beIN Sports HD 3

FC Barcelona v Levante 23:00
beIN Sports HD 1

ITALIAN CALCIO LEAGUE
Cagliari Calcio v Inter Milan 14:30
beIN Sports HD 1

Atalanta v ACF Fiorentina 17:00
beIN Sports HD 7

Bologna v AS Roma 17:00
beIN Sports HD 5

Napoli v Sampdoria 17:00
beIN Sports HD 4

Genoa CFC v Juventus 20:00
beIN Sports HD 4

AC Milan v Parma Calcio 1913 22:45
beIN Sports HD 4

GERMAN BUNDESLIGA
Augsburg v Schalke 04 17:30
beIN Sports

Bayer 04 v TSG 1899 Hoffenheim 20:00
beIN Sports

FRENCH LEAGUE
Nice v Stade Rennais 15:00
beIN Sports HD 6

Stade brestois 29 v Stade Reims 17:00
beIN Sports HD 6

Lorient v Nimes Olympique 17:00
beIN Sports

Nantes v FCO Dijon 17:00
beIN Sports HD 9

RC Strasbourg v FC Metz 17:00
beIN Sports HD 8

LOSC Lille v Bordeaux 19:00
beIN Sports HD 6

Paris Saint-Germain v Lyon nais 23:00
beIN Sports HD 6

Kuwait Football League roundup

By Abdellatif Sharaa

KUWAIT: Three matches were played on Friday during the 12th round of Kuwait Football League (ranking stage). Though Sahel Sports Club showcased an acceptable performance during their match on Friday, Kuwait grabbed a narrow win 2-1. Kuwait's Tunisian player Ahmad Al-Akaishi scored his team's winning goal in the 33rd minute following a fast counter attack by Jumaa, who was able to pass the ball to Akhaishi. Meanwhile Sahel seemed to pay more attention to defense with few meaningless attempts on the goal. Sahel's Jasim Ateeq saw red in the 80th minute and Kuwait players were not able to take advantage of that.



In another match, Arabi Club reclaimed their winning ways as they beat Kheitan 3-0. Arabi's Essa Yacoubou scored the first goal in the 56th minute - then Al-Sanousi Al-Hadi scored a second goal in the 79th, after which Ahmad Al-Saleh scored a third towards the end of the match from the penalty spot. Kheitan suffered a setback after the referee gave defender Faisal Al-Enezi a red card in the 50th minute leaving Kheitan with 10 players. It was not long after that, when Essa Yacoubou scored with the help of Mohammad Zunaifer in the 56th minute. Al-Sanousi Al-Hadi doubled Arabi's score in the 78th minute.

The referee awarded Arabi with a penalty kick three minutes into added time which Ahmad Al-Saleh succeeded in converting it into a goal. In the third match, Kazma blew away Jahra with four unanswered goals and gained three points - raising their total to 22. This placed Kazma in third place as Jahra remained in ninth with 11 points.



14 Football racism 'no black and white' issue in central Europe



15 Israeli football fans clash over Abu Dhabi's royal investment



15 Moyes unhappy with 'rubbish' VAR despite West Ham's win



Manchester derby fires blanks

Newcastle's Almiron scores in 20 seconds



MANCHESTER: Manchester United's English defender Luke Shaw (left) tackles Manchester City's English midfielder Raheem Sterling (center) during the English Premier League football match between Manchester United and Manchester City at Old Trafford in Manchester yesterday. — AFP

LONDON: Manchester United failed to ease the pressure on Ole Gunnar Solskjaer after a limp display in their 0-0 draw against Manchester City, while Miguel Almiron scored in 20 seconds as Newcastle beat West Bromwich Albion 2-1 yesterday. Solskjaer faced calls for his sacking after United crashed out of the Champions League with a midweek defeat at Leipzig. The beleaguered United manager desperately needed an uplifting result in the Manchester derby to win back some support. But, with Paul Pogba restored to the starting line-up, United labored to a drab draw that left them in seventh place.

United have won just one of their last four games in all competitions and have only one win at Old Trafford in six Premier League games this term. City weren't much better than their bitter rivals and Pep Guardiola's team are one place behind United in the

table. However, in contrast to United there is not yet any sense of crisis around City—who have kept six successive clean-sheets in all competitions to equal a club record. City should have been ahead in the first half when Gabriel Jesus shot over from Riyad Mahrez's long pass.

The visitors' best chance came when Kevin De Bruyne found Mahrez, whose shot was saved well by David De Gea before De Bruyne squandered the rebound. United were awarded a penalty two minutes into the second half when Kyle Walker kicked Marcus Rashford, only for the decision to be overruled by VAR as the forward had strayed offside in the build-up. De Bruyne saw his goal-bound effort well blocked by United defender Harry Maguire and Rashford shot wide after a good break, but chances were at a premium in a dire encounter.

Quick-fire Almiron

At St James' Park, Newcastle were playing for the first time since their match against Aston Villa was postponed due to a COVID-19 outbreak in their squad. Newcastle took less than a minute to grab the lead when Almiron swept his shot past West Brom keeper Sam Johnstone. West Brom drew level five minutes into the second half at St James' Park. Matt Phillips delivered a low cross which was met by defender Darnell Furlong, who lashed an unstoppable low shot past Karl Darlow.

