

4 KRCS distributes winter clothes to cleaning workers



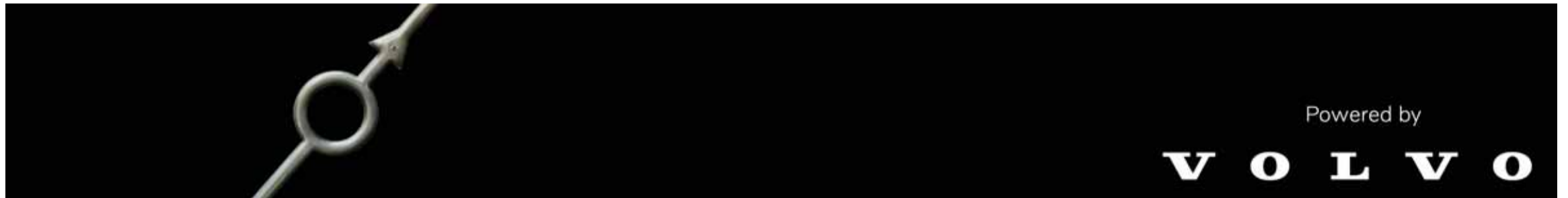
5 Despite democracy, Tunisia's revolution remains unfinished



13 Once upon a time: Pakistan's fabled storytellers fade away



16 PSG face Barca, Manchester United get Sociedad in draw



Amir swears in new Cabinet, urges solidarity, coordination

New ministerial lineup includes seven fresh faces



KUWAIT: HH the Amir Sheikh Nawaf Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah and HH the Crown Prince Sheikh Mishal Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah receive HH the Prime Minister Sheikh Sabah Al-Khaled Al-Hamad Al-Sabah and members of his new Cabinet at Bayan Palace yesterday. — AFP (See Page 3)

By B Izzak and Agencies

KUWAIT: HH the Prime Minister Sheikh Sabah Al-Khaled Al-Hamad Al-Sabah yesterday formed a new Cabinet that includes seven newcomers, three former ministers and only six members, including the premier himself, from the previous Cabinet. Sheikh Sabah Al-Khaled and his Cabinet then took the oath of office in front of HH the Amir Sheikh Nawaf Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah.

HH the Amir addressed the prime minister during

the ceremony, wishing him heavenly support and guidance for performing the great task, noting that the people of Kuwait "have great ambitions for fulfilling the aspired objectives" by the new government. Thanking members of the former government who had worked amid very complex circumstances, HH the Amir noted that the new government would deal with a new phase marked with challenges and tasks of equal weight that warrant extraordinary efforts and diligent and faithful work in coordination with the parliament.

HH the Amir hoped to see actions intended to attain

the aspired national goals, stressing on the necessity for solidarity, coordination among the apparatuses to enhance public services and tackling of basic issues. He hoped for action aimed at boosting the state of law and institutions and "placing Kuwait's interest above any other consideration".

In his advice to the freshly-assigned executives, HH Sheikh Nawaf noted that running state affairs warrants serious and organized action, field follow-up, commitment to the application of law on all, "embodiment of justice and equality", and sensible selection of leaders

who are capable to promote the homeland and attain its progress and prosperity. HH the Amir, in conclusion, affirmed that he was certain that the ministers would be able to face the enormous challenges, continue to push forward the national action for reforms and development and attain the aspired national objectives.

HH the Amir is scheduled to inaugurate the new National Assembly today, with the election of the speaker and his deputy topping the agenda. Over 40 MPs from the 50-member house have openly

Continued on Page 2

News in brief

Explosion rocks tanker

RIYADH: A blast rocked a Singapore-flagged oil tanker at the Saudi port of Jeddah yesterday, the vessel's owner said, with the kingdom saying it was struck by an explosives-laden boat in a "terrorist" assault. All 22 sailors aboard the tanker BW Rhine escaped unhurt after the blast struck just after midnight, Singapore-based shipping company Hafnia said, but it did not exclude the possibility of an oil spill. Hafnia reported "hull damage" in the blast. — AFP

Black asteroid dust found

TOKYO: Black sandy dust found in a capsule brought to Earth by the Japanese Hayabusa-2 space probe is from the distant asteroid Ryugu, scientists confirmed after opening it yesterday. The Japanese space agency released a picture of a small deposit of sooty material inside the metal box. The dust was found in the capsule's outer shell, agency officials said, with more substantial samples expected to be found when they open the inner container, a delicate task. — AFP

Thriller author le Carre dies

LONDON: John le Carre, the British writer best known for his Cold War espionage novels "Tinker Tailor Soldier Spy" and "The Spy Who Came In From The Cold", has died aged 89, his agent and family said Sunday. The author, a former British intelligence officer whose real name was David Cornwell, wrote 25 novels and one memoir in a career spanning six decades, selling 60 million books worldwide. — AFP (See Page 12)

Nurse receives first COVID vaccine in US

NEW YORK: A nurse in New York became the first person in the United States to receive the coronavirus vaccine yesterday. Sandra Lindsay, a critical care nurse at the Long Island Jewish Medical Center, received the Pfizer-BioNTech shot live on television shortly before 9:30 am (1430 GMT). "First Vaccine Administered. Congratulations USA! Congratulations WORLD!" President Donald Trump tweeted.

Lindsay said the jab "didn't feel any different from taking any other vac-

cine". "I feel great. I feel relieved," she said. "I hope this marks the beginning of the end of the very painful time in our history. I want to instill public confidence that the vaccine is safe. "We're in a pandemic so we all need to do our part," Lindsay added.

Governor Andrew Cuomo, watching the landmark moment via video-link, told Lindsay he hoped the vaccine would give her and other frontline healthcare workers "a sense of security and safety". "It's going to take months before the vaccine hits critical mass. So, this is the light at the end of the tunnel, but it's a long tunnel," he said, reminding people to keep following social distancing guidelines. COVID-19 has ravaged the United States. More than 299,000 Americans have been killed by the virus, including over 35,000 residents of New York state. — AFP

Sudan taken off US terror blacklist

KHARTOUM: The United States yesterday removed Sudan from its state sponsors of terrorism blacklist and declared a "fundamental change" in relations, less than two months after the East African nation pledged to normalize ties with Israel. The move opens the way for aid, debt relief and investment to a country going through a rocky political transition and struggling under a severe economic crisis exacerbated by the

COVID-19 pandemic.

US President Donald Trump had announced in October that he was delisting Sudan, 27 years after Washington first put the country on its blacklist for harboring Islamist militants. The US embassy in Khartoum yesterday said the step had been formalized, and Secretary of State Mike Pompeo later confirmed that "Sudan's designation as a state sponsor of terrorism is officially rescinded". "This represents a fundamental change in our bilateral relationship toward greater collaboration and support for Sudan's historic democratic transition," Pompeo said in a statement.

Sudan's army chief General Abdel Fattah Al-Burhan - who doubles as

Continued on Page 2



NEW YORK: Sandra Lindsay, a nurse at Long Island Jewish Medical Center, is inoculated with the COVID-19 vaccine by Dr Michelle Chester yesterday in the Queens borough. — AFP



KHARTOUM: Sudanese women chat at a cafe in the capital yesterday. — AFP

Local

Amir, Crown Prince receive visiting Iraqi Foreign Minister

Sheikh Nawaf receives letter from Iraqi Prime Minister



KUWAIT: His Highness the Amir Sheikh Nawaf Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah meets Iraqi Foreign Minister Fuad Mohammad Hussein. — Amiri Diwan and KUNA photos

KUWAIT: His Highness the Amir Sheikh Nawaf Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah received at Bayan Palace yesterday Iraqi Foreign Minister Fuad Mohammad Hussein along with Kuwait's Foreign Minister Sheikh Dr Ahmad Nasser Al-Mohammad Al-Sabah and the Iraqi accompanying delegation. Hussein delivered a letter to His Highness the Amir from Iraqi Prime Minister Mustafa Al-Kadhimi, which discussed bilat-

eral relations and ways to enhance them in different fields, in addition to the latest regional and international developments. His Highness the Crown Prince Sheikh Mishal Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah also received the Iraqi Foreign Minister, and the two sides delved into bilateral relations and ways to boost them in various fields, including discussion on the latest developments in the region and international arena. In



His Highness the Crown Prince Sheikh Mishal Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah meets Iraqi Foreign Minister Fuad Mohammad Hussein.



Kuwait's Foreign Minister Sheikh Dr Ahmad Nasser Al-Mohammad Al-Sabah meets his Iraqi counterpart Fuad Mohammad Hussein.

addition to Sheikh Dr Ahmad, the meeting was attended by Deputy Minister of Foreign Affairs, Ambassador Khaled Al-Jarallah, the Crown Prince Office Director Lieutenant General Jamal Mohammad Al-Thyab, Crown Prince Undersecretary Mazen Issa Al-Issa, and Foreign Minister Assistant for Arab world Affairs Ambassador Fahad Ahmad Al-Awadhi. His Highness the Prime Minister Sheikh Sabah Al-Khaled

Al-Hamad Al-Sabah later received the visiting Iraqi minister at Bayan Palace. In the meantime, Kuwait's Foreign Minister held a meeting with his Iraqi counterpart, during which they tackled bilateral relations and ways to strengthen them in many fields, in addition to discussion on various issues in the region and international arena. Senior foreign ministry officials attended the meeting. — KUNA

2020 KAFO forum held online

By Nawara Fattahova

KUWAIT: The fourth annual Kuwait's Achievers for Future Opportunities (KAFO) forum was launched on Sunday and continues till Dec 16, 2020. All activities of the forum are being held online via the Zoom app. This year, 100 personalities were chosen by KAFO to form 10 communities from various fields.

His Highness the Prime Minister Sheikh Sabah Al-Khaled Al-Hamad Al-Sabah said KAFO was launched on the directives of



His Highness the Prime Minister Sheikh Sabah Al-Khaled Al-Hamad Al-Sabah

late Amir Sheikh Sabah Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah and is supported by His Highness the Amir Sheikh Nawaf Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah. "It's one of the most important platforms supporting creativity and young achievers to be a reference for



Dr Yousef Al-Ibrahim

Kuwaiti youth that meets their ambitions and needs," he said during the launch ceremony. "Holding such forums is important for young people and a benefit to our country. It also creates strong human capital that is able to plan, develop and achieve

Kuwait's 2035 vision," he added.

Dr Yousef Al-Ibrahim, Consultant at the Amiri Diwan and Head of the Supervising Committee of KAFO, said His Highness the Amir Sheikh Nawaf is keen to support the youth, as he believes that young people are the true wealth of the nation, adding it's an honor to supervise this forum.

The four-day event includes various sessions on volunteering, sports, entrepreneurship, science and technology, media, arts and culture. On the first day, speakers from different fields participated in the sessions, including Dr Khaled Mahdi, Secretary General of the Supreme Council for Planning and Development, Dr Tareq Al-Sheikh, Representative of the Secretary General of United Nations in Kuwait,

Shafeeq Al Sayed Omar, Representative of the Public Authority for Youth, Dr Bassam Al-Faili, Director of the Innovation Department at the Kuwait Foundation for the Advancement of Sciences, Sheikh Al-Zain Al-Sabah and guests from the World Bank.

The first session of the forum was titled 'Public Policies Community' and included an awareness video on increasing the productivity of individuals. This was followed by a session on inspiring persons. The first day concluded with an acquaintance session between the attendees and community representatives to exchange knowledge and experience.

KAFO is one of the Kuwait Youth Program (Kuwait Listens) projects launched in 2013. KAFO

is the first national platform to showcase achievers to ease the process of searching, connecting and collaborating with young achievers. Launched on the directives of late Amir Sheikh Sabah, KAFO is an initiative by the Amiri Diwan fulfilling one of the recommendations of the 2013 National Youth Project.

Objectives of KAFO are to establish and develop a database of young Kuwaiti achievers in different professions, academic careers and creative fields. It also aims to connect national achievers with organizations and other achievers, and showcasing youth and their projects to allow collaborative opportunities, along with building communities for knowledge transfer amongst nationals and residents to utilize their talents.

Amir swears in new Cabinet...

Continued from Page 1

declared their support for Bader Al-Humaidi, a former minister, to become the new speaker to replace Marzuq Al-Ghanem, in office since 2013.

The number is well over the required 33 votes to ensure the election of Humaidi for the four-year term, but some MPs are still worried that a scenario similar to what happened four years ago could happen again. Following the general election in Nov 2016, around 28 MPs vowed at a meeting that they will not vote for Ghanem as speaker. But in the first session, Ghanem defeated two opposition candidates by a comfortable majority.

But this time, the anti-Ghanem MPs have unanimously nominated one candidate and repeatedly vowed they will ensure Humaidi's success. They warned the government against interfering in the election.

Ghanem has not issued any statement and has not even said he will contest the post, but he can do that today. Unless at least nine MPs change their mind and all 16 members of the Cabinet vote for Ghanem, he will not be re-elected as head of the Assembly.

The new Cabinet saw the appointment of five members of the ruling family, in addition to the premier, and also saw ruling family members retaking all the so-called sovereign posts of the interior, defense and foreign affairs. It also saw the return of the Al-Salem branch of the family to the Cabinet ranks with two key posts - Sheikh Hamad Jaber Al-Ali Al-Sabah taking the defense and Sheikh Thamer Ali Al-Salem Al-Sabah taking the interior portfolios.

The ministers of foreign affairs Sheikh Ahmad Nasser Al-Sabah, health Sheikh Dr Basel Al-Sabah, public works Rana Al-Fares and National Assembly affairs Mubarak Al-Harees retained their posts. Anas Al-Saleh was retained as Minister of State for Cabinet Affairs without the interior portfolio. Three of the new ministers, Essa Al-Kandari - minister of social affairs and Minister of Islamic affairs - Mohammad Al-Fares - oil and electricity and water - and the defense minister, have been ministers before.

The new Cabinet changed its entire economic team. Khalifa Hamada, finance ministry undersecretary, was appointed finance minister. Fares took the

oil and the electricity post while newcomer Faisal Al-Medlej was appointed commerce and industry minister. Newcomers Nawaf Al-Yassin was appointed justice minister, Abdulrahman Al-Mutairi as information and youth minister, Ali Al-Mudhaf as minister of education and Abdullah Al-Marafi as minister of state for housing and services affairs. Only one woman remains in the Cabinet, down from two in the previous one, as former minister of social affairs Mariam Al-Aqeel was not retained.

"It appears to be a relatively technocratic government," analyst Ayed Al-Manaa told AFP. Political analyst Anwar Al-Rasheed said people hope that the new government will have a different approach to managing issues, saying the old ways had led to "widespread dissatisfaction".

Opposition MPs were not impressed and lashed out at the new Cabinet for including former interior minister Saleh, although in a new post, saying the premier failed to read the election results and vowed to explore the possibility of non-cooperation. MP Muhallal Al-Mudhaf said the new line-up does not meet aspirations and is not in line with the huge economic, political and security challenges. "The prime minister has not read the results of the elections or he does not know political analyses," Mudhaf said.

Prominent opposition figure MP Mohammad Al-Mutairi said the new Cabinet will be debated with other lawmakers and will discuss "all constitutional options" including the repetition of what happened in 1963, when MPs refused to cooperate with the then new Cabinet, forcing it to be changed.

MP Khaled Al-Otaibi said the Cabinet has included ministers who failed in the past and who are not liked by the people. It also includes ministers who publicly opposed reforms, said Otaibi. MP Abdulkarim Al-Kandari said the basis of appointing ministers has not changed and it includes "anything but qualifications and competence".

The first litmus test of the new political setup, in what some analysts describe as a new era, will be seen today when the new Assembly holds its opening session. III the Amir will address the session and is expected to set guidelines for cooperation between the two authorities.

Then the Assembly will elect its speaker for the next four years. At least two MPs - Hassan Jowhar, backed by the gathering of lawmakers, and MP Ahmad Al-Shuhoumi, who expects the government's backing, are the only candidates who have expressed their desire to contest the post. The Assembly will also elect all the permanent committees which include finance, budgets, interior and defense, health, public utilities and housing.

Anger in Lanka over forced cremations

COLOMBO: Outrage is mounting in Sri Lanka after at least 15 Muslim coronavirus victims, including a baby, were cremated against family wishes and in contravention of Islamic funeral rites. Health authorities in Buddhist-majority Sri Lanka insist all victims must be cremated - even if they are Muslims, who traditionally bury their dead facing Makkah.

As local and international protests escalated, neighboring Maldives said it was considering a request to bury Sri Lankan Muslims in the archipelago. President Ibrahim Mohamed Solih was consulting his officials to "assist Sri Lanka in facilitating Islamic funeral rites in the Maldives for Sri Lankan Muslims

succumbing to COVID-19 pandemic," Maldives Foreign Minister Abdulla Shaheed tweeted.

The 57-member Organization of Islamic Cooperation expressed concern over the cremation order and called for Sri Lankan Muslims to be allowed to bury family members in line with their religious beliefs. "Against this practice, forbidden under Islam, the OIC calls for respect to funeral rites in the Islamic faith," it said in a statement. The cremation order issued in April came amid alarm raised by influential Buddhist monks that burying bodies could contaminate groundwater and spread the virus.

After the families of 19 Muslims refused to claim the bodies of relatives from a Colombo morgue, last week, the attorney general ordered their remains cremated. So far at least 15 have been - including a 20-day-old baby named Shaykh and despite the pleas of his parents. The family said they were bullied into agreeing to a cremation, but when they stood their ground the authorities conducted a forced cremation without the participation of any relative. — AFP

Sudan taken off US terror...

Continued from Page 1

the head of the Sovereign Council, the country's highest executive authority - offered his "congratulations to the Sudanese people". "It was a task accomplished... in the spirit of the December revolution", he said on Twitter, referring to a landmark month in 2018 when protests erupted against dictator Omar Al-Bashir.

Bashir was deposed by the military in April 2019, four months into the demonstrations against his iron-fisted rule and 30 years after an Islamist backed coup had brought him to power. Pompeo said that "we commend the calls of the Sudanese people for freedom, peace and justice, and we congratulate the members of the civilian-led transitional government for their courage in advancing the aspirations of the citizens they serve".

Sudan's Prime Minister Abdalla Hamdok also welcomed Washington's move in a post on Facebook, noting that it means "our beloved country... (is) relieved from the international and global siege" provoked by Bashir's behavior. The removal of the designation "contributes to reforming the economy, attracting investments and remittances of our citizens abroad through official channels" and creates new job opportunities for youth, the premier said.

As part of a deal, Sudan agreed to pay \$335 million to compensate survivors and victims' families from the twin 1998 al-Qaeda attacks on US embassies in Kenya and Tanzania, and a 2000 attack by the jihadist group

on the USS Cole off Yemen's coast. Those attacks were carried out after Bashir had allowed then Al-Qaeda leader Osama Bin Laden sanctuary in Sudan.

Sudan in October became the third Arab country in as many months to pledge that it would normalize relations with Israel, after the United Arab Emirates and Bahrain. The transitional government's pledge came amid a concerted campaign by the Trump administration to persuade Arab nations to recognize the Jewish state, and it has been widely perceived as a quid pro quo for Washington removing Sudan from its terror blacklist.

But unlike the UAE and Bahrain, Sudan has yet to agree a formal deal with Israel, amid wrangling within the fractious transitional power structure over the move. The first major evidence of engagement between Sudan's interim authorities and Israel came in February, when Burhan met Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu in Uganda. In late November, a spokesman for the Sovereign Council, comprised of military and civilian figures, confirmed that an Israeli delegation had visited Khartoum earlier in the month.

Sudan's transition has lately displayed signs of internal strain. Burhan last week blasted the transitional institutions, formed in Aug 2019 after months of further street protests demanding the post-Bashir military share power with civilians. "The transitional council has failed to respond to the aspirations of the people and of the revolution," Burhan charged while also lauding the integrity of the military.

Trump sent his notice to remove Sudan from the terror blacklist to Congress on Oct 26. Under US law, a country exits the list after 45 days unless Congress objects, which it has not. Families of victims of the Sept 11, 2001 attacks had called on lawmakers to reject the State Department's proposal, saying they want to pursue legal action against Sudan. — AFP

Local

Prime Minister presents Kuwait's new Cabinet to Amir

Sheikh Sabah Al-Khaled pledges coordination to tackle important issues



His Highness the Prime Minister Sheikh Sabah Al-Khaled Al-Hamad Al-Sabah



Hamad Jaber Al-Ali Al-Sabah



Anas Khaled Al-Saleh



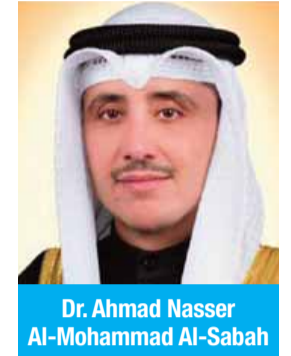
Essa Al-Kandari



Mohammad Al-Fares



Dr. Basel Al-Sabah



Dr. Ahmad Nasser Al-Mohammad Al-Sabah



Dr. Rana Al-Fares



Mubarak Al-Harees



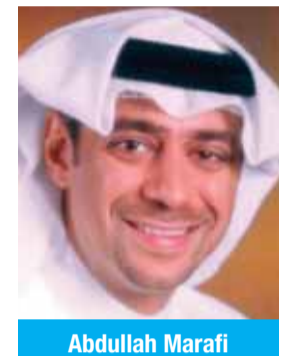
Thamer Ali Sabah Al-Salem Al-Sabah



Khalifa Hamada



Abdulrahman Al-Mutairi



Abdullah Marafi

KUWAIT: His Highness the Prime Minister Sheikh Sabah Al-Khaled Al-Hamad Al-Sabah yesterday presented his new Cabinet line-up to His Highness the Amir Sheikh Nawaf Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah, pledging coordination with all local stakeholders for tackling diverse national issues.