Newcastle clinched the points in the 82nd minute when Dwight Gayle met a superb cross by fellow substitute Jacob Murphy to head past Johnstone. Newcastle's second successive victory lifted the gloom from their virus issues, but struggling West Brom stay second bottom. Anwar El Ghazi's last-gasp

penalty fired 10-man Aston Villa to a dramatic 1-0 win against Wolves. Villa had Douglas Luiz sent off in the final minutes for two bookings after the Brazilian midfielder caught Daniel Podence with an elbow.

But Nelson Semedo's stoppage-time foul on John McGinn triggered El Ghazi's penalty before Wolves midfielder Joao Moutinho was dismissed for a second yellow card just moments from full-time in a fractious local derby. After two successive defeats, Villa will hope they are back on track with just their second win in six games. Villa have won four of their five away league matches this season, while mid-table Wolves have only one win in their last five games. In yesterday's last match, third placed Chelsea traveled to Everton knowing a win would take them above leaders Tottenham to the top of the table. — AFP

Belotti hits 100th goal for Torino

MILAN: Captain Andrea Belotti struck his 100th goal for Torino in a 3-2 defeat to Udinese which pushed the northerners to second last in the Serie A table yesterday. Torino matched their worst run of eight consecutive league defeats at home in Serie A, last achieved in 1959. Belotti has accounted for eight of his struggling side's 19 goals this season as they have garnered six points from 11 games. The skipper had rallied his side around for a pep talk at half-time, with coach Marco Giampaolo making a triple substitution.

And Torino sparked to life after an hour managing to fight back from two-goals down against their midtable rivals. Ignacio Pussetto had put the visitors ahead on 24 minutes, after Udinese's Brazilian midfielder Wallace dispossessed Soualiho Meite, with play waved on despite protests of a foul from the home side. Gerard Deulofeu sent the ball through for Argentine Pussetto to break through for a solo run to beat an outrushing Salvatore Sirigu in the Torino goal.

Rodrigo De Paul added a second for the visitors from the edge of the box nine minutes after the break, before Belotti reignited Torino hopes. The 26-year-old

picked up a Federico Bonazzoli cross on 66 minutes to finish off and repaid the favor with a back-heel kick allowing the Italian striker to get his first Serie A goal. However Udinese restored their advantage two minutes later with substitute Ilija Nestorovski finishing off a Roberto Pereyra cross. Ricardo Rodriguez missed the chance to salvage a point five minutes from time rattling the post.

Torino slump to second bottom, just one point ahead of Crotone who earlier got their first win over he season 4-1 over Spezia. Four of the goals in the game between the promoted teams were scored by Brazilians. Brazilian forward Messias struck after seven minutes, adding a second deep into injury time for the southerners. Brazilian Diego Farias pulled Spezia level after quarter of an hour after intercepting a poor Niccolò Zanellato pass as Crotone tried to play out of their own penalty area. Polish defender Arkadiusz Reca and Brazilian Eduardo Henrique added two more for the hosts within ten minutes after the break. Messias completed the rout in the final minute, picking up a cross from Nigerian Simy to slot in from an angle for the club's 10th goal this season. — AFP

Marseille start fast, beat Monaco and rise to 2nd

PARIS: Marseille climbed to second in Ligue 1 yesterday after scoring twice in the first 13 minutes and resisting late pressure to beat Monaco 2-1. Marseille slumped out of Europe on Wednesday after a disastrous Champions League campaign which ended with a defeat at Manchester City, but this was their sixth straight Ligue 1 victory. With coach Andre Villas-Boas absent, suspended after receiving a red card on the bench in the game against Nimes last Friday, Marseille pounced on two early turnovers by Monaco. "The guys were extremely tired and we came home from Manchester at 4:30 in the morning," said the Marseille coach.

"Emotionally, it was very hard with the end of the European adventure. So to give a performance like that, I say bravo to the team." After Monaco gave the ball away on the edge of their box in the fifth minute, Dario Benedetto burst down the left edge of the penalty area and chipped the ball to the far post where Florian Thauvin headed in. Eight minutes later, after Marseille won the ball back in the Monaco half, Thauvin returned the favour.



MARSEILLE: Monaco's French midfielder Enzo Millot (3rd left) fights for the ball with Marseille's Croatian defender Duje Caleta-Car during the French L1 football match between Olympique de Marseille (OM) and AS Monaco yesterday. — AFP

He swung in a left-foot cross from the right which Argentine Benedetto, running in unmarked, volleyed home.

As Monaco pressed in the second half, Thauvin dropped into his own penalty and conceded a 78th minute penalty with a dangerous high challenge on Wissam Ben Yedder. Ben Yedder sent Steve Mandanda the wrong way from the spot kick, but the Marseille goalkeeper dealt serenely with Monaco's desperate attempts in the closing minutes. "The first period was very good.

We controlled the ball," said Villas Boas. "In the second half, everyone saw that fatigue set in and we were in more trouble."

Monaco coach Niko Kovac lamented an early miss by Ben Yedder and the mistakes that led to the Marseille goals. "We gave away some soft balls and that set up two shots and two goals," said Kovac. "We dominated the second half, they defended, we tried everything." Marseille leapfrogged Lille and Lyon to move into second, one-point behind Paris Saint-Germain. — AFP