Addressing His Highness the Amir at a broad ceremony at Bayan Palace, His Highness Sheikh Sabah Al-Khaled presented his line-up of the government as follows:

Sheikh Hamad Jaber Al-Ali Al-Sabah, Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Defense.
Anas Khaled Al-Saleh, Deputy Prime

Minister and Minister of State for Cabinet Affairs.

Essa Al-Kandari, Minister of Social Affairs, Minister of Awqaf and Islamic Affairs.

Mohammad Al-Fares, Minister of Oil, Minister of Electricity and Water.

Sheikh Dr Basel Al-Sabah, Minister of Health.

Sheikh Dr Ahmad Nasser Al-Mohammad Al-Sabah, Foreign Minister.

Dr Rana Al-Fares, Minister of Public Works, Minister of State for Municipal Affairs.

Mubarak Al-Harees, Minister of State for National Assembly Affairs.

Sheikh Thamer Ali Sabah Al-Salem

Al-Sabah, Interior Minister.

Khalifa Hamada, Minister of Finance.

Abdulrahman Al-Mutairi, Minister of Information, Minister of State for Youth Affairs.

Abdullah Marafi, Minister of State for Housing Affairs and Minister of State for Services.

Dr Ali Al-Mudhaf, Minister of Education and Minister of Higher Education.

Faisal Al-Medlej, Minister of Commerce, Industry and Minister of State for Economic Affairs.

Dr Nawaf Al-Yassin, Minister of Justice.

Sheikh Sabah Al-Khaled, in his presentation statement, pledged serious



Dr. Ali Al-Mudhaf



Faisal Al-Medlej



Dr. Nawaf Al-Yassin

work in coordination with all segments of the Kuwaiti society and the parliament to tackle all national issues and problems. He also assured His Highness

the Amir that he, along with the ministers, would spare no effort to attain the aspirations of Sheikh Nawaf and the people of Kuwait. — KUNA

Amir inaugurates newly-elected parliament today

KUWAIT: His Highness the Amir Sheikh Nawaf Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah inaugurates the first regular session of the 16th legislative term of the National Assembly today at 10:00 am. Today's inaugural session marks the start of the National Assembly's first legislative term in the era of His Highness Sheikh Nawaf as Kuwait's Amir. Several legislative terms had come to pass since the late Amir Sheikh Abdullah Al-Salem Al-Sabah approved the constitution on

November 11, 1962, a document which regulated the relation among the executive, legislative and judiciary authorities.

On January 29, 1963, the first legislative term took effect until it ended on January 3, 1967. The second legislative term began on February 7, 1967 and lasted until December 30, 1970. The opening session of the third legislative term was held on February 10, 1971 and concluded on January 8, 1975. The first session of the fourth legislative term took place on February 11, 1975 and continued until August 29, 1976 while the fifth term started on March 9, 1981 and ended on January 19, 1985. The sixth legislative term began on March 9, 1985, but the parliament was dissolved on July 3, 1986. On April 22, 1990, the late Amir Sheikh Jaber Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah formed the national council which ended its first term in August of 1990, the year of the Iraqi invasion of Kuwait. The council resumed operation and its second term by July 9, 1991 and concluded the term on August 1, 1992.

Resumed role

The National Assembly resumed its role on October 20, 1992 with the seventh legislative term, concluding on October 5, 1996. The eighth legislative term began on October 20, 1996, but parliament was dissolved by May 4, 1999. The ninth legislative term began on July 17, 1999 and ended on May 31, 2003.



The 10th legislative term began on May 19, 2003; however, it did not last and was dissolved on May 21, 2006. Then came the 11th legislative term, which met the same fate, beginning on July 12, 2006 and dissolving on March 19, 2008.

The 12th legislative term followed the previous incarnations of parliament with dissolution, starting on June 1, 2008 and ending on March 18, 2009. The 13th legislative term began on May 31, 2009 and did not end the cycle of dissolution, as the term was sus-

pending on December 6, 2011. The dissolving of the parliament was the fate of the 14th legislative term, which began on August 6, 2013 and stopped short on October 16, 2016. Finally, the 15th legislative term managed to break the cycle of dissolving parliament; beginning the term on December 23, 2016 and finishing it on October 20, 2020. The most recent elections on December 5, 2020 resulted in selection of 50 MPs from 395 hopefuls who took part in the democratic process. — KUNA

News in brief

Amir congratulates Bahraini King

KUWAIT: His Highness the Amir Sheikh Nawaf Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah congratulated Bahrain's King Hamad bin Issa Al-Khalifa yesterday on the occasion of the 21st anniversary of accession to the throne. In the cable, His Highness the Amir praised the achievements accomplished during his reign in all fields, wishing him good health and wellbeing, and the brotherly Bahraini people success and prosperity. His Highness the Crown Prince Sheikh Mishal Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah and His Highness the Prime Minister Sheikh Sabah Al-Khaled Al-Hamad Al-Mubarak Al-Sabah sent similar cables to the Bahraini King. — KUNA

Kuwait welcomes US recognition

KUWAIT: Kuwait's Foreign Ministry has welcomed the US recent recognition of Morocco's sovereignty over its entire territories. "This step aims to help reach a fair and lasting solution to the dispute over the Moroccan desert," the ministry said in a press statement on Sunday. It argued that the Kuwaiti move comes in line with its support to Morocco's sovereignty and territorial integrity. — KUNA

Relief flight to Sudan

KUWAIT: Kuwait Red Crescent Society (KRCS) announced yesterday a plane carrying 40 tons of relief supplies took off from Abdullah Al-Mubarak Air base to Sudan, to be delivered to the Sudanese people. Director of the Disaster and Emergency Department at KRCS, Yousef Al-Miraj, said the plane was in a framework of the humanitarian aid and efforts provided by Kuwait to the countries in need, especially in Sudan, which was recently exposed to floods as a result of heavy rains. He mentioned that the relief plane carries on board essential humanitarian needs, various relief materials, wheelchairs, medicines, clothes and blankets. — KUNA

Stay safe. Stay home. Stay informed.



Local

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Kuwait's COVID cases jump by 231, one new death

KUWAIT: Kuwait's Ministry of Health (MoH) registered yesterday 231 additional COVID-19 cases in a span of 24 hours, increasing the total number of infections to 146,449, while one new death recorded in the same period raised the death toll to 912. Earlier, the ministry confirmed 263 fresh recovery cases, which brought the total to 142,357 recoveries so far. Meanwhile, active cases amounted to 3,180 with 57 of them in intensive care units, MoH's spokesman Dr Abdullah Al-Sanad said. Health authorities conducted 4,963 swab tests in the last 24 hours raising the total to 1,185,625, he revealed. Dr Sanad urged everyone in Kuwait to adhere to precautionary measures against the virus. —KUNA



Zain receives six awards at Arab Media Forum's Creativity Award

Recognized in TVC Creativity, PR Creativity, Best Government App categories



KUWAIT: Zain, the leading digital service provider in Kuwait, announces it has received six creativity awards at the Arab Media Forum's 8th Creativity Award - that recognizes creativity by Kuwaiti organizations - in three categories: TVC Creativity, PR Creativity, and Best Government App. The event organized virtually over video conferencing, was held under the patronage of Secretary-General of the League of Arab States Ahmed Aboul Gheit and witnessed the presence many creative personalities in media and advertising from across the region, as well as many actors, artists, and public personalities from the GCC and the wider MENA region.

During the virtual ceremony, Zain received a total of six awards, four of which came under the TV Commercial Creativity category for its most celebrated TVCs of the year: Ramadan TVC, National Celebrations TVC, Eid TVC, and its recent TVC on the heroic role of mothers during the pandemic. Zain also received an award in the Best Government App category for "Shlonik" app, which the company developed during the pandemic along with the Ministry of Health and the Central Agency for Information Technology (CAIT). Lastly, Zain's flagship operation in Kuwait received the PR Creativity award, which was presented to Zain Kuwait's Chief Corporate Communications and Relations Officer Waleed Al-Khashti.

Zain won a TVC Creativity Award for its tele-

vision commercial (TVC) to mark the commencement of the Holy Month of Ramadan, which immediately amassed significant interest on social media platforms, with the 2.35 minute-long commercial being the most searched and viewed Arabic content across social media platforms at the time, exceeding 12 million views on YouTube within its first week, and almost 40 million views to date.

The concept behind Zain's Ramadan TVC, which is entitled 'Zain's Consolation', and has also become known as 'God will not forsake us', is based on offering a message of hope in the midst of the current exceptional circumstances brought on by the Coronavirus pandemic. The shocking effects of the virus across the globe made the TVC's comforting words to resonate even more deeply with highly

TVCs receive millions of views

appreciative viewers. Words such as, "God will not forsake us" and "He'll make us richer than to need anything" within the accompanying soundtrack to the commercial offered an air of hope and optimism for people enduring hardships during this difficult time.

'Zain's Consolation' did face technical challenges when being produced. Major national lockdowns around the world made it difficult for crew members to communicate, travel, and film the footage. Crew members had to excuse themselves for the project, though the Zain team overcame these challenges to ensure the project was completed and the message of hope was shared.

The TVC's original idea was generated by Zain's team in Kuwait, while the videography crew members originated from Egypt. The TVC was produced by Joy Productions in Kuwait and directed by Samir Aboud from Lebanon. The lyrics were written by Heba Hamada, and the music was composed by Kuwait's Bashar Al Shatti, while the TVC's music arrangement was performed by Michel Fadel, the mix and master by Rabea Saydawi with vocals by Rama Rabbat.

Zain also won a TVC Creativity Award for its National Day TVC, which reached over two million views during the first 10 days of its launch on the company's official YouTube channel in commemoration of Kuwait's national celebrations.

As it does every year in February, Zain the company produces a TVC celebrating Kuwait's National and Liberation days. The production, which reflected national values and pride, featured a number of Kuwait's most prominent personalities who helped raise the name of Kuwait in various areas, and showcased many of Kuwait's historical achievements from both the past and the present.



Zain's national production was honored to feature many prominent Kuwaiti personalities who contributed to shaping the country's art, sport, and cultural scenes.

The TVC's idea centered around showcasing many of Kuwait's historical feats from both the past and present, such as holding the first parliament in the Arabian Peninsula, being the first Asian Arabian country to reach the World Cup finals, building the first cafe that gathered the people with their rulers to discuss political and economic issues, producing "Bas Ya Bahar", which is the first GCC film to receive 9 international awards, being the first GCC country to establish an official television station, and many more other honorable achievements.

Zain takes this opportunity to express its gratitude to everyone who contributed in making this national production a success, especially the TVC's stars: singer Abdullah Al-Ruwaished, Kuwait National Football Team's star Jassem Yaqoub, media presenter Majed Al-Shatti, and actress Mariam Al-Saleh. Zain also thanks the entire team of young Kuwaiti talents who worked behind the scenes, including lyricist Yousef Al-Shatti, historian Fahad Al-Abduljalil, Director Salim Al-Turk, Composer Bashar Al-Shatti, Music Distributor Rabea Saydawi, Turkish musician Ismael Tonch Blak, Joy Production's team headed by Mai Al-Saleh, and PH All Over Group's team.

This recognition comes in light of Zain's distinguished advertising and media involvement, and further showcases the company's role as a leading private sector company launching distinguished marketing and advertising campaigns all year round. Zain will continue supporting this very important field which carries significant and informative messaging to the public at large and the communications world as a whole, whether through traditional or modern media tools.

KRCS distributes winter clothes to cleaning workers

KUWAIT: Kuwait Red Crescent Society (KRCS) distributed yesterday 1,500 bags containing winter clothes to cleaning workers in Sabhan, as part of its winter campaign. This campaign targets workers with limited income, KRCS's Secretary General Maha Al-Barjas said. The society, she added, was keen on showing appreciation to workers specially during cold weather. The distribution of warm clothes, said Barjas, aimed at protecting cleaning workers from cold weather thus preventing health problems. Maryam Al-Adsani, head of KRCS's Domestic Assistant Department, thanked the donors for providing the clothes. —KUNA



KUWAIT: Firemen from five different fire stations put out a blaze reported in an aluminum plant in Rai yesterday. Firefighters were able to prevent the flames from spreading to a nearby garment factory. No injuries were reported, and an investigation was opened to reveal the cause of the fire.

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Elderly Ethiopian refugees in Sudan long for home

US Electoral College to confirm Biden win as Trump fights on

Page 7

Page 6



TUNIS: In this file photo taken on Dec 6, 2016, Tunisian lawyers with national flags shout anti-government slogans during a demonstration against a draft 2017 budget that would impose a public sector pay freeze, outside the Tunis law court. —AFP

Tunisia's revolution remains unfinished

Few reforms of security forces, economy rife with nepotism

TUNIS: Tunisians may have overthrown dictator Zine El Abidine Ben Ali a decade ago but, with few reforms to the country's security forces and an economy rife with nepotism, its revolution is far from achieving its goals. Ben Ali fled the country on Jan 14, 2011, with only a few members of his family and his closest aides leaving with him. The police, the backbone of his rule, stayed largely intact.

Oula Ben Nejma, who led investigations for Tunisia's Truth and Dignity Commission (IVD), said only 54 interior ministry staff had been sacked in 2011, along with a handful of others two years later. "They were neither put on trial nor punished," she said. "Others have seen their careers continue to develop, including people under investigation... for crimes committed under Ben Ali."

Following the revolution, some officers were handed heavy sentences for torture, and the state security agency, notorious for torture in the interior ministry's jails, was dissolved. Tunisia's 2014 constitution redefined the role of the police in a democracy, and for a time, NGOs were allowed to make unannounced visits to Tunisian prisoners. But after this brief opening, "the demons of the past came back", said Sihem Bensecdrine, the former head of the IVD.

The body was set up after the revolt to investigate rights violations under both Ben Ali and Tunisia's first post-independence president Habib Bourguiba, as well as to hold perpetrators to account and rehabilitate their victims. But police unions formed since have applied political pressure to protect their own, sometimes raiding the offices of judges investigating alleged abuses.

'Kamikaze political courage'

Special courts were launched in 2018 to judge 1,400 people on accusations of murder, rape and torture. But police have hobbled the process, while almost all the officers summoned have refused to appear. The IVD, whose mandate ended in 2018, recommended creating an independent police watchdog and an intelligence service answerable to parliament. Neither have been created.

While torture is no longer practiced systematically,

since 2013, the World Organization Against Torture has documented 500 victims and says those responsible enjoy "almost total impunity". A string of deadly jihadist attacks in 2015 put a brake on efforts to strengthen the rights of suspects, with security services again given wide-ranging surveillance powers, and a state of emergency that has stayed in place since.

And rather than improving police training or work conditions, political leaders have repeatedly tried to pass a law bolstering officers' impunity when they use force - although they have backed down after a public outcry. Still, "it would take almost kamikaze political courage" to fully reform the police and justice systems, said analyst Selim Kharrat, citing their deep political connections.

Holding back change

The judiciary was heavily politicized under Ben Ali. Today, the most publicly visible magistrates from his era have mostly been sacked - but nothing has been done to hold corrupt judges to account. In its final report last year, the IVD called for measures to strengthen the independence of magistrates and administrative courts, a subject that featured heavily in the 2019 presidential election.

One of the frontrunners in the vote, media mogul Nabil Karoui, was imprisoned for much of the campaign on charges of money laundering and tax evasion dating back several years. The timing of his arrest stoked accusations of misuse of the justice system. Tunisia has won plaudits for its democratic transition, its free elections and new liberal constitution, contrasting sharply with the civil wars and ever-more-repressive dictatorships that have taken hold in other countries hit by Arab Spring uprisings.

But reform of Tunisia's economy and the reduction of gaping inequalities remain a big issue. "We have made civil and political rights a priority, but we have neglected economic and environmental rights," said Kharrat. There has been growing public debate on "crony capitalism", the system "in which family conglomerates retain control over one of the main inhibitors to change", he said.

Italy on Jan 14, 2011 - the same day Ben Ali took flight to Saudi Arabia. Belhassen flew in a private jet to Canada and lived in a plush Montreal apartment until 2016. When he was denied asylum, he simply disappeared.

After three years on the run, Belhassen was arrested in March 2019 in the south of France. He remains under judicial supervision while French courts examine whether to extradite him for trial in Tunisia, with a new hearing set for Dec 16. He is accused of fraud, embezzlement and laundering criminal proceeds.

Imed Trabelsi

Imed, a nephew of Leila Trabelsi, was arrested as he attempted to flee to France the day the regime fell. The most prominent Trabelsi to have faced trial in Tunisia, he was sentenced to 100 years in prison, including on multiple charges of corruption. In 2017, he apologized on national television for the endemic corruption under Ben Ali, describing how the clan bribed and bullied its way to monopolies on everything from the real estate sector to banana imports. Trabelsi said he "apologized from the bottom of my heart" and offered to pay back his ill-gotten gains, but he remains in prison. Two other brothers of Leila Trabelsi have died in jail: Moncef and Mourad.

The in-laws

Sakher El Materi, ex-husband of Nessrine Trabelsi, was often seen as Ben Ali's favorite son-in-law and potential successor. After the revolution, he sought refuge in the ultra-rich Gulf state of Qatar, but was expelled and headed to the Seychelles. The Indian Ocean nation gave him residency in 2013, a decision Tunisia called "unacceptable". In 2017, he proposed paying 500 million dinars in exchange for the right to return to Tunisia. The government did not respond. El Materi's father, army officer Moncef El Materi, was arrested on an international arrest warrant when a cruise ship he was aboard stopped in France in 2017. The following year a court rejected Tunisia's appeal for his extradition to face charges of money laundering.

Big players favored

Ben Ali's rule had adopted and expanded a system dating back to colonial times, granting certain families a free pass to operate in certain domains while other, less well-connected families were excluded - to the detriment of the country's development. Under the system, "the state can require trucking companies to have either a single truck or more than 18, ensuring that big players who were already established shared the market without competition," said Louai Chebbi, head of Alerte, an NGO which campaigns against the problem.

Each make of car can only be imported by a single agent, giving lucrative monopolies to groups such as Ennaki, formerly owned by one of Ben Ali's sons-in-law but bought in 2013 by another well-established family. Overlapping ownership of banks by family-owned conglomerates and the state make access to credit extremely difficult for players who do not already belong to the existing networks.

For example, start-ups working to launch mobile phone payment systems failed for lack of the required five million dinars (A1.5 million), a far higher requirement than in other countries. Once again, this played to the interests of established actors such as the banks or telecoms operators belonging to the state or to established families, Chebbi said. He added that such arrangements affect businesses of all sizes, perpetuating nepotism that excludes whole swathes of society from various business sectors.

And in a sign that Ben Ali's departure did not bring an end to bad habits, Tunisians say corruption has grown. Between 2010 and 2017, the country fell 15 places in Transparency International's global index of perceived graft. This phenomenon and the resulting economic stagnation - exacerbated by the coronavirus pandemic - has fanned nostalgia for the old regime, which carefully portrayed itself as an economic success. Radhouane Erguez, a consultant at think tank Joussour, warns that such nostalgia could even endanger Tunisia's democratic transition. "It could bring into question everything we have achieved on the political level," he said. —AFP

In birthplace of revolution, few jobs, little hope

SIDI BOUZID, Tunisia: Khouloud Rhimi sits sipping a latte with friends in Sidi Bouzid, ground zero of the Tunisian uprising, and laments 10 years of disappointment and economic woes. The town, which helped trigger a wave of revolts across the Arab world, now has a swimming pool, a plush new cafe where young men and women mingle, enjoying the complementary Wi-Fi, and freedom of speech. But Rhimi, 25, is unimpressed. "There are no jobs in Sidi Bouzid," she said.

It was unemployment, along with alleged police harassment, that prompted street vendor Mohamed Bouazizi to set himself alight outside a nearby government building on Dec 17, 2010. The act proved a tipping point for Tunisia's long-marginalized interior. Within weeks, vast demonstrations had spread to the capital and swept long-time dictator Zine El Abidine Ben Ali from power, setting off a domino-like string of revolts across the Middle East and North Africa.

Tunisia has been praised for its democratic transition with its first free and fair parliamentary elections in 2011 and presidential poll in 2014. But many in Sidi Bouzid say life in the past decade has become worse. "Lots of people we know have tried to get to Europe," said Rhimi. "Some have died at sea. Other people have set themselves on fire. Some people can't afford to eat."

Rhimi completed a professional diploma in computer science in 2015. But in a region where some jobs - in factories, clothes shops or agriculture, for example - pay just 150 dinars (euro46) a month, it took her four years to save start-up funds for a small restaurant. When she approached banks and micro-credit lenders for more, she was rejected. "There are so many conditions. They make it really difficult to get a loan," she said. "I started my project, but after six months I closed it down. I've been unemployed ever since," added Rhimi, currently an unpaid volunteer with civil society groups who continues to apply for public sector jobs.

Investors flee

Her story is a far cry from Rachid Fetini's early career. In 1990, two decades before the revolution, he returned from studying in France and established his first textile factory. "I had no experience in the world of business," he said. "But in one month I managed to set up a factory with 50 workers. After a year and a half, I had 300 staff." By the eve of the uprising, Fetini was a major employer with 500 staff. But "after the revolution, bit by bit, all my clients fled Sidi Bouzid," he said. "They were afraid."

Fetini bemoaned media coverage of the region as being perennially on strike, "which is not true at all". But he also blamed the lack of laws and government strategies to boost investment, as well as Tunisia's clunky, politicized bureaucracy. "There's a fratricidal struggle between political parties, which means that even local officials can't take decisions," he said. "Nobody dares sign a document without having political cover... just in case." —AFP

Cronies of Ben Ali: Where are they?

TUNIS: Ten years since an uprising toppled Tunisian dictator Zine El Abidine Ben Ali, his in-laws, who ran a mafia-like empire that once pocketed a fifth of national private sector profits, are scattered across the world. Few have faced justice. Here is an overview.

Ben Ali and Leila Trabelsi

After he was toppled and fled the country in 2011, Ben Ali was sentenced in absentia to decades in prison for ordering killings and torture during his rule and a bloody crackdown against the revolt. He was also found guilty of embezzlement, corruption and a string of other crimes. He died in September 2019 in exile in Saudi Arabia, and was quietly buried in the presence of his second wife, Leila Trabelsi, and their children.

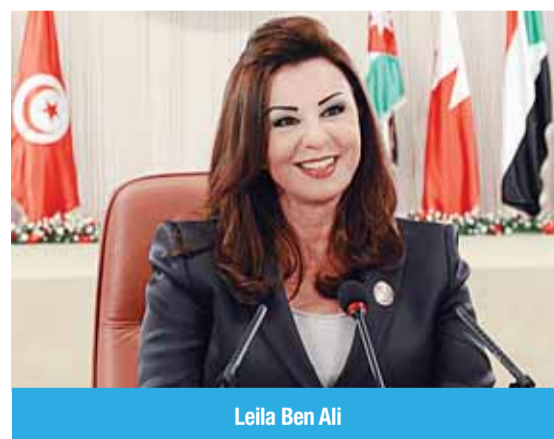
Trabelsi, nicknamed "the hairdresser" due to her modest beginnings, was one of the most-hated figures of the Ben Ali regime. Her family exploited her position to build a vast, corrupt business network. She and her young son live in Jeddah along with her daughter Nessrine, a divorcee who recently remarried to ostentatious Tunisian rapper K2Rhythm, before press reports that she had divorced again.

The Trabelsi clan

Trabelsi's brothers are suspected of having led her family's monopolization of the Tunisian economy. Under Ben Ali, they gradually came to dominate the retail, real estate, communications, media and car import sectors. The following are key figures:

Belhassen Trabelsi

A fabulously wealthy businessman described in a leaked 2008 US diplomatic cable as Ben Ali's "most notorious family member", Belhassen fled by yacht to



Leila Ben Ali

Marouane Mabrouk

The ex-husband of Cyrine Ben Ali, a daughter of Ben Ali from his first marriage, Mabrouk is a discrete but influential businessman. He and his brothers ran one of Tunisia's main conglomerates, with stakes in the local franchises of retail giant Monoprix, dealerships for Fiat and Mercedes, and banking interests. Accused of corruptly benefiting from ties with Ben Ali, in 2011 he saw some of his assets frozen. However, he was able to retrieve some, including his stake in French telecoms group Orange last year, after the European Union controversially lifted sanctions against him, paving the way for Orange to buy back his shares.

Slim Chiboub

The husband of Ben Ali's second daughter Dorsaf, Chiboub was formerly the head of popular football club Esperance de Tunis. After fleeing to the United Arab Emirates following the revolution, he returned in 2014 to settle accounts with the Tunisian judiciary. Chiboub spent a year in prison and reached a deal to pay back undue gains as well as paying a fine, in exchange for investigations against him being dropped. But he was arrested again this summer, accused of not paying the full amount. —AFP



SIDI BOUZID, Tunisia: Tunisian businessman Rachid Fetini gestures during an interview on Oct 27, 2020 at his empty textile factory. —AFP

International

Battered civilians in war-hit Tigray speak of horror as blackout lifts

Ethiopian army battles forces loyal to TPLF

ADDIS ABABA: Ethiopia said yesterday that power and phone connections had been partly restored in Tigray, where civilians spoke of deprivation, fear and violence in the troubled region after six weeks of silence.

Tigray has been under a communications blackout since November 4, when Prime Minister Abiy Ahmed ordered a major military offensive against the ruling party of the dissident northern region.

The shutdown, coupled with restrictions on access to the region, made verifying the situation on the ground difficult as the army battled forces loyal to the Tigray People's Liberation Front (TPLF). Abiy, the winner of last year's Nobel Peace Prize, visited the regional capital Mekele on Sunday for the first time since fighting began. He met with soldiers and said that damaged telecommunications and other key infrastructure were being repaired.

As the blackout lifted, civilians inside the city of half a million spoke of the joy of hearing loved ones for the first time in weeks—and their desperation at trying to locate others in areas still in the dark. "When communication came back, I felt really great, because family and friends from abroad and even locally, they were not sure whether I was alive or dead," said Mulubirhan Hailemariam, who spoke with AFP from Mekele.

"But I'm worried about my family in Adigrat," he added, referring to another city in Tigray where communications have not been fully restored.

People are being killed

The government said yesterday that mobile voice services had been restored to about half a dozen other cities besides Mekele, but that reliable power remained a problem outside the capital. "The lights came on Sunday, while on and off, telecom services were working since Sunday. My immediate family is safe, but I don't have information on the safety of other family members living in other parts of Tigray," said one woman, a business owner, who requested anonymity.

Abiy declared victory over the TPLF on November 28 with the capture of Mekele, which he said was achieved without incurring civilian casualties. But civilians in Tigray told AFP that soldiers patrolling the streets of the capital had violently enforced a dusk curfew.

Mozambique jihadists push masses to Pemba

PEMBA, Mozambique: The population has soared in Pemba, a northern Mozambique port known for its wide bay, but rather than tourists coming for a swim, the newcomers have fled Islamic extremists. In the past few months, boatloads of people with little but the clothes they wear have landed under the palm trees after their homes fell prey to Al-Shabab gunmen swearing allegiance to the Islamic State group (IS).

In October, the violent rebellion entered its fourth year and has reportedly killed more than 2,400 people and displaced half a million, according to the government. Their villages were torched, many men killed and many young women kidnapped. After seizing coastal zones that host natural gas installations, Islamist fighters have begun to push to the inland districts of Cabo Delgado province. The last official census put Pemba's population at more than 205,000, while more than 130,000 displaced people are estimated to have arrived. Local authorities are now struggling to provide basic social services. Mayor Florete Simba said.

He deplored "pressure on water, health centers, sanitation and mobility and territorial planning". Many refugees try to earn money by buying essential goods in bulk and selling them for a small profit, and a study is underway to determine how many displaced people have remained in Pemba. The major described being faced with "a huge challenge" that required "diverting existing resources to support the displaced. For example, we had to allocate vehicles to transport the displaced people from Pemba to their respective camps" and mobile toilets had to be installed in an old part of town that lies near the shore.



Displaced women attend a meeting at the Centro Agrario de Napala where hundreds of displaced arrived in recent months are sheltered, fleeing attacks by armed insurgents in different areas of the province of Cabo Delgado, in northern Mozambique. — AFP

US government confirms cyberattack

WASHINGTON: The US government confirmed Sunday that its computer networks had been hit by a cyberattack, as The Washington Post reported at least two departments had been targeted by Russian state hackers. "We have been working closely with our agency partners regarding recently discovered activity on government networks," a spokesperson for the



Ethiopian refugee children who fled the Ethiopia's Tigray conflict wait in a line for a food distribution by Muslim Aid at the Um Raquba refugee camp in Sudan's eastern Gedaref state. — AFP

"The Tigrayan people are being abused. In the evenings, in the name of law enforcement, people are being killed," said Mulubirhan, who alleged Eritrean soldiers were among the uniformed troops present in Mekele. "I personally attended the funeral of three people. But I know many more people that were killed by Ethiopian security forces, mostly soldiers, when they allegedly broke the curfew."

Zadig Abraha, Ethiopia's democratization minister, told AFP that any reports of extrajudicial killings by Ethiopian soldiers were "false".

War is just starting

Other Mekele residents contacted yesterday reported looting and arbitrary executions, as well as a drastic shortages of supplies, with shops boarded up and businesses yet to reopen. "The view in Mekele city is that the war is just starting and things are only going to get worse," said one man, who declined to be named, describing ongoing battles outside the city limits.

Vetting potential terrorists

On top of the infrastructure challenges, newcomers must be vetted given the risk that jihadists could be among them. "We have had situations of criminality... especially small-scale theft," the mayor said. "We have created a security committee, where we have our municipal police who, in coordination with the police of the Republic of Mozambique and local authorities track everyone who arrives."

In fact, a local resident told AFP: "On the beach, when the boats arrive, the police receive money" and let people through. Physically at least, terrorists "are people like us, so they should search everyone who enters," the resident insisted. Others say they have no choice but to take in entire families who really need support.

Sani Bernardo, 36, has lived in Pemba for 30 years and feels a moral duty to help those who land on the shore. "I have a displaced family at home. I am not sure how many there are, but there are many," she said. "We received them despite the difficulties" such as insufficient food supplies.

"As human beings we receive them without discrimination." Fulcane Saide, 25, works for a Pemba fishing company but was born and raised in Paquitequete, the neighborhood where the beach is, now home to thousands of displaced people. "Our parents are from these affected areas, so they are like family to us."

"We give shelter without fear because we are sure they need a place to stay. If they didn't, they wouldn't be here." Many of those displaced are gradually settling in, and using their skills to work in the local economy.

Suleimane Saide, 49, arrived three months ago and now works as a carpenter to feed his family, sculpting long fishing boats that line local beaches.

"They attacked my village and took my daughter. I came to Pemba and was welcomed by a family here," he said. "I still haven't forgotten what happened. I do not sleep. My head hurts. I think they should stop this war." — AFP

Abiy last week dismissed reports of ongoing hostilities as "sporadic gunfire" as the army hunts down militias and special forces allied to the TPLF. "We will continue apprehending the criminal clique," Abiy posted on Twitter late Sunday, accompanied by images of his visit to Mekele.

Abiy has resisted calls for mediation to end the conflict, which has left thousands dead, according to the International Crisis Group think tank, and driven 50,000 refugees into Sudan. Sudanese Prime Minister Abdalla Hamdok announced Sunday that Abiy had agreed to hold an urgent meeting of a bloc of East African countries to resolve the crisis, but Addis Ababa is yet to formally respond. State media reported at the weekend that the provisional administration appointed to oversee Tigray was urging civil servants and businesses to return to work yesterday. The head of the administration, Mulu Nega, was also quoted as saying that anyone in Tigray in possession of a weapon—legal or illegal—should turn it over to security forces by today.—AFP



Ethiopian Asafu Alamaya (left), a 80-year-old blind who fled the Tigray conflict, walks with her daughter at the Um Raquba refugee camp in Sudan's eastern Gedaref state. — AFP

Elderly Ethiopian refugees in Sudan long for home

UM RAQUBA, Sudan: As fighting raged and bombs rained down on Ethiopia's Tigray region, 80-year-old Asafu Alamaya begged her daughters to flee with their children to Sudan, and to leave her to die at home. Her daughters refused to abandon their blind, frail mother in their war-ravaged home town of Humera, however, as Prime Minister Abiy Ahmed's forces pressed a deadly military operation against Tigray's ruling party.

From Humera to the banks of the Sitet River that separates Ethiopia from Sudan, they held her by the hand and took turns carrying her when she could no longer walk. With the help of fellow refugees, they brought her across the water to safety. Asafu, who lost her eyesight five years ago, now lives in a makeshift shelter made from plastic sheeting and wood in Um Raquba refugee camp in eastern Sudan.

Every day, she weeps, wishing she could return home, where despite her age and condition she felt safe. "I heard the bombs," said Asafu, wearing a white and brown dress, her white hair cropped short.

"The road was very hard. But my children helped me, they carried me here."

Live together or die together

In Um Raquba, a sprawling, insalubrious camp that started welcoming refugees fleeing the Tigray conflict in November, her reliance on her daughters is total. "At this age, I shouldn't be here," Asafu told AFP as she finished a meal. "Here, I am just tiring my children out... If I were home, I wouldn't need anyone's help."

Seated by her side on a blue mat was her 47-year-old daughter Sandayo Saggai, who has seven children. "This is our mother. She breastfed us, she raised us," said Sandayo, who wore a blue and green dress and her hair in cornrow braids.—AFP

ment agencies during the Obama administration.

"The United States government is aware of these reports and we are taking all necessary steps to identify and remedy any possible issues related to this situation," National Security Council spokesman John Ulyot said. Russia's embassy in the US hit back later Sunday against what it said were the "unfounded" media claims, denying any role in the alleged attacks.

"Malicious activities in the information space contradicts the principles of the Russian foreign policy, national interests and our understanding of interstate relations," the embassy said in a statement on its official Facebook page. "Russia does not conduct offensive operations in the cyber domain." —AFP

News in brief

CureVac launches final trials

FRANKFURT: German biotech firm CureVac announced yesterday the start of final phase clinical trials for its coronavirus vaccine before seeking approval from regulators. The company said more than 35,000 people would take part in the tests in Europe and South America. "The first volunteer has been recruited," CureVac said in a statement. Germany is battling an explosion of new coronavirus infections and is imposing a partial lockdown from tomorrow. CureVac follows Germany's BioNTech which has already gained approval in the United States, Britain and Canada for its vaccine developed with US pharma giant Pfizer.—AFP

Canada rolling out COVID vaccine

OTTAWA: Canada will begin a roll-out of the Pfizer-BioNTech COVID-19 vaccine, just days after becoming one of the first countries to approve the treatment. The first shipment of the vaccine arrived in the country on Sunday night, with Prime Minister Justin Trudeau hailing the "good news." "But our fight against COVID-19 is not over. Now more than ever, let's keep up our vigilance," he said in a tweet. Trudeau has previously said the country will receive 249,000 initial doses of the vaccine this month, the first 30,000 doses of which were expected to have arrived yesterday.—AFP

Russia launches rocket 'successfully'

MOSCOW: Russia yesterday conducted a second launch of its new heavy-class Angara rocket—the first developed after the fall of the Soviet Union—nearly six years after its maiden voyage. Space agency Roscosmos announced that the next-generation Angara-A5 rocket had been "successfully" launched with a mock payload from Plesetsk in northern Russia at 0550 GMT. Twelve minutes and 28 seconds after the launch, "the orbital block consisting of the Breeze-M upper stage and the spacecraft's cargo mockup separated from the third stage of the carrier", Roscosmos said in a statement.—AFP

Gunman shot dead by New York police

NEW YORK: A man was shot dead by police after he opened fire near crowds who had gathered to watch carol-singing outside a New York church on Sunday. New York Police Department Commissioner Dermot Shea said no one was injured during the shooting on the steps of the Cathedral of St John the Divine in Manhattan. Three police officers fired a total of 15 shots at the man, Shea told reporters. "The defendant was struck at least once in the head and is deceased," he said. Police recovered two guns from the scene and a bag found nearby that had a full container of gasoline, rope, wire, and multiple knives.—AFP

Mostar, symbol of Bosnia's divides, to vote after 12 years

MOSTAR, Bosnia and Herzegovina: Nina Popovic has been eligible to vote for a decade but she has never had a say in the leadership of her Bosnian hometown of Mostar—a city that will hold its first local election in 12 years on Sunday. Twenty-five years after the signing of the Dayton Peace Agreement that ended Bosnia's war, Mostar is a symbol of the communal splits and broken politics that have haunted the Balkan state ever since. Predominantly Catholic Croats and Muslim Bosniaks in the city are represented by nationalist parties that have been unable to agree on a legal issue. This has led to a failure to hold an election and meant the city of 100,000 people has not had a local council since 2012.

The delay is "a sad truth and not a source of pride, but I still have hope that it will be better afterwards", Popovic, who works in a puppet theatre, told AFP of her belated chance to vote.

The agreement that made the December 20 poll possible came about largely thanks to the work of Irma Baralija, a political scientist who fought for her right to vote in court. The 36-year-old sued her country at the European Court of Human Rights, which ruled in October 2019 that she was a victim of "discrimination" and ordered the Bosnian state to organize municipal elections in Mostar.

"This verdict showed that every individual is important and can bring about change," Baralija, energetic and smiling, said. "Everyone can now make an individual choice also to choose a new name on 20 December." Building on the strength of her court victory, Baralija is running in the race as the leader of Nasa Stranka (Our Party), a rare multi-ethnic party in a country still divided between the Bosniak, Croat and Serb communities who clashed in the 1990s war. Baralija, a Bosniak, has been campaigning in both parts of the city and dreams of reviving the old Mostar that existed before the 1992-95 conflict carved it up.—AFP

Cybersecurity and Infrastructure Security Agency told AFP. "CISA is providing technical assistance to affected entities as they work to identify and mitigate any potential compromises." The Post said the hacks were linked to an attack last week on cybersecurity firm FireEye, which said its own defenses were breached by sophisticated attackers who stole tools used to test customers' computer systems.

FireEye said it suspected the attack was state-sponsored. US media reports also said the FBI was investigating a group working for the Russian foreign intelligence service, SVR, and that breaches had been taking place for months.

The same group also reportedly hacked US govern-

International

US Electoral College to confirm Biden win as Trump fights on

50 states and District of Columbia certify Nov 3 election result

WASHINGTON: Long a mere formality, a vote by members of the Electoral College was poised to formally recognize Joe Biden as the next US president has taken on unusual import this year with Donald Trump stubbornly refusing to admit defeat.

The results of the November 3 vote have been certified by each of the 50 states and the District of Columbia: the Democrat won with a record 81.3 million votes, or 51.3 percent of those cast, to 74.2 million, and 46.8 percent, for the Republican president. But in the United States, the occupant of the White House is chosen by indirect universal suffrage, with each state allocating its electors—whose numbers are essentially based on population—to the candidate who carried the state.

The results confirm an easy victory for Biden, with 306 of the 538 electoral votes, to 232 for Trump, with 270 required for election.

Electoral College members were meeting to formalize the process, though the electors actually meet separately in each state. Biden will then deliver a speech in the evening to celebrate the latest confirmation of his win and “the strength and resilience” of US democracy—a clear jab at Trump’s unprecedented stance.

Electors are local political officials or activists, civil society figures or friends of candidates. Most are unknown to the wider public, though national personalities occasionally take part—like Hillary Clinton, who lost to Trump in the 2016 election but who will vote in New York to confirm President-elect Biden and Vice President-elect Kamala Harris.

No Trump concession

Although there have been a few “faithless electors” in past years—who cast votes for someone

other than the candidate who won their state—there have never been enough to change an election outcome. So Biden’s victory will become all the more official today.

But Trump, still the legal occupant of the White House until January 20, has continued to make baseless assertions that the November vote was the “MOST CORRUPT ELECTION IN US HISTORY,” as he tweeted yet again on Sunday.

He added: “How do states and politicians confirm an election where corruption and irregularities are documented throughout?” In fact, his campaign has not been able to document any widespread fraud, and its legal challenges to the vote—in dozens of suits, heard by scores of judges—have virtually all been dismissed, often in scathing language.

An ultimate humiliation

In an ultimate humiliation, the US Supreme Court—despite having a conservative majority assured by three Trump appointees—on Friday bluntly refused to even consider two Republican challenges to the vote. Large numbers of Republican lawmakers are on record as backing Trump’s false claims of fraud.

Some may finally be willing to recognize Biden’s victory once the Electoral College ratifies it.

But with polls showing that as few as one in four Republican voters accept the election results as valid, Trump is not expected to give in anytime soon.

“WE HAVE JUST BEGUN TO FIGHT!!!” he tweeted. This weekend, when asked on Fox News whether he would attend Biden’s inauguration on January 20 — as demanded by protocol and centuries of tradition—the former real estate magnate

students were “in the hands of the bandits” and how many had managed to escape. “The school has a population of 839 and so far, we are yet to account for 333 students,” Masari told a federal government delegation in his office on Sunday.

“We are still counting because more are still coming out of the forest,” said the governor.

“Up till this moment, no one can give a precise figure of the children abducted,” he said, adding that students who escaped confirmed some of their peers were taken.

Masari directed the school to take a headcount of the students to determine those who went back home.

Cowardly bandits

Osama Aminu Maale was one of the students who escaped the abductors and returned to his parents. “There were a total of 520 of us that were taken by the gunmen from the school,” the 18-year-old student told AFP on the phone. “After they took us away we stopped inside the bus where they made the older students take a headcount. We counted 520,” he said.

The hostages were split into groups before Maale and four others escaped. “One of the gunmen hit me repeatedly when I failed to keep up with the rest of the group due to my failing health before he let me trail behind, giving me the chance to escape,” he said.

tion lawmaker Xavier Jayakumar told AFP.

However, as well as the health minister and human resources minister, one opposition MP who should have been quarantining also turned up in parliament in protective gear. The parliament speaker insisted safeguards had been taken, including having the lawmakers transported in an ambulance and placed in a special room, state news agency Bernama reported.

He rejected attempts to stop the vote, and the nine-month-old government easily won after the walkout. Most MPs had already backed the main budget vote last month, a victory for embattled Prime Minister Muhyiddin Yassin whose parliamentary coalition holds a wafer-thin majority.

But officials need to win several more crucial votes related to specific parts of the spending bill. Muhyiddin seized power in March without an election after the collapse of a reformist coalition, but his government is highly unstable and has been accused of lacking legitimacy. —AFP

into self-isolation,” said an army statement late Sunday. “Comprehensive testing of all participants commenced immediately,” it added.

By Sunday, a total of 417 personnel had been tested with 26 confirmed positive cases.

All who attended the conference had gone into self-isolation, while those who tested positive started medical treatment. Nigeria has reported a spike in virus infections in recent weeks, sparking fears of a second wave of the pandemic. Africa’s most populous nation recorded 3,820 fresh Covid-19 cases last week. According to the Nigeria Centre for Disease Control, such a high figure was last reported between July 19–25 when 3,870 new cases were tallied.

Lask week’s figure represents a 142 per cent

the blaze. The fire on the world’s largest sand island, off Australia’s east coast, destroyed large swathes of the island’s forests before heavy downpours arrived over the weekend. “With the help of welcome rainfall and a massive response from crews, the fire is now contained,” Queensland Fire and Emergency Services tweeted on Sunday. Attention has now turned to the large weather system that brought the much-needed rain—and with it, strong winds and the possibility of flooding to roughly 500 kilometers (300 miles) of the east coast.

“Many of the impacts from this weather event will be similar to a category one cyclone event,”



WILMINGTON: US President-elect Joe Biden (right) and Vice President-elect Kamala Harris (second left) react as confetti falls with Jill Biden (right) and Douglas Emhoff after delivering remarks in Wilmington, Delaware in this November 7, 2020 file photo. —AFP

snapped, “I don’t want to talk about that.”

The president might yet seek to use America’s drawn-out transition process in one last attempt to reverse the outcome: some elected officials allied with Trump have speculated about contesting the result on January 6 when Congress is to formally

validate the Electoral College tally.

Such a maneuver is given virtually no chance of succeeding. Regardless, Trump’s struggle against a repeatedly confirmed result seems sure to leave Biden facing a steep challenge with the country more divided than ever. —AFP

Nigeria steps up rescue efforts for abducted students

KANO, Nigeria: Nigerian authorities on Sunday stepped up efforts to rescue students abducted by armed men who raided their hostels. UN children’s agency UNICEF condemned the assault on the school in Katsina, the home state of President Muhammadu Buhari.

Gunmen on motorcycles stormed the Government Science School at Kankara late on Friday and engaged security forces in a fierce gun battle, forcing hundreds of students to flee and hide in surrounding bushes and forest. State governor Aminu Bello Masari, who visited the school on Saturday, said soldiers were working to locate and free the hostages.

“Soldiers are currently in the bushes fighting the bandits. We will do all we can to ensure all the abducted children are reclaimed,” he said. National police spokesman Frank Mbas said “additional operational and investigative assets to support the ongoing search and rescue operations in Kankara” had been deployed.

Masari said it was still not clear how many

Malaysia ministers vote in parliament in protective gear

KUALA LUMPUR: Two Malaysian ministers who should have been quarantining after being exposed to coronavirus voted in parliament in protective gear yesterday, triggering an opposition walkout. The politicians came into contact with Covid-19 patients earlier this month, but officials allowed them to partake in a key budget vote—provided they wore gowns, face masks, shields and gloves.

But the sitting quickly descended into pandemonium, with opposition MPs shouting out in protest and most deciding to leave the chamber rather than cast their votes. “It is a black day for democracy in Malaysia because there is no rule of law,” opposi-

26 Nigerian generals COVID-19 positive

LAGOS: At least 26 Nigerian generals have tested positive for the novel coronavirus after they attended a conference in the nation’s capital and one has died, the army said.

Testing was ordered following the death of major-general John Irefin during the 2020 Chief of Army Staff Annual conference in Abuja last week. “The Chief of Army Staff directed the immediate suspension of the conference and all participants were directed to move

Storms help Australia contain UNESCO heritage island fire

BRISBANE: Australian firefighters have managed to control a bushfire that burned more than half of the UNESCO world heritage-listed Fraser Island, around two months after a suspected illegal campfire sparked



Boko Haram fighters in Nigeria in a video produced by the group. —AFP

Since the attack, all secondary schools in the state have been shut. UNICEF in a statement on Sunday said it “condemns in the strongest possible terms this brutal attack and calls for the immediate and unconditional release of all children and their return to their families”.

The global children’s body said it was “deeply concerned about these acts of violence”.

“Attacks on schools are a violation of children’s rights. This is a grim reminder that abductions of children and widespread grave violations of children’s rights continue to take place in northern Nigeria.” UNICEF commended the Nigerian government for deploying security forces to rescue the students. —AFP



KUALA LUMPUR: Opposition party politicians walking out of a parliament session after ruling party lawmakers who had been required to be in quarantine due to contact with someone with a case of the COVID-19 came to the session wearing full personal protective equipment at the Malaysian Parliament in Kuala Lumpur. —AFP

increase from the previous week’s 1,607 cases.

Nigeria had seen a drop in infections since the start of October with a daily average of less than 200 cases. Health authorities fear Nigeria might not be able to cope with a second wave because of weak health facilities and poorly equipped and unmotivated personnel. Health minister Osagie Ehanire has blamed rising infections on people failing to uphold preventive measures like mask-wearing, hand-washing and physical distancing.

He has directed health authorities to reopen isolation and treatment centers which had been closed as case numbers fell. The virus has so far infected 73,175 people and killed 1,197 in the west African country with a population of 200 million. —AFP

Queensland Emergency Services Minister Mark Ryan told public broadcaster ABC. Strong winds and rain are hitting tourist hotspot the Gold Coast, as well as Byron Bay, where the town’s famed beach is at risk of severe erosion.

The storms come just over a week after a heat-wave swept through much of the region, sending temperatures soaring to 35 degrees Celsius (95 degrees Fahrenheit) in some areas. Scientists say climate change is fuelling more extreme weather in Australia—including droughts, bushfires and cyclones—which will only worsen as global temperatures rise. —AFP

News in brief

14 dead in migrant shipwreck

CARACAS: The Venezuelan government said Sunday it had found 14 bodies after a ship carrying migrants bound for Trinidad and Tobago was wrecked en route. The government said in a statement that 11 bodies were found by a Coast Guard patrol on Saturday afternoon, and “today, following up on the events that occurred, we found 3 dead, 2 adult males and 1 female on the beach.” The Trinidadian Coast Guard had said Saturday that Venezuelan authorities informed them that “11 bodies had been recovered that day in waters near the Venezuelan coastal town of Guiria,” in the northeastern state of Sucre. —AFP

NZ may open to Australians

WELLINGTON: New Zealand hopes to open a travel bubble with Australia by April next year and is working to finalize the necessary anti-coronavirus border measures, Prime Minister Jacinda Ardern said yesterday. Ardern said New Zealand’s cabinet had agreed “in principle” to open a trans-Tasman travel bubble in the first quarter of 2021 provided there are no major virus outbreaks in either country. “It is our intention to name a date for the commencement of quarantine-free trans-Tasman travel in the new year, once remaining details are locked down,” she told reporters. —AFP

WHO sees health center water crisis

GENEVA: One in four health centers worldwide lacks access to water, putting around 1.8 billion people at increased risk of contracting the coronavirus, the World Health Organization said yesterday. The lack of this basic amenity endangers patients and staff alike at such centers, the WHO said in a joint report with the UN children’s agency UNICEF. The study was based on data from 165 countries. “Working in a healthcare facility without water, sanitation and hygiene is akin to sending nurses and doctors to work without personal protective equipment,” said WHO chief Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus. —AFP

Arrests at Paris demo denounced

PARIS: Several rights groups and journalists’ unions on Sunday denounced what they said were “arbitrary arrests” by Paris police at the latest protest against a controversial security bill a day earlier. Officers arrested 150 people at the march and rally, the third protest over consecutive weekends, the last two of which were marred by violence. A statement by several rights groups and the SNJ journalists union condemned “mass arrests, unjustified charges breaking up the procession” and the detention of people beyond the legal limit “for no legitimate reason”. —AFP

Two Indians kidnapped in Nigeria

LAGOS: Police in southwest Nigeria on Sunday warned foreign nationals to be vigilant days after gunmen kidnapped two Indian workers in the region. Gunmen seized the two men on Wednesday as they drove out of a pharmaceutical firm in Ibadan, the capital of Oyo state. They out the rear tyres of their vehicle to force it to stop. State police spokesman Olugbenga Fadeyi said in a statement the force was making a “concerted effort” to find and rescue them, but did not say if the kidnappers had made contact with the families. “All expatriates are advised to be vigilant and be watchful especially during this period,” he said. Security agencies should be alerted about “any suspicious movement around their facilities”, he added. —AFP

Business

TUESDAY, DECEMBER 15, 2020

EU sees 'narrow path' to Brexit deal

Key sticking points remain after both sides abandon deadline

BRUSSELS: EU negotiator Michel Barnier yesterday signaled there was a "narrow path" to a post-Brexit trade deal with Britain, as key sticking points remain after both sides abandoned a supposed make-or-break deadline. British Prime Minister Boris Johnson and EU chief Ursula von der Leyen pledged to "go the extra mile" on Sunday as they side-stepped a self-imposed cut-off point to end talks if there was no progress towards a pact.

EU chief Ursula von der Leyen expressed satisfaction yesterday over talks with Britain to agree a post-Brexit trade pact, saying there was progress as negotiators entered the "last mile".

"First of all there is movement. That is good... We are talking about a new beginning with old friends," she told a conference organized by the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD). "We are on the very last mile to go. But it is an essential one. We want a level playing field, not only at the start, but also over time," she added. "This is the architecture we are building. We are fine about the architecture itself, but the details in it-do they really fit? These are crucial points because it is a matter of fairness, fair competition and we want to ensure that."

Her comments came as EU and British officials were set to return to the negotiating table yesterday after von der Leyen and British Prime Minister Boris Johnson agreed to abandon a supposed make-or-break weekend deadline.

French Finance Minister Bruno Le Maire had in a radio interview earlier warned that in the event of a no deal in the trade talks "the losers will be the British. We don't lose much."

Johnson insists it remains "most likely" that Britain will crash out of the globe's largest single market on World Trade Organization (WTO) terms by year's end as the two sides spar over regulating future standards and fishing. But von der Leyen yesterday said "there is movement. That is good".

An EU diplomat said following a briefing from Barnier that "there might now be a narrow path to an agreement visible - negotiators can clear the remaining hurdles in the next few days". "There has been some progress in the negotiations over the last few



LONDON: Pedestrians walk past a BTier 2 Coronavirus information displayed on an electronic advertising board at a bus stop in central London yesterday. — AFP

days, but - sometimes substantial - gaps still need to be bridged in important areas like fisheries, governance and level playing field," the diplomat said.

An EU source said there had been "fragile" progress.

Serious blockages

The source said there had been steps towards determining a mechanism to regulate future divergences in standards, but that there were seriously blockages "on all fronts" on the issue of fishing rights.

"If there is progress on fishing then we could have an agreement in the coming days," the official said. Barnier was set to sit down in Brussels with his British

counterpart David Frost for the latest round of talks aimed at thrashing out a deal before Britain leaves the EU's single market on December 31.

The chief EU negotiator said on Twitter that "the next few days are important" if a deal can be found and insisted the two sides had a "responsibility to give the talks every chance of success".

Von der Leyen and Johnson have not set a new deadline as the definitive end date looms in just 18 days and there are fears that the talks could go right to the wire. Irish Prime Minister Micheal Martin, whose country stands to be hit hard by a no-deal, told RTE that the "real end deadline is New Year's Eve, although I think both sides are very possessed of

the need to try and get outcomes to these negotiations in the next number of days".

France's Europe Minister Clement Beaune said he did not expect the negotiations to go "beyond the coming week" as any deal would still need to be signed off by the 27 EU member states and British parliament. Key log-jams remains over on a raft of thorny issues and a second EU diplomat said there were "serious difficulties" on fishing rights, with London adamant it wants to assert full rights over its territorial waters.

Reports said that there had been some progress on determining a mechanism to regulate any future divergences in standards between the two sides, but work was still to be done. Britain insists it will not be tied in perpetuity to rules it claims would be set by Brussels. "Any deal that we get with the EU has to respect the fact that we are a sovereign country, we are an independent country and that's the basis on which we will do a deal if there's a deal to be done," Britain's Business Secretary Alok Sharma told journalists yesterday.

"Of course we are continuing to talk, that's what people expect. Where there is life there is hope." Britain left the EU in January and has been in a standstill period until the end of this month while both sides try to agree the terms of their new relationship.

Without a deal, cross-Channel trade will revert to World Trade Organization rules, with tariffs driving up prices and generating paperwork for importers, and the failed negotiation could poison relations between London and the continent for years to come.

In London, the government insists that Britain is ready to leave the union and handle its own affairs after 47 years of close economic integration. Downing Street even says it has mapped out "every single foreseeable scenario" for problems after December 31, and "no one needs to worry about our food, medicine or vital supply chains".

The government says it is ready to offer hefty new support for sectors in the firing line such as farming and autos, but British business groups are aghast at the lack of clarity on future trading rules. — AFP

Europe-Iran forum put off after outcry over execution

PARIS: Organizers have postponed a major forum on business between Iran and Europe due to begin yesterday in the wake of an outcry over the execution at the weekend of opposition figure Ruhollah Zam. The three-day Europe-Iran Business Forum had been due to kick off with keynote remarks by Iranian Foreign Minister Mohammad Javad Zarif and EU foreign policy chief Josep Borrell, followed by a panel with EU ambassadors.

But the holding of the event caused controversy coming two days after the execution of Zam, who ran a social media channel popular during 2017 protests. The hashtag #BoycottEuropeIranBusinessForum trended on Twitter and several activists spoke out against the online event taking place. "The organizing committee of the Europe-Iran Business Forum has decided to take the exceptional step of postponing the conference," the organizers said in a statement late Sunday.

"The European and Iranian business communities continue to see significant potential and value in commercial exchanges," they added, expressing hope the conference would take place in the near future. The French foreign ministry had said on its Twitter account that following the "barbaric and unacceptable execution" of Zam its ambassador to Tehran, as well as those of Germany, Austria and Italy, were cancelling their participation in the forum. "#nobusinessasusual," it said in a hashtag. Christian Buck, the German foreign ministry's director for the Middle East, also confirmed on Twitter that EU member states' envoys would not take part.

Zam was hanged on Saturday after Iran's supreme court upheld his death sentence passed in June over his role in protests during the winter of 2017-18, among other charges. The dissident, who ran a Telegram channel widely followed in the protests, had lived in Paris for several years after being given refugee status and residency in France. But activists say he was held after travelling to Iraq from Paris in October 2019 in circumstances that remain unclear, with some campaigners accusing Tehran of abducting him.

The German foreign ministry said in a statement Sunday it was shocked by the circumstances surrounding Zam's conviction "particularly by the... kidnapping from abroad".

Iran's foreign ministry on Sunday had summoned Germany and France's envoys to protest EU condemnation of his execution. The postponing of the business forum is a major blow to proponents of improving engagement with Iran through encouraging trade and commerce.—AFP

French central bank sees recovery taking longer

PARIS: The French central bank said yesterday that it expects the country's economy to recover more slowly than previously and return to its pre-pandemic level only in mid-2022. The forecast is based on the COVID-19 pandemic not dying down immediately and widespread vaccination not being achieved before the end of 2021.

The Banque de France now sees economic output falling by nine percent this year, with a rebound of five percent in 2021. Three months ago the bank forecast a drop in GDP this year of 8.7 percent followed by 7.4 percent growth next year.

Reddit snaps up Tik Tok rival Dubsmash

LOS ANGELES: Reddit has acquired the Tik Tok-like app Dubsmash, both companies said Sunday, as big tech moves to carve out territory in the lucrative short-form video-sharing market. In a statement, Reddit said it had been drawn to Dubsmash—which reports over a billion video views a month—because of its commitment to diversity and promoting under-represented voices.

"Both Reddit and Dubsmash share a deep rooted respect for how communities come together," Reddit CEO Steve Huffman said. "Dubsmash elevates under-represented creators, while Reddit fosters a sense of community and belonging across thousands of different topics and passions," he added.

News of the deal comes as big tech scrambles to acquire space in the massive video-sharing app market following the success of TikTok, which is now under sustained pressure from the US government over its Chinese ownership. Dubsmash, which allows users to lip-sync to popular music or dance along to their favorite songs, has been described by tech press as the "number two" video-sharing app online.—AFP



In this file photo Reddit Inc co-founder and CEO Steve Huffman speaks during a hearing with the House Communications and Technology and House Commerce Subcommittees on Capitol Hill in Washington, DC. — AFP

Since then France has been swept by a second wave of the novel coronavirus that prompted authorities to reintroduce restrictions on movement and the closure of certain businesses. That provoked an 11 percent drop in activity in November from the same month last year, with activity expected to be eight percent lower in December given the partial relaxation of confinement measures adopted by the government for the holiday period. The central bank sees France's economy continuing to grow at a five percent rate in 2022 and then slow to a rate above two percent in 2023.

Despite the foreseen recovery in the economy the Banque de France expects unemployment to jump higher as firms which have so far held on finally collapse. It expects unemployment to jump to 11 percent during the first quarter of 2021, and fall to nine percent by the end of 2022. France's unemployment rate was around eight percent, using international survey methods, before the pandemic hit Europe at the end of the first quarter. —AFP

Britain braces for Brexit no-deal

LONDON: Prime Minister Boris Johnson has said Britain should prepare for a "no-deal" Brexit, even as UK and EU negotiators indicated a last-minute free trade agreement could be reached. With just over two weeks to go until Britain leaves the EU single market, preparations have been stepped up as fears grow about the impact of customs checks and congested ports.

Fresh food

A no-deal would mean Britain trading with the EU on World Trade Organization terms, with tariffs and quotas. "The most immediate impact arising from a no-deal is likely to be food supplies, where there probably will be some shortages and some price rises," Jonathan Portes, professor of economics and public policy at King's College, London, told AFP. With supply chains uncertain, the British Retail Consortium trade association said Sunday that supermarkets were increasing stocks of tinned goods, dried pasta and toilet rolls. Concerns are rising over the supply of perishable fresh fruit and vegetables, much of which is imported from EU countries.

Justin King, former boss of supermarket giant Sainsbury's, told BBC radio on Monday that "fresh food can cope with a blip", but not "persistent, pervasive delays." "That's the thing people are worried about."

Traffic jams

New customs checks on goods moving between Britain and the EU will put huge pressure on ports and the surrounding roads. The government has carried out dummy runs as part of its two contingency plans, Operation Brock and Operation Fennel, for Kent, south-east England. Under Operation Brock, moveable road barriers will be used to separate normal traffic from lorries to keep major roads flowing into ports such as Dover and Folkestone, and the Channel Tunnel. Up to 7,000 lorries could end up log-jammed, according to official planning figures, and if there are more than 2,000 queued up, the government has made plans for several temporary lorry parks. Operation Fennel will kick in if the congestion becomes more serious, and allows for 7,000 heavy goods vehicles to be diverted to a disused airfield.



PARIS: French President Emmanuel Macron (right) welcomes OECD's Secretary General Angel Gurría (left) prior to a meeting marking the 60th anniversary of the creation of the Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) at the Elysee palace in Paris yesterday. — AFP

Economic uncertainty

Business have been urged to plan for a no-deal and secure supply chains. But as talks drag on, they are still in the dark about how trade will be conducted with Britain's biggest export market.

"There are two sorts of uncertainty," said Portes. "One is uncertainty about what the rules are, and another uncertainty is about whether, actually, the new systems that are being put in place are going to be up to the job." "The best guess at the moment is that there will be some disruption but it won't be catastrophic. "However, deal or no-deal, the medium- to long-term economic consequences of major new trade barriers with the EU are going to be very significant."

Aviation

Britain will no longer be part of the European Common Aviation Area, which allows airlines to fly between Britain and the EU, in the event of a no deal. The European Commission has proposed a six-month deal to allow flights to continue but Britain has not yet responded.

Fishing

A totemic issue during talks, despite representing only a fraction (less than 0.1 percent) of Britain's economy, fishing threatens to be a flashpoint should negotiations break down. Britain will regain full control of its fishing waters without a deal, and has readied armed Royal Navy patrol vessels to police the coast against EU trawlers. The European Commission proposed extending the deadline to reach a fishing deal until the end of 2021, allowing fishing in each other's waters for another year. But Britain has said it "would never accept arrangements and access to UK fishing waters which are incompatible with our status as an independent coastal state".

Irish border

New customs checks between EU member Ireland and the British province of Northern Ireland threaten the reimposition of a "hard border", which is feared will disrupt the terms of the peace agreement reached in 1998 following decades of violence. Britain and the EU last week reached an "agreement in principle" on issues including border control posts and the supply of medicines, although details have not yet been published.—AFP

Business

Japan's business confidence picks up after virus plunge

Manufacturers upbeat after govt approves \$700 billion in fresh stimulus

TOKYO: Confidence among major Japanese manufacturers has recovered further after plunging on pandemic woes to its worst level since the global financial crisis, a key survey showed yesterday.

The Bank of Japan's December Tankan business survey—a quarterly poll of about 10,000 companies—showed a reading of minus 10 among big manufacturers, after recording minus 27 in the previous survey and minus 34 in the June survey. The latest figure compared with a market consensus estimate of minus 15. The June figure was the lowest since June 2009 when worldwide financial shocks hammered the planet's third-largest economy.

The short-term business sentiment survey reports the difference between the percentage of firms that are upbeat and those that see conditions as unfavorable. A negative reading means more companies are pessimistic than optimistic. It is considered to be the broadest indicator of how Japan Inc. is faring.

The latest reading comes after the government last week approved more than \$700 billion in fresh stimulus to fund projects from anti-coronavirus measures to green tech, the country's third such package this financial year. "The sharp rebound in the Q4 Tankan supports our view that Japan's economy will rebound relatively swiftly from the dislocation caused by the pandemic," said Tom Leamouth, Economist at Capital Economics in a commentary.

Japan officially exited recession last month after three quarters of contraction, but the world's third-largest economy now faces a spike in Covid-19 infections, with record numbers of new cases reported in recent weeks. The latest survey also comes ahead of the Bank of Japan's two-day monetary policy meeting from Thursday, which is widely expected to keep the current monetary easing tools but also likely to extend its special measures in response to Covid-19.

"We think the BoJ will explain that the economy continues to need policy support, especially with higher uncertainty due to the arrival of a third wave of infections," UBS economists Masamichi Adachi and Go Kurihara said in a report. Confidence among big non-manufacturers improved to minus 5 — against a market consensus of minus 6 — after logging minus 12 in September.

The latest figures show a steady recovery from the low of minus 17 in June, but are still well below the March figure of plus 8. Japan was struggling with the effects of natural disasters and a hike in consumption tax even before the pandemic crippled the global economy.

Once it hit, there were no mandatory lockdowns in the country, with the government instead asking people to stay at home—a request that was largely heeded. But that, coupled with a shuttering of the country's borders, battered tourism and consumer spending, with the hospitality industry hit particularly hard. —AFP



TOKYO: The Tokyo Tower is seen at night in the Japanese capital yesterday.— AFP

Indonesia wants to lure SpaceX to build rocket launch site

JAKARTA: Indonesia has invited Tesla boss Elon Musk to build a launch site for his SpaceX's rocket in the Southeast Asian country, pointing out the benefits of a location next to the equator, officials said. "Indonesia has several areas located near to the equator," Jodi Mahardi, spokesman of Coordinating Maritime Affairs and Investment Ministry, said yesterday.

"The cost of SpaceX's rocket launch will be lower because its satellite won't need any manoeuvring to adjust its orbit to the equator," he added. President Joko Widodo officially extended the invitation to the world's second-richest person in a telephone conversation on Friday.

Indonesia's space agency announced last year a plan to build its first spaceport on the island of Biak, off the north coast of the island of New Guinea and has been in talks with foreign partners. SpaceX last week launched a prototype Starship rocket from Texas which it hopes will be used for Mars missions. The rocket crashed on landing but Musk was upbeat, saying they got all the data they needed from the experimental flight.

Musk and Widodo, along with Coordinating Minister for Maritime Affairs and Investment Luhut B. Pandjaitan, also discussed investment opportunities for Tesla in Indonesia, according to a press statement. The pioneering electric car company is reportedly eyeing Indonesia's large nickel reserves, a key component for its batteries.

"Tesla CEO Elon Musk responded to the invitation of Indonesian President Joko Widodo by planning to send his team to Indonesia in January 2021 to explore all the opportunities for this collaboration," the ministry statement said. However, Mahardi said no exact date had been confirmed. —AFP



Kazakhstan oil majors paid \$1.3m to settle dispute

NUR-SULTAN, Kazakhstan: Kazakhstan declared a long-running profit-sharing dispute over a giant oil field settled yesterday after a consortium led by energy majors agreed to pay the Central Asian country \$1.3 billion. Operators Royal Dutch Shell and Italy's Eni each hold stakes of 29.25 percent at Karachaganak, a giant gas condensate field

in the northwest of the energy-rich country.

Smaller stakes are held by Chevron Corp, Lukoil and Kazakhstan's KazMunayGas. Kazakhstan said the consortium had agreed to pay it a \$1.3 billion cash settlement in addition to finalizing the terms of production sharing.

The energy ministry said the new terms of the agreement should offer Kazakhstan an extra \$600 million through to 2037 if oil prices stay in the \$40-50 per barrel range. The Karachaganak project has been plagued by disputes for more than a decade. The latest disagreement dates back several years when Kazakhstan filed a claim against the majors for \$1.6 billion. An energy ministry official said last year that the government had rejected a \$1.1 billion offer from the consortium to settle. —AFP

Buggy Cyberpunk 2077 shaves billions off company stock

WARSAW: Video game maker CD Projekt RED has lost billions in value since the ill-fated launch of its much-hyped Cyberpunk 2077 title last week, yesterday stock figures showed.

Rollled-out worldwide on Thursday and reported to be one of the most expensive video games ever made, the dystopian-themed Cyberpunk 2077 triggered a backlash from gamers who complained it was riddled with bugs, performed poorly on standard consoles and even risked triggering epileptic seizures. CD Projekt Red plunged 15.6 percent in early trading yesterday on the Warsaw Stock Exchange (WSE) before starting to inch back up.

The company's stock value sank to 32.3 billion zloty (\$8.8 billion, 7.2 billion euros) yesterday, down from 42.7 billion zloty last week prior to the Cyberpunk 2077's launch. The company issued apology yesterday

Tech giants will need to inform EU of takeover plans

PARIS: Tech giants will need to inform the European Union ahead of any planned mergers or acquisitions under tough new regulations set to be unveiled this week, the bloc's industry commissioner Thierry Breton said yesterday. The EU is set to present today its new Digital Services Act and its accompanying Digital Markets Act to lay out strict conditions for internet giants to do business in the 27 countries.

The biggest tech firms will be designated internet "gatekeepers", subject to specific regulations to limit their power over the market. "We're going to require big platforms to notify us before they make an acquisition" as part of the new regulations, Breton told France Inter radio. Google, Facebook, Apple and Amazon, and maybe others, will almost certainly be slapped with the designation. There has been growing concern among European and US regulators that the big tech firms have used purchases as a way to nip in the bud potential rivals.

Examples include Facebook's acquisition of Instagram and Whatsapp as well as Google's purchase of YouTube and Waze. Breton said the prior notification requirement would be a world first and was squarely aimed at the gargantuan firms whose client bases and market capitalizations "give them a predatory capacity" over other firms. The EU believes that much like big banks that were deemed "too big to fail" and subjected to special oversight by financial regulators following the 2008 financial crisis, so too should big tech firms. "Because when one is very big there are greater responsibilities," Breton said. He added, "My role is to set rules, and if they are not adhered to there will be sanctions."

But Breton also warned that if these sanctions are repeatedly not respected "they could ultimately result in a breakup". The proposals will go through a long and complex ratification process, with the EU's 27 member states, the European Parliament, and company lobbyists and trade associations influencing the final law. —AFP



vowing to "fix bugs and crashes" with patches in January and February and offered refunds to gamers who are not willing to wait. The game's release had been delayed twice this year and CD Projekt RED was forced to add health warnings last week after one reviewer complained it had caused an epileptic seizure.

Last week the company said it was looking into a "more permanent solution" to tackle the health risk "as soon as possible". Despite the problems, entertainment rating website Metacritic has given Cyberpunk 2077 a score of 90 out of 100 based on 54 reviews, describing it as "an open-world, action-adventure story set in Night City, a megalopolis obsessed with power, glamour and body modification."

Ratings by gamers posted on the site were, however, less upbeat, with Cyberpunk 2077 earning a score of 6.9 out of 10 as of yesterday based on reviews from 14,819 users. CD Projekt RED spent an estimated 1.2 billion zloty (\$328 million) to make Cyberpunk 2077, according to analysts at Polish bank BOS, which would make it one of the most expensive games ever made.

The company rose to global prominence five years ago thanks to its hugely successful "The Witcher: Wild Hunt", a somber fantasy whose monster-slaying hero is endowed with superhuman powers. —AFP

Euro stocks, sterling advance on Brexit talks extension

LONDON: Europe's main stock markets and sterling advanced yesterday after Britain and the European Union agreed to extend talks on a post-Brexit trade deal past a self-imposed deadline.

In late morning deals, London shares rose 0.4 percent but gains were capped by the strong pound, which weighs on profits of dollar-earning multinationals listed in the British capital. The market was also tempered by a 6.0-percent drop in AstraZeneca shares, after the drug-maker agreed Saturday to buy US biotech firm Alexion for a hefty \$39 billion (32.2 billion euros), sparking investor concerns about the high price tag. Frankfurt stocks jumped 1.2 percent and Paris gained 1.1 percent in early afternoon eurozone deals.

Go the extra mile

"European equity markets are showing gains as British-European trade discussions continue," said CMC Markets analyst David Madden. Prime Minister Boris Johnson and EU chief Ursula von der Leyen said after a crisis call that they would "go the extra mile" to find common ground in long-running talks between Brussels and London. "Our negotiating teams have been working day and night over recent days," said von der Leyen, reading a joint statement agreed with Johnson as their Sunday deadline passed, with sticking points on issues including fishing rights and fair trade regulations. "We have accordingly mandated our negotiators to continue the talks and to see whether an agreement can even at this late stage be reached."

The news gave the pound a boost against the dollar and euro, though Johnson warned a deal was far from sure with less than three weeks until Britain leaves the single market on December 31.

"I'm afraid we're still very far apart on some key things, but where there's life there's hope," he said.

The talks between the EU and Britain were showing "some progress", according to OANDA analyst Craig Erlam. "It does seem like some progress is being made and with neither side willing to be the ones to call off the talks: a minute-to-midnight compromise looks likely," Erlam said. "This is a negotiation after all and there's nothing to be gained by showing your hand at this point."

Digging heels in

Investors are also keeping tabs on Capitol Hill, where lawmakers are still battling to hammer out a fresh stimulus for the beleaguered US economy, with hope they can reach a deal before the end of the year.

However, with both sides digging their heels in, analysts said there were worries about their chances of success. Still, the rollout of vaccines is keeping traders optimistic, even as surging infections force governments to impose strict containment measures, with Germany the latest to announce a lockdown.

US regulators gave the go-ahead for the use of the Pfizer-BioNTech vaccine on Friday and officials said 20 million Americans could receive a first of two required injections by the end of the year and 100 million by March. —AFP



NEW YORK: A woman walks past the New York Stock Exchange (NYSE) and 'Fearless Girl' statue at Wall Street in New York City.— AFP

Business

UK set for talks with France's EDF over building \$26.4bn nuke plant

Project delayed by pandemic, drew flak from environmental activists

LONDON: Britain said yesterday it will hold talks with French energy giant EDF concerning the construction of a nuclear power plant on England's east coast, in a project reportedly worth £20 billion (\$26.4 billion, 22 billion euros). EDF had submitted an application in May to build the 3.2-gigawatt Sizewell C nuclear plant, which is situated in Suffolk, but it ran into criticism from environmental campaigners-while plans were delayed by the pandemic.

"The government has... confirmed that it is to enter negotiations with EDF in relation to the Sizewell C project in Suffolk as it considers options to enable investment in at least one nuclear power station by the end of this parliament" in 2024, it said in a statement. "If the project proceeds, it could create thousands of new jobs during construction and operation."

The statement said the negotiations will strive to reach conditions that would ensure value for any money invested and that all relevant approvals would be secured before any final decision is taken on whether to proceed. "The successful conclusion of these negotiations will be subject to thorough scrutiny and needs to satisfy the government's robust legal, regulatory and national security requirements," said the statement.

EDF is working alongside long-standing partner China General Nuclear Power Corporation (CGN) to build nuclear power plants in Britain. The French group

said in May that Sizewell C will generate low-carbon electricity to power six million homes-but Greenpeace had argued that there were more cheaper and safer alternatives than nuclear. Construction of the plant would create 25,000 jobs and 1,000 apprenticeships, while the operational power plant would employ 900 staff. Britain, which will host the UN's next major climate summit COP26 in the Scottish city of Glasgow next year, announced the EDF talks in its Energy White Paper. The document set out the government's plans to meet its goal of net zero emissions by 2050.

Business minister Alok Sharma stressed yesterday that EDF has not yet been given a "green light" for construction. "We are starting negotiations with EDF, which would be the developer at Sizewell C," Sharma told BBC Radio 4.

"What this is not is a green light on the construction, so what we will be doing is looking to see whether we can reach an investment decision in this parliament on that particular project."

"We will only do so if this delivers value for money for taxpayers and consumers." EDF is also working alongside China's CGN in the construction of a nuclear power plant at Hinkley Point, in southwest England. Sizewell comprises two power plants: Sizewell A, which opened in the 1960s and shut in 2006. Sizewell B, which opened in 1995, is still in operation. — AFP



In this file photo taken on June 27, 2019, a man works in the hearth of the nuclear reactor building at the Tricastin nuclear power plant owned and operated by French energy company EDF in Saint-Paul-Trois-Châteaux, southern France. — AFP

KIB reveals winners of first five KIBPay campaign draws

KUWAIT: Kuwait International Bank (KIB) recently announced the winners of KIBPay November monthly draw in an event held at the Bank's headquarters on December 8th, 2020, in the presence of the representative of the Ministry of Commerce and Industry. Among the winners, Ali Hamza Abbas Akbar won the monthly prize of KD 1,000, while 8 KIB customers won the weekly prize worth KD 250, the winners of the first weekly draw were Meteb Khaled Meteb AlRashidi, Farid Shawki Habshi Gerges, while the second weekly draw winners were Saad Faisal Hamad Al-Owayhan and Ahmed Mustafa Shaar.

In addition, Sami Ghanem Ghaith Al-Suwayit and Sayed Yousef Mahdi Mortada Behbehani won the third weekly prizes, while Abdulaziz Shaker Badran Al-Ahmad and Meshal Kamikh Naif Al-Mutairi were the lucky winners of the fourth weekly prizes. The Bank announced that cash prizes will be credited into the winning customers' accounts within 10 business days from the date of the draw.

Launched last November and valid until January 2021, KIBPay campaign aims to the users of KIBPay service eligible to enter the weekly draws, with a chance to win KD 250 in addition to entering the monthly draw of KD 1000. In case the customer wins any prize in the weekly or monthly draws, he/she shall also be entitled to participate and/or win the next draws, whether weekly or monthly.

Commenting on the draw, Othman Tawfeq, General

Manager of KIB's Retail Banking Department said: "This campaign comes as part of our commitment to provide a variety of marketing campaigns and rewards in line with our customers' interests throughout the year. KIB constantly strives to reward its customers and provide them with the best services and offers, which is important pillar of our efforts to provide a unique banking experience for our customers, allowing them to benefit from our various services and products as well as great opportunities to win valuable prizes."

Tawfeq further noted that all KIBPay customers still have an opportunity to win the next weekly and monthly draws, stressing that they are entitled to enter the weekly draw once they receive KD 200 or more via KIBPay and credit it into their account within the specified period for each draw. "The customer's eligibility to enter these draws essentially depends on the total number of transfers received and credited into the customer's account via KIBPay at a total of KD 2,000 or more within the specified period for each draw. However, customers will not be entitled for any more opportunities if they receive any amount in excess of KD 200 via KIBPay. In addition, amounts deducted from or transferred between the customers' accounts with KIB do not qualify them to enter the draw," he added. It serves to note KIBPay is a fast and secure e-banking service that allows KIB customers to receive money in seconds through two ways, either through "In-App" or by "Sharing" a message through an external App (WhatsApp, email, SMS) with a KNET link.



Othman Tawfeq

Gulf Bank announces winners of Al-Danah weekly draw

KUWAIT: Gulf Bank held its weekly Al-Danah draw on 13th December 2020 announcing the names of the winners for the week of 6 - 10 December 2020. The weekly draw consists of five winners who receive KD 1,000 each, every week.

The winners this week are:

Ahmad Waleed Abdulhameed Al-Qallaf
Omran Ahmed Gholoum Ashkanani
Zinab Katea Nasser
Mohammad Saoud Namshan Alnamshan
Ghouson Fahed Abdulla Alzouman

Al-Danah is now offering its biggest prize yet, with an annual draw prize of KD 1,500,000. The annual draw will be held on 14 January 2021. Gulf Bank encourages customers to increase their chances of winning with Al-Danah by depositing more into their Gulf Bank accounts using the new ePay (Self-Pay) service, which is available on Gulf Bank's online and mobile banking services.

Al-Danah offers a number of unique services to customers, including the Al-Danah Deposit Only ATM card, which allows account holders to deposit money into their accounts at their convenience. Account holders can also calculate their chances of winning the draws through the 'Al-Danah Chances' calculator available on the Gulf Bank website and app. Furthermore, loyal Al-Danah customers are rewarded with loyalty chances. Loyalty chances are the total chances accumulated from the previous year, which are added to the customer's chances the following year. Therefore, the total chances earned by Al-Danah customers in 2019, have been added to their 2020 chances, and the same process will take place in 2021, and so on. Terms and conditions apply.

Gulf Bank's Al-Danah account is open to Kuwaiti and non-Kuwaiti residents of Kuwait. Customers require a minimum of KD200 to open an account and the same amount should be maintained for customers to be eligible for the upcoming Al-Danah draws. If the customer's account balance falls below KD 200 at any given time, a KD 2 fee will be charged to their account monthly until the minimum balance is met. Customers who open an account and/or deposit more will enter the weekly draw within two days.

time, despite shareholder pressure, so investors might see AstraZeneca as a bit of a sap for pitching up with a 45-percent premium.

"It is also an immunology-focused business which will stick out like a sore thumb against the rest of AstraZeneca's portfolio." Markets.com analyst Neil Wilson added that shares sank "seemingly on fears (that) it's paying too much". But Wilson added that the high price tag was "probably not that significant when you consider the sector and the cash flow generation and revenue growth that it will bring".

Since taking the helm at AstraZeneca in 2012, Chief Executive Pascal Soriot has pushed the group

KFH launches 'Opening Bank Account Online' service

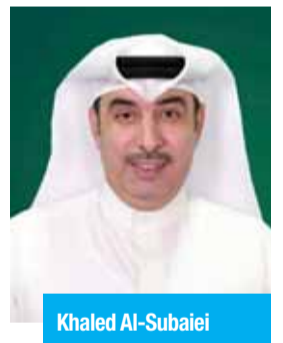
KUWAIT: Kuwait Finance House (KFH) announced the successful launch of the digital service "opening bank account online" for new customers, citizens and residents within minutes without having to visit the branch. The Acting General Manager of Retail Banking at KFH - Khaled Al-Subaiee said that, in line with the financial technology strategy (FinTech), the new service allows new KFH customers who do not have any bank accounts at the bank, to open a bank account online through the KFHonline Application on mobile.

The service is tailored as per the highest levels of ease and safety, with the implementation of the electronic signature, through the digital signature service in collaboration with the Public Authority for Civil Information. Al-Subaiee added in a press release that KFH completed all necessary procedures, tests, and required regulatory approvals, before launching the service.

He praised the collaboration with the AION digital banking platform, which provides a set of unique features, including verification of official scanned documents, scanning and copying of digital documents, facial recognition and customer matching using the latest technologies.

He illustrated that KFH is moving forward in its innovation approach and digital transformation strategy for KFH banking services, in efforts to give customers exceptional banking experiences.

Al-Subaiee pointed out that the service is available to citizens and residents in the State of Kuwait, starting from the age of 17, according to the bank's terms and conditions. He explained the collaboration with AION, which teamed up with (KFH-Bahrain) to launch the "Jazeel" digital platform. Jazeel banking provides the service of opening bank accounts in Bahrain remotely without the need of visiting the branch, and within minutes without the hassle of traveling, for citizens of the Gulf Cooperation Council countries residing in the Gulf, along with a package of the best digital banking solutions.



Khaled Al-Subaiee



ABK congratulates winners of salary transfer draw

KUWAIT: Al-Ahli Bank of Kuwait (ABK) announced the names of the final winners for the month of December for the "Transfer your Salary and Find Reasons to Smile" monthly draw campaign, held on December 10th 2020, under the supervision of the Ministry of Commerce and Industry. The lucky winners who will each receive the equivalent of their monthly salaries are:

Roshan Varghese Varghese and
Ulka Avinash Jadhav

The salary campaign offers ABK salary account customers a range of exceptional rewards. Kuwaiti salary account holders received cash gifts up to KD 1,000 provided they transfer a salary equivalent to/or higher than KD 500. Moreover, Kuwaiti customers are eligible for a 0 percent interest loan of up to KD 10,000 and expatriates up to KD 5,000. These loans are subject to ABK's terms and conditions, as well as the Central Bank of Kuwait's regulations and policies.

For more information about the Salary Campaign and other ABK products kindly visit eahli.com or contact an ABK customer service agent via 'Ahlan Ahli' at 1899899.

CBK bonds and related Tawarruq

KUWAIT: The Central Bank of Kuwait (CBK) announced the most recent issues of CBK bonds and related Tawarruq at a total value of KD 290 million for three months with a rate of return at 1.125 percent.

AstraZeneca shares slide on doubts over \$39bn deal

LONDON: Shares in British pharmaceuticals group AstraZeneca slumped yesterday on investor doubts over a gigantic \$39-billion (32.2-billion-euro) purchase of US biotech firm Alexion, analysts said.

AstraZeneca, which is finalizing a vaccine against Covid-19, announced the vast acquisition on Saturday in order to boost its work on immunology. The blockbuster transaction is the largest M&A deal in the global pharmaceutical sector since the start of the deadly Covid-19 pandemic.

In early afternoon London deals, the company's share price dived 6.9 percent to 7.595 pence. That made AstraZeneca the biggest faller on London's benchmark FTSE 100 stocks index, which rose 0.3 percent on hopes of a Brexit trade agreement. Both the boards of Alexion and AstraZeneca agreed to the deal, which values Alexion at \$175 a share-a premium of 45 percent to the Boston-based company's closing price on Friday.

"You would think AstraZeneca could do without any distractions as it looks to address some of the skepticism which has built up around the COVID vaccine developed in partnership with Oxford University," said Russ Mould, investment director at online broker AJ Bell. "Perhaps that's why the market has taken exception to its \$39-billion cash-and-shares bid for US biotech Alexion, with the company also taking on lots of debt to fund the deal."

"Alexion has failed to attract a suitor for some



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Lifestyle | Features

British spy thriller author **John le Carre** dies aged 89

John le Carre, the British writer best known for his Cold War espionage novels "Tinker Tailor Soldier Spy" and "The Spy Who Came In From The Cold", has died aged 89, his agent and family said Sunday. The author, a former British intelligence officer whose real name was David Cornwell, wrote 25 novels and one memoir in a career spanning six decades, selling 60 million books worldwide. His wife of nearly 50 years, Jane, and sons Nicholas, Timothy, Stephen and Simon, said in a statement that he died on Saturday night after a short battle with pneumonia. "We all grieve deeply his passing," they said, thanking staff at the hospital in Cornwall, southwest England, for their care. "We know they share our sadness," they added.

"Tinker Tailor Soldier Spy" was adapted for television in 1979, with Alec Guinness starring as the enigmatic spy-catcher George Smiley, and became a classic. Gary Oldman reprised the role in the 2011 film, winning an Oscar the following year. "All who follow are in his debt," Oldman said in a statement. "His characters were drawn deftly and deeply... For me, inhabiting George Smiley remains one of the highpoints of my life." His friend, the novelist Robert Harris, called le Carre "one of those writers who really was not only a brilliant writer but he also penetrated popular culture-and that's a great rarity".

Harris told Sky News television "The Spy Who Came In From The Cold" was a "masterpiece". "It's an incredibly engrossing tale and very deep, and it transformed the writing of spy fiction. It was a brilliant, psychological portrait of spying and of betrayal and of the



In this file photo taken on January 30, 2020 British author John le Carre (David John Moore Cornwell) poses after receiving the Olof Palme Award 2019. — AFP

decline of British power." Stephen King, the best-selling US author, called le Carre "a literary giant and a humanitarian spirit". Jonny Geller, le Carre's literary agent, said: "His like will never be seen again, and his loss will be felt by every book lover, everyone interested in the human condition." And historian Simon Sebag Montefiore said he was heartbroken at the death of a "titan of English literature".

Tailor's shop

Le Carre's life could have been the stuff of fiction and he once said he owed his career in the shadows and later literary success to an "impulsive adolescent decision" to flee an unhap-

py home life. It involved a spell in Bern, Switzerland, learning German, where he took his first steps in British intelligence, doing odd-jobs across the border in Austria. From Switzerland, he returned to Britain to study at Oxford University, then went on to teach at the elite Eton school before joining MI5, the country's domestic intelligence agency, in the late 1950s. He later transferred to the overseas spy agency MI6, serving in the West German capital Bonn, where he witnessed the building of the Berlin Wall.

It was as an MI6 officer that he had his first success with "The Spy Who Came in from the Cold" in 1963. For obvious reasons, he had to use a pseudonym. "I was asked so many times why I chose this ridiculous name, then the writer's imagination came to my help," he told The Paris Review in 1996. "I saw myself riding over Battersea Bridge (in London), on top of a bus, looking down at a tailor's shop... and it was called something of this sort-le Carre."

Big Pharma to Brexit

If Cold War intrigue and its tense, often bleak backdrop made his name and his books best-sellers, le Carre found new subject matter and a litany of characters and causes as the world changed. They included arms dealers, Russian gangsters, financiers and Big Pharma, which he portrayed in the 2001 novel "The Constant Gardener", later adapted into a film starring Ralph Fiennes and Rachel Weisz.

Despite his establishment education and career, le Carre-a traditionalist who admitted he could not type and wrote

John le Carre's life in dates

October 19, 1931: Born David Cornwell in the southern English coastal town of Poole in Dorset.

1936: Olive Cornwell flees the family home, leaving the young le Carre to be raised by his father Ronnie, a tyrant and conman who was jailed twice for fraud.

1948 to 1956: Studies French and German in Bern in Switzerland, where he begins his espionage career, before moving to Oxford.

1954: Marries Alison Sharp, with whom he has three sons before their divorce in 1971.

1958: Starts working for MI5, British Security Service, and writes "Call for the Dead", his first novel.

1960: Begins working for MI6, the Secret Intelligence Service, while Second Secretary of the British Embassy in Bonn, West Germany.

1963: Publication of "The Spy Who Came in from the Cold", his second novel and his first written using his John le Carre pen name.

1964: Forced to resign from MI6 after his identity is compromised by double agent Kim Philby, and from this point devotes himself completely to writing.

1974: Publication of "Tinker Tailor Soldier Spy", the first installment of le Carre's magnum opus Karla trilogy, followed by "The Honourable Schoolboy" in 1977 and "Smiley's People" in 1979.

January 2003: Publishes in The Times a diatribe against Bush's America entitled "The United States has gone mad".

2017: Publication of "A Legacy of Spies", his 24th novel.
October 2019: Publication of his final novel "Agent Running in the Field".
December 12, 2020: Dies of pneumonia in Cornwall. — AFP

by hand-often railed against it. He turned down a knighthood and was suspicious of literary honors. An avowed Europhile, he was also an outspoken critic of Brexit, and at the last general election in 2019 told AFP that Britons should "join the resistance" against Prime Minister Boris Johnson. "My England would be the one that recog-

nizes its place in the EU," he told a US interviewer in 2017. "The jingoistic England that is trying to march us out of the EU, that is an England I don't want to know." — AFP



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



US saxophonist Lee Konitz



Bronx rapper Fred



Comedian Tim Brooke



Exiled Chilean writer Luis Sepulveda



Comedian Tim Brooke

Celebrity deaths from coronavirus

Youth and fashion

US boy band member Chris Trousdale, former Dream Street star, died in June aged 34.

Japanese fashion pioneer Kenzo Takada died in Paris on October at 81.

Showbiz

Charley Pride, the first black superstar of country music, died in Dallas on December 12, aged 86. Controversial film director Kim Ki-duk, the enfant terrible of Korean cinema, died the previous day aged 59.

Bronx rapper Fred the Godson died aged 35 in April.

British rapper Ty, 47, died in May.

Also in May, Roy Horn, of Las Vegas magic legends Siegfried and Roy, died aged 75.

Dave Greenfield of British punk band The Stranglers died in May at 71.

Jazz men

US saxophonist Lee Konitz died on April 17 aged 92.

US pianist Ellis Marsalis-the father of trumpeter Wynton Marsalis-died on April 1 aged 85.

Sax star Manu Dibango of Cameroon, 86, died March 2.

Literature and leaders

Former French President Valery Giscard d'Estaing died on December 2 aged 94.

Exiled Chilean writer Luis Sepulveda, 70, died on April 16.

US playwright Terrence McNally of "Kiss of the Spider Woman" fame died at 81 March 2.

Former Republic of Congo president Jacques Joaquin Yhombi Opango died on March 30 at 81.

Indigenous leader and Amazon defender Paulinho Paikan died aged 65 in June.

British comedians

"The Goodies" star Tim Brooke-Taylor, 79, died in June.

Eddie Large, 78 died in April.

Bobby Ball, 76, died in October.

Serial killers

British serial killer Peter Sutcliffe who murdered 13 women died at 74 after testing positive though immediate cause of death was given. — AFP

WhatsApp recordings throw lifeline to Sahel artists

Ali Traore, dressed in black, sits down to record in his lively courtyard in Mali's capital Bamako, with children frolicking on the dirt ground between parked mopeds and stray jerrycans. He starts to strum an acoustic guitar and sing of his longing for the desert dunes around his native Niafunke, a town in the centre of the turbulent Sahel state. A drummer sitting on an indigo-blue mat beside him keeps the beat on a calabash, as Traore, 26, breaks into a smile mid-song. He is recording the jam session on his smartphone and will later send the file via WhatsApp to his producer in Portland, in the US west-coast state of Oregon.

"A label from Mali can't take you to the United States or to do international tours," says Traore, explaining his interest in working with Sahel Sounds. The record label specialises in Africa's semi-arid Sahel, a vast and often lawless region with a rich musical tradition, focusing on artists predominantly from Mauritania, Mali, Senegal and Niger. Sahel Sounds usually cuts vinyl records, but in January it decided to release monthly EPs online which artists record on mobile phones, and send to Portland over WhatsApp.

The lo-fi method has proved a surprising success, removing studio costs and earning some of the participating artists handsome sums from fans who pay to download tracks. For talented artists from remote areas-sometimes without the credit cards or PayPal accounts needed to market music online themselves-it also offers a way to showcase their music. "It's essentially an experiment to see how can we break down these barriers of entry for artists in West Africa," Sahel Sounds founder Christopher Kirkley says of the project, dubbed "Music from Saharan WhatsApp". Many countries in the region rank among the world's poorest, and a brutal jihadist conflict raging in Mali, Burkina Faso and Niger also aggravates economic woes.

Virus boost

The WhatsApp recordings began



The musical group "Espoir de Niafunke" is seen while they repeat along with a group of friends through the streets of Bamako.

before coronavirus struck, much as it seems tailored to respond to the travel restrictions, venue closures and economic hardship caused by the pandemic. Amariam Hamadhalher, a member of the Tuareg band Les Filles de Illighadad (Daughters of Illighadad), says the success of her WhatsApp recordings "really helped us during this difficult time, with coronavirus". The 26-year-old said she has earned more than 3,000 euros (\$3,600) from downloads of her work dreamy songs of friendship and life in her native village near the desert town of Agadez, in northern Niger. Sahel Sounds keeps the mobile-recorded EPs online for only one month. All download proceeds from the one-year project go to the artists.

The sound quality can be high, although Kirkley-who produces the WhatsApp tracks in a matter of days-says it varies depending on the mobile phone used. He adds that some artists are "shocked at how much money they've made off of a cell-phone recording... in such a short time". But their motivations aren't always just financial. Traore, who earns good money gigging in Bamako, told AFP his WhatsApp EP might bring him international expo-

sure, for example. He dreams of making it as big as his uncle, Mali musical icon Afel Bocoum.

'A model for the future'

Kirkley founded Sahel Sounds in 2009, initially as a blog, after falling for the region's music through Bocoum. He spent several years travelling the Sahel in search of lesser-known musicians, recording them on the fly, when he noticed the importance of mobile phones in the local music scene. Poor internet access meant people traded tracks on their phones using Bluetooth. "The only way to get a song would be to physically meet up with someone (and) transfer, in this sort of peer-to-peer metaphorical internet," he says. A decade later, WhatsApp has replaced Bluetooth as smartphones have proliferated. Most access the internet using mobile devices.

"I wanted to launch this project that played with that idea," says Kirkley, noting that he wanted to challenge traditional recording, where studio producers can have an outside influence on the final sound. "Maybe this could be a model for future work," he suggests. — AFP



The musical group "Espoir de Niafunke" is seen during a recording session for the record label Sahel Sounds in Bamako. — AFP photos



Malian musician Ali Traore is seen using his phone to record a new track in his courtyard in Bamako.

Lifestyle | Features



In this picture local resident Khwaja Safar Ali, 75, arranges items in his antiques shop at the oldest Qissa Khawani or "storytellers bazaar" in Pakistan's northwestern city of Peshawar. — AFP photos



Local resident Khwaja Safar Ali arranges items in his antiques shop at the oldest Qissa Khawani or "storytellers bazaar".



Mohammad Naseem poses for a photograph in the Shogran hill area in Kaghan Valley, northern Pakistan.

ONCE UPON A TIME: PAKISTAN'S FABLED STORYTELLERS FADE AWAY

Mohammad Naseem's eyes shine while he shares the legend of a remote, alpine lake nestled among snow-capped Himalayan peaks as a rare crowd of onlookers hears one of Pakistan's last "storytellers". The story of Saif-ul-Malook-the winding saga of a brave prince who falls in love with a fairy-is just one of the 50 tall tales passed down to Naseem by his father. "Usually people tell me I'm crazy when I tell these stories," says Naseem, whose long white beard and traditional cloak give him the timeless appearance of a storyteller of old. The 65-year-old shopkeeper says it would take days to recite all the stories he learned by heart that are imbued with "the history, the culture" of the land. But few are still listening.

Naseem says he hasn't bothered sharing the stories with his six children, and friends are no longer interested in hearing them as social media, video games, and soap operas have all but eclipsed his ancient art. Video platform TikTok is now a major source of entertainment for the country's youth, wildly popular in part because it is accessible to illiterate users in rural areas-just as the legends of old once were. "When I die, these stories will die with me," sighs Naseem outside his shop in northern Pakistan's Shogran, where winter snows have blanketed the mountains.

Storyteller's bazaar

The city of Peshawar-in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa province where Shogran is

located-has long been the country's stronghold of oral history, its Qissa Khawani or "storytellers bazaar" a Silk Road hub where travellers and locals alike congregated to hear a well-spun yarn. The bustling frontier capital was once "the Times Square of the region" because of "the excellence of its storytellers," explains Naeem Safi-a consult-

narrow lanes the market was littered with Silk Road caravans of wandering traders who often stayed the night after the city's sixteen gates were sealed at dusk. In the evenings, the merchants would hear the city's famed storytellers-who shared tales about the perils of the road, news of wars and local lore. Storytellers were "the communication tools of that time, they

tures that now dot the traffic-choked streets. "There may be some storytellers left, but the tradition is gone. It has transformed into other forms of storytelling," Safi added.

Dying art

Long-time Peshawar resident Khwaja Safar Ali, 75, remembers his youth in the

1960s had become an increasingly rare sight in the area.

Storytellers continued to perform for smaller circles, but were gradually replaced by radios and then televisions. This autumn one of Peshawar's few remaining storytellers died aged 86, said Jaiil Ahmed, a tour guide who frequently took his clients to hear the recitations.



A man prepares traditional tea for customers at the oldest Qissa Khawani or "storytellers bazaar".



Residents walk through the oldest Qissa Khawani or "storytellers bazaar" in Pakistan's northwestern city of Peshawar.



Residents visit the oldest Qissa Khawani or "storytellers bazaar".

ant at an Islamabad-based institute dedicated to Pakistani folk heritage, where cassettes of stories told at the bazaar have been archived. "Writing was not very popular. The transfer of knowledge was verbal. Storytelling was fundamental-people considered themselves educated if they had heard enough stories," says Safi.

Before tuk-tuks and buses clogged its

were the messengers," said Ali Awais Qarni, a researcher in history and literature at the University of Peshawar. "When they were telling the truth, they would always add a little poetry and color to it," he said. "People would listen to them for hours. Sometimes a story could last a week, or a month." The bazaar's tea houses and salons have been replaced by neon signs on garish struc-

ture when the arrival of caravans was met with excitement. During the day, "we used to run between the camels' legs," he recalls. And when evening came, "we would all sit together and listen to the storytellers". "They would tell us about Kabul, the USSR, Uzbekistan. We learned about these countries through them." Modern transportation eventually killed off the caravans, which even by the

The narrator once owned a small hotel where the caravanners lodged and listened to stories "for a few pennies" over steaming cups of green tea. "But now the only way to see storytellers in Peshawar is to go to the cemetery," Ahmed sighed. — AFP

JAPAN'S SYMBOL OF YEAR NODS TO NO-LOCKDOWN VIRUS STRATEGY

A written character that evokes everything people in Japan were urged to avoid this year-crowds, confined spaces and close contact with others-was yesterday voted the country's top linguistic symbol of 2020. Although new infections have recently hit record highs, Japan has seen a relatively small coronavirus outbreak overall and never imposed a strict lockdown like those seen elsewhere in the world. Instead, residents were strongly advised to use their own judgment and steer clear of situations described as "mitsu"-meaning dense, crowded and close-to limit the spread of the respiratory disease.

The social distancing message quickly gained a tongue-in-cheek popularity, with the Tokyo governor's call inspiring viral manga strips, techno remixes and even a video game. Now "mitsu" has been chosen as the character of the year in an annual public ballot organized by the Japan Kanji Aptitude Testing Foundation. It took around 14 percent of over 208,000 votes. Japanese TV stations broadcast the announcement live, as Seihan Mori, master of the ancient Kiyomizu temple in Kyoto, painted the character on a big white panel with an ink-soaked calligraphy brush. "After the government asked the public to avoid crowded, poorly ventilated spaces, and places that carry the risk of close contact with strangers... many began acting with 'mitsu' always in mind," the organization said. Other contenders in the top 10 for 2020's character, or kanji, were mostly coronavirus-related, such as illness, harm, perish and germs. Last year's top character was "rei", used in the word "Reiwa", the name of the new imperial era. — AFP



This picture received from Jiji Press shows Seihan Mori, master of the ancient Kiyomizu temple, using calligraphy to write the Chinese character, known in Japan as "kanji", for 'mitsu'. — AFP

French winner hits 200-million-euro lottery jackpot

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. Apart from France, EuroMillions tickets can be bought in Austria, Belgium, Britain, Ireland, Luxembourg, Portugal, Spain and Switzerland. — AFP

Iconic Brazil bossa nova bar is latest victim of virus

The year was 1956, and two of the founding fathers of bossa nova, Tom Jobim and Vinicius de Moraes, had just met at a Rio de Janeiro bar called the Casa Villarino. The friendship that started that day would change the history of music, as the pianist and the poet helped reinvent Brazilian samba to give the world a silky-smooth new genre that would come to define modernity and cool.

The meeting also sealed the Villarino's place in history. But 64 years on, the iconic bar and restaurant in the city center has closed, the latest victim of the coronavirus pandemic. Rio's central business district has all but emptied as companies have switched to home office in Brazil, the country with the second-highest death toll in the pandemic, after the United States: nearly 180,000. Social distancing measures have taken a heavy toll on the restaurants, bars and shops that catered to the now-vanished business set-including the Villarino, which closed indefinitely on November 16.

"The city center is empty. It's like a ghost town," said owner Rita Nava, 79. "We used to serve 80 to 100 meals a day on average. The day we closed, there was one customer." Nava's late husband, Antonio Vazquez, was the last remaining member of a group of Spanish partners who had run the bar almost since its founding in 1953. They turned it into a hangout for artists, intellectuals and politicians in the 1950s. The bar still has the mosaic tiles, marble tables and red-leather chairs from that era.

Regular clients in those days included Moraes, a diplomat and poet who used to jet into Rio's nearby Santos Dumont airport and immediately head to the Villarino to install himself at his favorite corner table. It was there that he was introduced to the young pianist Antonio Carlos Jobim, whom he soon enlisted to score his work "Orfeu da Conceicao," the play that became the basis for the Oscar-winning film "Black Orpheus" (1959). The pair would collaborate on some of the greatest bossa nova hits of all time, including "The Girl from Ipanema," "A Felicidade" and "Eu Sei

Que Vou Te Amar."

Faded heyday

Back then, Rio was still Brazil's capital, not yet supplanted by Brasilia, the ultra-modernist planned city inaugurated in 1960. Central Rio is still home to a huge number of historic buildings, though many have fallen into decay. The district has been in failing health for decades, even before the pandemic. Buzzing with activity during business hours, it emptied on evenings and weekends except for homeless people and drug addicts. Since the pandemic, its streets are largely deserted even in the middle of working days.

2014 World Cup and 2016 Olympics. But it largely failed to attract major employers to the district.

'Stalled economy'

Then-mayor Eduardo Paes (2008-2016), who won a new term in elections last month, promises to attract investment to save the "soul of the city" when he takes office again in January. Small business owners hope he will deliver. "The economy has stalled here. Offices closed, stores closed and those of us who are open aren't making ends meet," said newsstand owner Derisvaldo Pereira.

He closed shop for three months



Picture taken at Casa Villarino, the traditional bar in which the legendary late poet Vinicius de Moraes and late musician Tom Jobim met and started a friendship that would change the world with Bossa Nova, in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil. — AFP

"It was already a problem before. The pandemic has just accelerated things," said Claudio Hermolim, head of the Association of Real Estate Managers (ADEMI). A recent report by the association identified 14,000 abandoned, empty or nearly unused properties in the city center, up from 8,000 before the pandemic. Hermolim argues Rio needs to overhaul its zoning regulations to make it easier to convert business properties into residential ones and bring life back to the city center. Brazil's second city tried to revitalize the center with a series of infrastructure projects when it hosted the

when the pandemic arrived, and says sales are down 60 percent since he reopened. The Brazilian Bar and Restaurant Association says 30 percent of those businesses have closed nationwide since the new coronavirus arrived. Nava hopes she will be able to reopen someday, and see the city center make a come-back. "The culture of every city in the world is in the center. That's where everything starts," she said. "We can't just leave it in oblivion." — AFP

Sports

Photo of the day



Sean Garnier performs in front of the Kuwait Towers. —Photo taken from www.redbullcontentpool.com

Joshua-Fury deal could be done in 2 days: Promoter

Joshua knocks out Pulev to set up potential Fury fight

LONDON: Anthony Joshua's promoter Eddie Hearn says a deal for his man to fight Tyson Fury in an all-British world heavyweight unification bout in 2021 could take as little as two days to complete. Plans for a "Battle of Britain" have accelerated after Joshua, 31, stopped Bulgarian veteran Kubrat Pulev in the ninth round at Wembley Arena on Saturday to retain all three of his belts. Fury, the self-styled "Gypsy King", took to social media after Pulev was knocked out, saying he would knock out his fellow British heavyweight "inside three rounds".

An agreement in principle for Joshua, who retained his WBA, WBO and IBF belts, and WBC champion Fury for two meetings in 2021 has been in place since earlier this year. Asked how long it would take to complete a deal, Hearn replied: "A couple of days. There is no reason we cannot complete the deal and then move on and solve the other problems. We need to write to the governing bodies and say 'yes we have a deal' and we will now talk to the various sites and confirm the dates shortly for what I suppose will be the end of May."

There are some potential stumbling blocks, including if Fury is forced to fight Deontay Wilder for a third time and Joshua could be told by the WBO to face mandatory challenger Oleksandr Usyk. But Hearn insisted: "The only hitch I can think of is Wilder. If the court order the Fury rematch, and it doesn't sound as though they will, then it is out of our hands. That is the only way it falls through is if something stops their side. That isn't me saying they don't want it—they do. But if the court orders it then we will have to fight Usyk."

Matchroom promoter Hearn disputed Fury's gung-ho assessment of his chances, saying Joshua would knock him out. "AJ got hit once maybe with a right hand (against Pulev), that was about it," he said. "Fury and Pulev probably punch as hard as each other, Fury is not a devastating puncher, but he is a

lot better than Pulev. It is an undisputed fight, it should be the toughest fight out there, but I've always fancied him to beat Tyson Fury, always."

BBC personality

Fury has revealed he has asked his lawyers to help remove him from the BBC's sports personality of the year shortlist. The heavyweight champion said he asked "politely" when he posted an Instagram message earlier this month. But he has now taken further steps to be removed from the list of contenders and instructed his lawyers to send a letter to the BBC.

Fury's previous appearance on the shortlist in 2015 caused controversy, with more than 100,000 people signing a petition calling for the boxer's removal over a series of outspoken comments on homophobia and abortion. But in 2018 Fury's omission from the final list, following his draw against Wilder, drew criticism from the boxer's camp. This year's shortlist also includes Formula One world champion, world snooker champion Ronnie O'Sullivan and Liverpool captain Jordan Henderson.

Joshua knocks out Pulev

Meanwhile, Joshua said he wants to unify all four world heavyweight boxing titles in an all-British clash with Tyson Fury after a dominant ninth round knockout of Bulgaria's Kubrat Pulev at London's Wembley Arena on Saturday. In front of 1,000 fans, with attendance limited due to coronavirus restrictions, Joshua ensured there was no repeat of a shock defeat in his first clash with Andy Ruiz Jr in 2019 as the 39-year-old Pulev was swatted aside. Attention will now turn to the possibility of a much-anticipated clash with WBC champion Fury in 2021. "I'm up for anything. Who wants to see Anthony Joshua box Tyson Fury in 2021?" Joshua asked the crowd to a chorus of cheers.

"I started this game in 2013 and I've been



WEMBLEY: Britain's Anthony Joshua lands a punch on Bulgaria's Kubrat Pulev (left) during their heavyweight world title boxing match at Wembley Arena in north west London. —AFP

chasing the belts ever since. "Whoever has got the belt, I would love to compete with them. If that is Tyson Fury then let it be Tyson Fury." Pulev had lost just once previously in his career to Vladimir Klitschko in 2014, but was outclassed by Joshua, who could have had victory wrapped up within three rounds. Twice Pulev was given a count by the referee in round three after he was left flailing on the ropes by an explosive burst of punches from Joshua. The IBF, WBA and WBO world champion then surprisingly took his foot off the accelerator to allow Pulev to hang in the fight.

But in round nine three uppercuts in quick succession put Pulev back on the canvas and this time he did not get back up in time as Joshua took his career record to 24-1. An agreement in principle for Joshua and WBC champion Fury to finally go head-to-head has been in place since earlier this year. "Starting from tomorrow, we make the Tyson

Fury fight straight away. It's the only fight to be made in boxing. It is the biggest fight in British boxing history," said Joshua's promoter Eddie Hearn. "I know he (Joshua) wants it. He is the best heavyweight in the world, I promise you. He'll break him down, he'll knock him out."

Fury also confirmed he wants the fight with a post on social media shortly after Joshua's win. "I want the fight, I want the fight next," said Fury, who has not been in the ring since beating Deontay Wilder in February. "I'll knock him out inside three rounds." However, Fury could be contractually obliged to fight Wilder for a third time before taking on Joshua. After the first bout was controversially declared a draw, Wilder activated a rematch clause following Fury's victory in the second fight. A third clash between the two was postponed earlier this year due to coronavirus. —Agencies

Wuhan horse racing gallops beyond virus

WUHAN: Blue cushions are up for grabs as masked spectators cheer horses galloping to the finish in Wuhan, ground zero for the pandemic but also a major centre for racing in China. The city of 11 million people is synonymous with the coronavirus, which emerged in Wuhan about a year ago, but far less known is its vibrant horse racing scene dating back more than 150 years. At first glance Wuhan Open Horse Racing, which sprang back into action in October after the city reopened from lockdown, is much like the sport anywhere in the world. There are thoroughbreds with names such as "Freedom Fighter" and "Ultimate Perfection"; jockeys wear colored silks; spectators in a grandstand check the form guide to pick a winner.

But there is one crucial difference: gambling is broadly illegal in mainland China. Instead, people scan a QR code on their mobile phone and select a winner. If that horse comes in, they win a prize. On a recent Saturday at Orient Lucky City racecourse, the prize was a cushion. But it can also be cooking oil, phone credit or - if you guess several winners in a row - a rice cooker or even a car. There are no cash prizes. For Mr. Zhang, a spectator who declined to give his first name, the absence of betting does not matter.

"It's different from foreign countries, the fun here is watching the horses in action and soaking up the atmosphere," the 65-year-old, who lives nearby and is making his second visit to the races, said behind a face mask. Jin Lei, who is attending with two friends, said it was his first time at the races and there is a thrill in "getting close up

to feel the power of the horses". "I came here more out of novelty," the 27-year-old medical consultant added. Entry for spectators starts at 50 yuan (\$8) although at least two people told AFP that they were given free tickets.

'I missed it'

The wet and chilly weather put a dampener on what was the penultimate race day of the coronavirus-shortened Wuhan racing season and made for a crowd of just a few hundred people, many of them young families. But Jacky Wu, chairman of Orient Lucky Horse Group, which built and runs the racecourse, said there would normally be between 3,000 and 5,000 spectators. Unlike race days in other countries, which can be alcohol-fuelled affairs, there was tea, juice and fruit as adults and children sheltered inside from the rain.

The purpose-built Wuhan course saw its first action in 2003 but Wu said that there is "a long history" of horse racing in the central city because of the British who once traded there. "Wuhan's first racecourse was in 1864 and in the past there were four racecourses running at the same time," he said in his office overlooking Wuhan's sand track. According to Wu, although there is racing in other parts of mainland China, notably in the far-flung regions of Xinjiang and Inner Mongolia, Wuhan is "the centre of Western-standard horse racing" in the country.

However, like sport all over the globe, the coronavirus hit racing in Wuhan hard, wiping out four months of the season. The city was locked down from January 23 until early April and racing only resumed in October. Nearly 4,000 people died of the virus in Wuhan. Xiang Yan, a jockey from the city, said it was a relief to get back in the saddle having been locked down for 76 days. "Riding every day is my habit and not doing so for a long time, I missed it," said the 24-year-old.



WUHAN: Jockeys race during the Wuhan Open Horse Racing event at Dongfang Macheng international race track in Wuhan, China's central Hubei province. —AFP

Wuhan ploughs on

After a grim year Wu is optimistic about the future of Wuhan horse racing. It is backed by local authorities and China's ruling Communist Party wants to boost equestrian sport. "It wasn't easy for us to get horse racing going in Wuhan this year and the pandemic isn't over," said Wu, who is also chairman of Wuhan Jockey Club. "But the fact we now have races on shows that Wuhan attaches great importance to horse racing."

With China successfully slowing virus infections to a trickle nationwide, plans are afoot for a bigger and better 2021 for the Wuhan racing industry. "If all goes according to plan we expect to increase the level of competition, the prize money, the number of foreign jockeys and the quality of the horses," said Wu. "We will continue to invest in the next few years and it should be said that we are very confident in the future of Chinese horse racing, very confident." He added: "Horse racing in many cities has stopped, but Wuhan hasn't." —AFP

Bahraini child urges Hamilton to save his father on death row

ABU DHABI: A Bahraini child whose father is facing the death penalty sent a letter to Lewis Hamilton urging the seven-time Formula 1 champion to shed light on the case amid allegations of torture. Ahmed Ramadhan, 11, drew a picture of Hamilton's racecar pleading for help: "Lewis, please save my father." "When I was drawing the car, I felt hope that it might save my father's life," the London-based advocacy group Bahrain Institute for Rights and Democracy (BIRD) quoted the child as saying.

"I really hope Lewis Hamilton delivers my message so my dad can come back home." Hamilton, who won the Bahrain Grand Prix last month, confirmed in a press conference in the United Arab Emirates capital Saturday that he received the letter. "I think the saddest thing for me was that there's a young man on death row and it's not clear ... and when his son writes me a letter it really hits home," he said ahead of the final race in the Abu Dhabi Grand Prix.

"I think there's definitely work to be done in the background and I definitely won't let it go unnoticed." In July, Bahrain's top court upheld a death sentence against Mohamed Ramadhan and Hussain Moosa convicted of murdering a police officer in a bomb attack, following allegations that the conviction was based on confessions extracted by torture.

The incident allegedly came amid a wave of attacks against police and other violent incidents that erupted after mass street protests in 2011 demanded an elected prime minister and a constitutional monarchy in Bahrain. The two accused are members of Muslim Sunni-ruled Bahrain's Shiite community and were first sentenced in late 2014.

Amnesty International has condemned the ruling and described the trial as "grossly unfair". Hamilton said during the conference he would have hoped to address the issue with Bahrain's Crown Prince Salman bin Hamad Al Khalifa but his infection with coronavirus would not allow him.

"I'd hoped... to sit and address it with the crown prince, but I was bed-ridden for most of the week," he said. Bahrain has claimed Iran trained and backed the demonstrators in order to topple the Manama government - an accusation Tehran denies. The kingdom rejects allegations of human rights violations and denies imposing discriminatory measures against its Shiite citizens. "When world champions like Lewis Hamilton choose to speak out, lives can change forever," said Sayed Ahmed Alwadaei, director of BIRD. —AFP

News in brief

Ex-Liverpool manager dies

PARIS: Gerard Houllier, the French coach who won the UEFA Cup, FA Cup and League Cup treble with Liverpool, has died aged 73. Houllier, who managed Liverpool from 1998 to 2004, died overnight Sunday to Monday after undergoing heart surgery. His career was blighted by health problems and he had to take a break in his time at Liverpool to recover from heart issues. Two of the French clubs Houllier managed, Paris Saint-Germain and Lens, confirmed his death on Monday. He was also in charge of the French national team from 1992 to 1993, overseeing their failure to qualify for the 1994 finals in the United States. The cerebral Houllier played an important role in shaping Liverpool after the club that had won the league title consistently throughout the 1980s lost its way. Although he was unable to lead the club to the Premier League title - that would have to wait until this year under German coach Jurgen Klopp - Houllier was loved by the Anfield club's supporters. —AFP

NBA scoring machine shines

LOS ANGELES: Kevin Durant scored 15 points Sunday on his unofficial Brooklyn Nets' debut, 552 days since his last appearance on a court when he tore his Achilles tendon. Durant, arguably the best player in the NBA at the time of his injury, spent his downtime in rehabilitation watching Milwaukee's Giannis Antetokounmpo claim two most valuable player awards and LeBron James capture his fourth NBA championship. The Nets are Durant's new team, and soon New York will be his city. But before Durant can rejoin the conversation about who is the best, he needs to show he can lead the Nets to the top rung of the NBA ladder. On Sunday, Durant played the first half as the Nets beat the Washington Wizards 119-114 in their opening pre-season game at Barclays Center arena. "It's definitely good to get back into the flow of things and it's definitely giving me some confidence," said Durant. "So it's a good step, and I'm trying to build on it." —AFP

Dortmund out to reverse slump

BERLIN: New Borussia Dortmund boss Edin Terzic will make his debut in the dugout when his team travel to Werder Bremen today, with the crisis-hit Bundesliga giants looking to pick up their first win in four league games. After former coach Lucien Favre was sacked on Sunday, Dortmund are looking to bounce back from a humiliating 5-1 defeat to Stuttgart which saw them drop out of the top four and cost the Swiss coach his job. Former Bayer assistant Terzic will now take the reins as interim boss until the end of the season, starting with the trip to Bremen. Dortmund have not lost a league game in Bremen since 2014, yet they travel north with just one point from their last three matches and several players out injured including Belgians Thomas Meunier and Thorgan Hazard and star striker Erling Braut Haaland. Terzic is charged with leading Dortmund back into the top four after recent results saw them fall behind the leading pack of Bayer Leverkusen, Bayern Munich and RB Leipzig. —AFP

Sports

Messi saves lacklustre Barca as Sociedad reclaim top spot

Villarreal - four points off the lead in fourth

MADRID: Lionel Messi saved Barcelona from another embarrassing result by scoring the decisive goal in a 1-0 win over lowly Levante, while Real Sociedad returned top of La Liga on Sunday. Messi struck with 14 minutes remaining of a lacklustre display from Barca at the Camp Nou which will do little to ease fan fears following their 3-0 hammering at the hands of Juventus midweek. Ronald Koeman's side are still way off the pace in the title race, nine points behind Sociedad who reclaimed first place despite only drawing 1-1 with Eibar. Barcelona do however have two games in hand on the Basque outfit.

Atletico are level on 26 points with Sociedad and also have two games in hand while Real Madrid are now just three points behind the leaders having played one less after beating their local rivals 2-0 on Saturday. Villarreal are four points off the lead in fourth after drawing 1-1 at Real Betis, who are one point behind Barca in ninth. "The team is working well, they gave the maximum," said Koeman. "We still lack a little confidence in ourselves, in our game, but we had a lot of chances, and I have nothing to say about the attitude of the players in this match."

Barca managed to force several saves from Aitor Fernandez, with the Levante goalkeeper doing particularly well to push away a stinging shot from Martin Braithwaite in the 16th minute and Antoine Griezmann's header five minutes later. However the best chance of the opening period fell to Jorge de Frutos in the 12th minute, the Spaniard somehow shooting straight at Marc-Andre ter Stegen after the

ball broke kindly for him right in front of goal.

Messi saves day

Barca continued to dominate possession in the second half but if anything looked less threatening, with Fernandez being called into action largely for shots that were hit straight at him. However with Levante looking more comfortable than a side of their level should at the Camp Nou, Messi saved his team with a clinical finish off the post after collecting Frenkie de Jong's pass. It was hardly the sort of display to honor Sergio Busquets' 593rd appearance for the club, which takes him level at fourth of all time for matches played for Barca alongside Carles Puyol.

However the three points are a boost ahead of the visit of Sociedad on Wednesday, which is then followed up by another home clash with Valencia on Saturday. Earlier Ander Barrenetxea gave Real Sociedad the lead in San Sebastian with a thumping strike in the 20th minute, but Sergi Enrich turned home with 25 minutes remaining to send his team 10th on 15 points.

Sociedad would have had a bigger gap between them and Atletico had Igor Zubeldia's 80th-minute tap-in not been ruled out by VAR for an extremely tight offside. Sunday's draw was Sociedad's sixth in as many games in all competitions, and came after another 1-1 draw at Napoli on Thursday which saw them squeeze into the last 32 of the Europa League. Granada won 1-0 at Elche in Sunday's other match, a win that keeps them one point ahead of Barcelona. —AFP



BARCELONA: Barcelona's Uruguayan defender Ronald Araujo (left) jumps for the ball during the Spanish league football match between FC Barcelona and Levante UD at the Camp Nou stadium in Barcelona on December 13, 2020. —AFP

Arsenal beaten by Burnley; Leicester rout Brighton 3-0

LONDON: Arsenal defender Kieran Tierney says the players must take responsibility for the club's "terrible" form after the Gunners lost a fourth home Premier League game in a row. Burnley recorded their first-ever win at the Emirates on Sunday as a Pierre-Emerick Aubameyang own goal secured a 1-0 victory for the visitors after Granit Xhaka was sent off for the hosts. The result leaves Mikel Arteta's side just five points clear of the relegation zone and without a Premier League win since November 1.

It is the first time since 1959 that Arsenal have suffered four home league defeats in succession—their host Southampton on Wednesday looking to get back to winning ways. The current run has left them languishing in 15th place in the table and Tierney knows that results have to improve. "It's not good enough," he said. "There is no way to disguise it, it's terrible, to be honest. It's not what we are, not where we are as a club. It's not what the fans deserve, it's not what the manager deserves, it's not what the board and that deserve. It's us players that need to take responsibility for this."

"It's on us and nobody else. We have got a great manager and we believe in him 100 per cent. The blame is on us, nobody else." Burnley had never even led a Premier League game against Arsenal but picked up a second win of the campaign to move out of the bottom three. "There's a feel-good factor about the place now," said Burnley's England defender James Tarkowski. "I know we're still low down in the table but that's not too concerning. We've been close a few years to nicking a result here, but I felt we did what we

needed to do."

Meanwhile, Tottenham and Liverpool remain tied at the top of the Premier League after both were held to 1-1 draws at Crystal Palace and Fulham respectively, while Pierre-Emerick Aubameyang's own goal condemned Arsenal to another shocking home defeat, going down 1-0 to Burnley on Sunday. Leicester took advantage of slip ups by the top two to close to within one point of the leaders as James Maddison scored twice in a 3-0 rout over Brighton and Southampton are up to fourth as they also comfortably saw off Sheffield United 3-0.

Liverpool and Tottenham face each other at Anfield on Wednesday and, after Chelsea, Manchester City and Manchester United failed to win on Saturday, they both missed the chance to open up a gap at the top in the title race. The champions needed a Mohamed Salah penalty 11 minutes from time to avoid an embarrassing defeat at Fulham after a dreadful first-half performance left Liverpool manager Jurgen Klopp seething on the touchline. "We needed half an hour to get our feet in the game, that's why I shouted a bit at them," said Klopp. "I think in the first half an hour we could have lost the game, in the last 60 minutes we should have won it. In the end we get a point and that's it."

Bobby DeCordova-Reid's thunderous finish into the far corner to take the lead was no more than Scott Parker's side deserved as the returning Alisson Becker kept Liverpool in the game before the break. Liverpool dominated the second-half to pin Fulham back, but needed a penalty to salvage a point when Aboubakar Kamara was penalised for handling Georginio Wijnaldum's free-kick. Salah slammed the penalty low and just beyond the grasp of Alphonse Areola, but Fulham comfortably saw out the final 10 minutes to the delight of 2,000 fans at Craven Cottage.

Tottenham pegged back

Palace could also count on the return of fans to

liant long-range strike after the break. Yet Hoffenheim's joy was short-lived, as Wirtz danced through the box and beat Baumann with a dainty chip on 55 minutes. The visitors' fate was sealed when both Grillitsch and Stefan Posch were sent off for second yellow cards within 15 minutes, and Lucas Alario added a fourth for Leverkusen with a stoppage-time penalty.

Schalke's Uth 'stable and responsive'

Earlier Sunday, Schalke's hopes of a first win in 27 games were dashed by Marco Richter's stoppage-time equaliser in a 2-2 draw overshadowed by a serious injury to Mark Uth. Richter's late header crowned a heartbreaking evening for Schalke, who remain on course to equal Tasmania Berlin's notorious, 54-year-old Bundesliga record of 31 games without a win. Schalke's misery was compounded by concerns for Uth, who was stretchered from the field unconscious after a clash of heads with Augsburg defender Felix Uduokhai in the 10th minute. The striker was treated on-field for around 15 minutes before being carried from the pitch attached to a drip and wearing a neck brace.

Schalke later confirmed that the 29-year-old was "stable and responsive" and on his way to hospital, but both sets of players were left visibly shocked by the incident. "I didn't realize how serious it was at first, but then I saw him lying on the floor. A lot of things go through your head, I was scared and worried. I am so happy that he is ok," Uduokhai told Sky. After the game resumed with a 15-minute delay, Augsburg took the lead from a corner in the 32nd minute, Suat Serdar accidentally heading the ball into his own net.

Benito Raman levelled the scores with a delicate

time in 14 games this season, but the far greater concern will be the health of Neymar after his ankle appeared to twist awkwardly under a challenge from Thiago Mendes in stoppage time. The Lyon midfielder was sent off for the tackle following a VAR review while a distraught Neymar, in considerable pain, was taken off on a stretcher having immediately signalled for medical assistance. "He's with the physio and the doctors and we have to wait for the tests tomorrow (Monday)," PSG coach Thomas Tuchel told French broadcaster Telefoot.

Lyon's first win away to PSG since October 2007, the last season they won the Ligue 1 crown, provided fresh hope of a genuine title race this term with the top five teams separated by just three points. "We defended well, we destroyed their strength, and then played well enough in attack to score at least



LONDON: Arsenal's Gabonese striker Pierre-Emerick Aubameyang (2nd right) heads the ball toward the goal and into his own net to score an own goal during the English Premier League football match between Arsenal and Burnley on December 13, 2020. —AFP

Selhurst Park for the first time in nine months to inspire a second-half fightback against Tottenham. Harry Kane opened the scoring thanks to a goalkeeping howler from Vicente Guaita as he misjudged the England captain's long-range effort. Spurs then sat on their lead and failed to hold out for a sixth consecutive Premier League clean sheet when Hugo Lloris failed to hold Eberechi Eze's free-kick and Jeffrey Schlupp swept home the rebound.

"We lost two points," said Spurs coach Jose Mourinho. "From 45 to 75 minutes we couldn't play or build from the back and we made lots of mistakes." Guaita then redeemed himself with a pair of outstanding saves to deny Kane and Eric Dier as Spurs suddenly found their attacking thrust again after the equalizer. At the other end of the table, Arsenal are now just five points above the relegation zone after a self-inflicted defeat to Burnley. —Agenciest



LEVERKUSEN: Hoffenheim's Austrian midfielder Christoph Baumgartner (left) scores during the German first division Bundesliga football match Bayer Leverkusen vs TSG 1899 Hoffenheim in Leverkusen, on December 13, 2020. —AFP

chip over goalkeeper Rafal Gikiewicz on 52 minutes, before a second yellow card for Florian Niederlechner dealt another blow to Augsburg moments later. Serdar then redeemed himself as he fired a low cross towards Nassim Boujellab, who smashed the ball past Gikiewicz to give Schalke the lead. Yet Richter dashed hopes of a first league win since January 17 when he flicked a Michael Gregoritsch cross past Ralf Faehrmann two minutes from time to save a point for 10-man Augsburg. The draw leaves Schalke bottom of the league, with just four points from 11 games this season. —AFP

once," said Lyon coach Rudi Garcia. PSG trail the leading duo by a point with Marseille, who have two games in hand on their rivals, another point back in fourth alongside Montpellier. "Losing top spot doesn't worry me. But we didn't have the right approach and I have a problem with that," said Tuchel.

"We were never mentally ready to play this match. We were shot mentally. We never found our rhythm either. We didn't play with enough concentration or discipline. It was a big step backwards after the last match. I'm surprised. I was expecting a very high level." With Kylian Mbappe rested from the start, Moise Kean partnered Neymar in attack following the Brazilian's hat-trick in the midweek 5-1 Champions League win against Istanbul Basaksehir—a game that was completed 24 hours later than planned after an unprecedented anti-racism protest. —AFP

Kuwait Football League roundup

By Abdellatif Sharaa

KUWAIT: Neither Salmiya nor Fahaheel were able to score during their match on Sunday – in conclusion of the 12th round of Kuwait Football League ranking phase. Salmiya are in fourth place with 22 points, while Fahaheel have 12 points (9th place). Salmiya had played most of their matches with different formation. Salmiya's manager Mohammad Al-Mashan was forced to place midfielder on defense along with Fahad Al-Mijmed due to the absence of Musaed Nada and Alex Lima. He also replaced R Suza with Abdallah Al-Dhafiri and this reflected on the team's performance.

Fahaheel's manager Dhaher Al-Adwani meanwhile, resorted to defending with few counter attacks, but even with the empty spaces behind Salmiya defenders, Fahaheel failed to take the advantage during the first half. Salmiya seemed determined to score in the second half, but all attempts by various players failed despite being very close to scoring and the match ended 0-0.

The second match saw Shabab rebound from their embarrassing loss to Yarmouk (5-2) as they beat Burgan 1-0, raising their point total to 18 (seventh place) while Burgan remained with 11 points at 11th place. The two teams played a dull first half without any threat to either teams, and it was not until the second half that Shabab's Abdelmohsen Turkumani scored in the 48th minute. Burgan attempted to get the equalizer but failed, until the last minute of the match when the referee awarded them a penalty for a handball, but Nicolas Kofi failed to score.

Tavernier shines again for Rangers; Celtic win eases Lennon pressure

GLASGOW: Rangers captain James Tavernier produced another influential display with a goal and an assist in a 2-1 win at Dundee United as Celtic eased the pressure on Neil Lennon with a 2-0 victory against Kilmarnock. Tavernier scored a superb free-kick for his 17th goal of the season and then swung in another for Connor Goldson to seal the points at Tannadice. That was the 13th goal the English right-back has set up this term, making him a strong early contender for the Scottish Premiership's Player of the Year.

Thanks to Tavernier, Steven Gerrard's team look well set to end Celtic's bid to win a 10th successive Scottish title with a 13-point lead over their Glasgow rivals, who have two games in hand. Rangers are now unbeaten in 27 games in all competitions this season. "It's a fantastic effort from the players across that run," said Gerrard. "I've said it many times, it's about taking each challenge as it comes and this was a real tricky one today." The only concern for Gerrard will be the form and behaviour of volatile Colombian striker Alfredo Morelos. —AFP



PARIS: Paris Saint-Germain's Brazilian forward Neymar reacts after getting tackled during the French L1 football match between Paris Saint-Germain (PSG) and Lyon (OL) on December 13, 2020. —AFP

PSG surrender top spot; Neymar stretchered off

PARIS: Paris Saint-Germain surrendered top spot in Ligue 1 after losing 1-0 at home to Lyon on Sunday but potentially suffered a more devastating blow as an anguished Neymar was stretchered off with an ankle injury. Tino Kadewere's first-half goal secured Lyon a seventh win in eight matches as they moved level with Lille, who took over first place earlier in the day following a 2-1 home victory over Bordeaux. PSG dropped to third after losing for the fourth

14 Joshua-Fury deal could be done in 2 days: Promoter



15 Arsenal beaten by Burnley; Leicester rout Brighton 3-0



15 Messi saves lacklustre Barca as Sociedad reclaim top spot



PSG face Barca in knockout phase

Manchester United get Liga leaders Sociedad in Europa League last 32

DRAW RESULT	
WOLFSBERGER AC (AUT)	TOTTENHAM HOTSPUR (ENG)
FC DYNAMO KYIV (UKR)	CLUB BRUGGE (BEL)
REAL SOCIEDAD DE FÚTBOL (ESP)	MANCHESTER UNITED FC (ENG)
SL BENFICA (POR)	ARSENAL FC (ENG)
FK CRVENA ZVEZDA (SRB)	AC MILAN (ITA)
ROYAL ANTWERP FC (BEL)	RANGERS FC (SCO)
SK SLAVIA PRAHA (CZE)	LEICESTER CITY FC (ENG)
FC SALZBURG (AUT)	VILLARREAL CF (ESP)
SC BRAGA (POR)	AS ROMA (ITA)
FC KRASNODAR (RUS)	GNK DINAMO (CRO)
BSC YOUNG BOYS (SUI)	BAYER 04 LEVERKUSEN (GER)
MOLDE FK (NOR)	TSG 1899 HOFFENHEIM (GER)
GRANADA CF (ESP)	SSC NAPOLI (ITA)
MACCABI TEL-AVIV FC (ISR)	FC SHAKHTAR DONETSK (UKR)
LOSC LILLE (FRA)	AFC AJAX (NED)
OLYMPIACOS FC (GRE)	PSV EINDHOVEN (NED)

RESULTS OF THE DRAW	
B. MÖNCHENGLADBACH (GER)	MANCHESTER CITY FC (ENG)
S.S. LAZIO (ITA)	FC BAYERN MÜNCHEN (GER)
CLUB ATLÉTICO DE MADRID (ESP)	CHELSEA FC (ENG)
RB LEIPZIG (GER)	LIVERPOOL FC (ENG)
FC PORTO (POR)	JUVENTUS (ITA)
FC BARCELONA (ESP)	PARIS SAINT-GERMAIN (FRA)
SEVILLA FC (ESP)	BORUSSIA DORTMUND (GER)
ATALANTA BC (ITA)	REAL MADRID CF (ESP)

NYON: Photo shows the screen displaying the results after the draw for the round of 32 of the UEFA Europa League football tournament at the UEFA headquarters in Nyon. (Right) The screen displays the results after the draw for the round of 16 of the UEFA Champions League football tournament. — AFP

PARIS: Paris Saint-Germain, last season's beaten finalists, will face Barcelona in the last 16 of the Champions League while Liverpool were paired with RB Leipzig in yesterday's draw. French champions PSG will relish another chance to avenge their soul-destroying 'Remontada' defeat to the Catalan giants in 2017. Having beaten Barca 4-0 in the French capital, PSG crashed to a 6-1 defeat at the Camp Nou orchestrated by Neymar.

The Brazilian, who won the 2015 Champions League with Barca, then joined PSG in a world record move weeks later but has yet to taste similar European success with Ligue 1's dominant force. They came closest last season when they were beaten 1-0 in the final by Bayern Munich, who claimed a sixth European crown thanks to a goal from PSG youth product Kingsley Coman. With the first legs due to be played in February, PSG seem hopeful Neymar will have recovered in time from an ankle injury which forced him to be stretchered off the pitch in his side's 1-0 Ligue 1 defeat to Lyon on Sunday.

Yesterday PSG said Neymar's prognosis was "reassuring" while the 28-year-old said on Instagram that his injury "could have been worse" following a rough tackle from Lyon midfielder Thiago Mendes which left him screaming in agony. Barca may not be as intimidating opponents as in the past after a trou-

bled start to the season influenced by boardroom chaos and Lionel Messi's attempt to leave the club in the summer. Messi saved Barca's blushes on Sunday with the only goal in a home win over lowly Levante, but they are nine points behind La Liga leaders Real Sociedad.

Holders Bayern face Lazio

Reigning champions Bayern play Italian side Lazio, who are in the knockout phase for the first time in over two decades. "They are a very difficult opponent, we saw them in the group against Dortmund," said Bayern's sports director Hasan Salihamidzic. "It is always difficult against the Italian teams. But it is always nice to go to Rome."

Lazio's Spanish midfielder Luis Alberto described the draw as "complicated". Pep Guardiola's Manchester City team, who like PSG are still seeking a first Champions League title despite serious investment from Gulf state owners, must get past Borussia Mönchengladbach, European Cup finalists way back in 1977. "I learned when I was in Germany how big and important and historical a team Gladbach are. I respect the beauty of their football," said former Bayern boss Guardiola.

"I want to arrive in the best condition when we play them. We want to compete as best as possible and go through," Frank Lampard said that Chelsea,

winners in 2012, have been handed the hardest possible draw with their tie against Atletico Madrid. "I think most people will say it's the toughest draw that we could have had," the Blues boss said. "We have to have belief in ourselves and, when that game comes around, you're going to have to beat these sort of teams if you're going to win the Champions League."

Cristiano Ronaldo and Juventus will play Portuguese side Porto, winners in 2004, while Real Madrid take on last season's surprise quarter-finalists Atalanta. "We want to face them in the same manner we took on Barcelona," said Juve vice president Pavel Nedved, referring to the 3-0 win at the Camp Nou which allowed the Italians to top their group. Liverpool will be wary of an attack-minded RB Leipzig side who ended the hopes of Manchester United in the group phase. That match will be a clash of German managers as Jurgen Klopp's Reds face a Leipzig side led by young coach Julian Nagelsmann.

Man United face Sociedad

Meanwhile, Manchester United will face La Liga leaders Real Sociedad in the last 32 of the Europa League following yesterday's draw in Nyon, after they were dumped out of the Champions League last week. United dropped down to the Europa League, which they won in 2017, after RB Leipzig knocked them out of the Europe's top competition

at the group stage. But Sociedad represent one of the toughest draws of the first knockout round. They reclaimed top spot in La Liga on Sunday and made it out of the Europa League group stage thanks to a dramatic late draw at Napoli, combined with AZ Alkmaar's last-gasp defeat at Rijeka.

United meanwhile are eighth in the Premier League after Saturday's goalless draw with local rivals Manchester City, although they are only five points behind leaders Tottenham Hotspur having played a game fewer. Gennaro Gattuso's Napoli, who are four points behind leaders AC Milan in Serie A, will face another Spanish side in the shape of Granada, while Milan have been handed a tie with Red Star Belgrade in a clash of former European champions.

New Bundesliga leaders Bayer Leverkusen will take on Swiss side Young Boys, while Ajax face current Ligue 1 leaders Lille after being eliminated from a tough Champions League group that contained Liverpool and Atalanta. Arsenal have a tricky tie with Benfica after topping their group with six wins from six, while fellow Premier League outfits Tottenham and Leicester City will clash with Austria's Wolfsberg and Slavia Prague respectively. Scottish Premiership leaders Rangers take on Royal Antwerp after finishing above Benfica to top Group D. — Agencies

Ronaldo marks 100th game for Juventus

MILAN: Cristiano Ronaldo marked his 100th game for Juventus with a pair of penalties in a 3-1 success over Genoa on Sunday, as the champions closed the gap on Serie A leaders AC Milan who were held at home against Parma. French defender Theo Hernandez's brace rescued a point at the death for AC Milan who came from two goals down to draw 2-2 in the San Siro. Milan's lead on second-placed Inter was cut to three points after Antonio Conte's side staged a 3-1 comeback win at Cagliari.

Napoli, in third, are a further point adrift after beating Sampdoria 2-1, equal on points with nine-time reigning champions Juventus. Playing without injured top scorer Zlatan Ibrahimovic, Milan had looked set for their first league defeat this season. Hakan Calhanoglu rattled the woodwork three times while Brahim Diaz also hitting the post for the hosts before Hernani put Parma ahead after quarter of an hour. The Brazilian midfielder then set up Jasmin Kurtic for the second after 56 minutes.

But two minutes later Hernandez headed in off a Calhanoglu corner with the French defender adding a second in injury time off a rebound. "It wasn't the best night but we had the quality to bring home an important draw which boosts our self-esteem," said coach Stefano Pioli. "While Ibra gives us a lot of presence, we did well even without him. We have shown strength, especially psychologically, it's a step forward." Chasing a first league title since 2011, Milan are

unbeaten in the first 11 matches of a Serie A season since the 2003/2004, when they also won the "Scudetto". In Genoa, Juventus were boosted after their 3-0 Champions League win in Barcelona, with Paulo Dybala getting his first goal this season. Stefano Sturaro leveled for the hosts after an hour. But Nicolò Rovella's foul on Juan Cuadrado allowed Ronaldo to slot in his first penalty after 78 minutes with the second coming a minute from time after goalkeeper Mattia Perin brought down Alvaro Morata. Genoa sink to second from bottom of the league.

Ronaldo, Ibrahimovic lead way

Ronaldo, 35, joins 39-year-old Ibrahimovic as leading scorer in Serie A with 10 goals this season, for a total of 79 since joining Juventus in 2018. "What better way to celebrate my 100th game for Juventus, than scoring two more goals for the team?" Ronaldo said on Twitter before vowing to reach 100 goals for the reigning champions.

Inter Milan's Romelu Lukaku, 27, is just behind with nine goals after scoring the third against Cagliari in injury time. Conte's side are out of Europe with their focus now on a first Serie A title since 2010. They fought back after trailing with a quarter of an hour to go in Sardinia. Former Cagliari player Nicolò Barella volleyed in the equaliser after 77 minutes with Danilo D'Ambrosio coming off the bench to immediately nod in a second with six minutes to go.

Napoli got their first win in their newly named Stadio Diego Armando Maradona, renamed after the Argentina legend who led the club to their only league titles in 1987 and 1990 and the UEFA Cup in 1989. Jakub Jankto put Sampdoria ahead in the 20th minute, but Hirving Lozano came off the bench in the second half to spark a Napoli revival. — AFP

NFL's Chiefs and Packers clinch division crowns

LOS ANGELES: The Kansas Chiefs coughed up an uncharacteristic four turnovers but still beat the Miami Dolphins 33-27 on Sunday to clinch their fifth straight AFC West division title. Quarterback Patrick Mahomes received a rude welcome in his first appearance at Miami's Hard Rock Stadium since he earned MVP honors in a Super Bowl win over the San Francisco 49ers in February.

He was intercepted twice and sacked for an NFL-record 30-yard loss in the first quarter as Miami seized an early 10-0 lead. But the Chiefs scored 30 straight points to seize control and fended off the Dolphins' fourth-quarter rally to improve to 12-1. Miami's defeat gave the Chiefs' main competition for the AFC's top overall seed, Pittsburgh, a boost, securing the Steelers' first post-season berth since 2017.

But the Steelers dropped a game behind the AFC-leading Chiefs when they suffered just their second defeat of their season in the late game, losing 26-15 to the Buffalo Bills. Mahomes' three interceptions marked his first multi-interception game in more than two years. But he threw for 393 yards and two touchdowns. "We won the Super Bowl here and just clinched the AFC West - it seems every time we leave this stadium we have a chat about something we accomplished," Mahomes said.

"The (bad) part, it seems, is like I have half my interceptions at this stadium." Tyreek Hill scored on a 32-yard run and a 44-yard reception and Travis Kelce had eight catches for 136 yards and a TD. Mecole Hardman returned a punt 67 yards for a touchdown and Chiefs

defender Chris Jones sacked Dolphins rookie quarterback Tua Tagovailoa for a safety. Tagovailoa passed for 316 yards and two touchdowns to Mike Gesicki, cutting the deficit to six points with less than five minutes to play before Harrison Butler kicked a 46-yard field goal for the Chiefs with just over a minute remaining.

'Explosive team'

Mahomes kept that drive going with a fourth-and-one pass to Hill. "This is an explosive team, and they went on a run there," Dolphins coach Brian Flores said. "It was a quick spurt. That's how they're built - they go on runs. We collected ourselves, and I thought our guys did a good job of that. We played with poise and got ourselves back in the game." The Green Bay Packers clinched the NFC North division title with a 31-24 victory over the Detroit Lions.

Aaron Rodgers connected on three touchdown passes to three different receivers and moved into fourth place in NFL history for most games with three or more TD passes with 73 - passing former Packers great Brett Favre on the list. Rodgers also scored a rushing touchdown and the Packers defense knocked Lions quarterback Matthew Stafford out of the contest midway through the fourth quarter with a rib injury. Davante Adams had seven catches for 115 yards and a TD for Green Bay - his eighth straight game with a touchdown catch.

Eagles shock Saints

The Packers' win, coupled with the Detroit Lions' 26-14 loss to the Tom Brady-led Tampa Bay Buccaneers - saw Green Bay capture the division with three games remaining. They are level with New Orleans for best record in the NFC after the Saints' 24-21 loss to the Philadelphia Eagles. Jalen Hurts made his first start at quarterback for the Eagles and provided the spark coach Doug Pederson was looking for. — AFP