

2 Scammers find innovative ways to con their victims



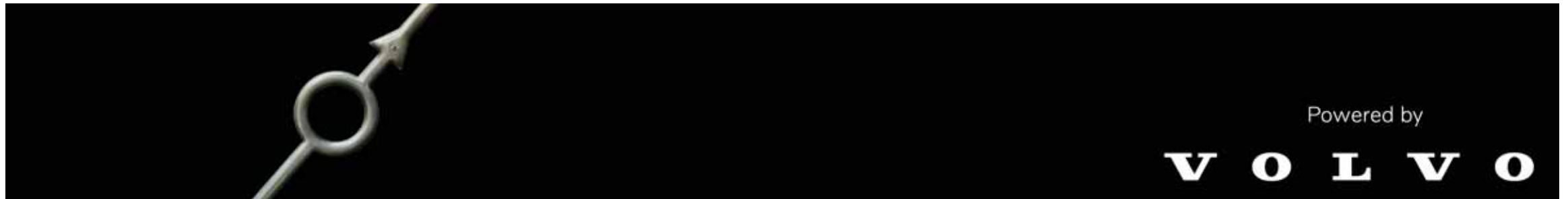
5 Leader of Turkmenistan champions herbal defense



8 Struggling Syria farmers turn to fern for fodder



16 Negro double as Ulsan win Asian Champions League



Europe battles virus surge as US authorizes second vaccine

Italy braces for Christmas lockdown • Countries tighten holiday curbs

Former US envoy to Kuwait Howell passes away

KUWAIT: Wilson Nathaniel "Nat" Howell, a great champion of US-Kuwait friendship, passed away yesterday. Howell served as ambassador to Kuwait from 1987 to 1991. US Ambassador to Kuwait Alina Romanowski offered her deepest condolences to his family, noting that during the 1990 invasion of Kuwait by Iraqi forces, Howell protected many lives. He also wrote an excellent book - 'Stranger When We Met, A Century of American Community in Kuwait' - about America's century-long relationship with Kuwait.



W Nathaniel Howell

ROME: Millions of Italians braced for Christmas and New Year under tough new coronavirus restrictions announced yesterday as Europe battled a winter surge in infections and Switzerland became the latest country to approve a virus vaccine. Europe has become the first region in the world to pass 500,000 deaths from COVID-19 since the pandemic broke out a year ago, killing more than 1.6 million worldwide and pitching the global economy into turmoil.

Among those testing positive this week for coronavirus was French President Emmanuel Macron, but his office said yesterday his condition was stable and his examinations were giving reassuring results. Italy became the latest country to announce a new regime of restrictions until Jan 6 that included limits on people leaving their homes more than once a day, closing non-essential shops, bars and restaurants and curbs on regional travel.

"It's right that they prohibit departures after 20 December if it means travelling in safety," Claudia Patrone, a

33-year-old lawyer, told AFP as she got off a train in Milan. "I took the test before leaving, I stayed locked in my house, I didn't see anyone. The measure is right if everyone respects the rules and guarantees safety."

Europe - the epicenter of the pandemic earlier this year - is once again seeing growing cases with officials fearing an explosion in infections after the Christmas holidays as families gather. England's chief medical officer Chris Whitty confirmed yesterday that a new coronavirus strain which surfaced in the country could spread faster and called for greater public vigilance to reduce transmission.

A year after the pandemic first emerged in the Chinese city of Wuhan, the rapid rollout of vaccinations is now seen as the only effective way to end the pandemic and the economically devastating lockdowns used to halt its spread. Europe is expected to start a massive vaccination campaign after Christmas following the United States and Britain which have begun giving jabs with an



WASHINGTON: US Vice President Mike Pence receives the COVID-19 vaccine in the Eisenhower Executive Office Building on Friday. — AFP

approved Pfizer-BioNTech shot, one of several leading candidates.

Russia and China have also started giving out jabs with their own domestically produced vaccines. Swiss regulators yesterday gave the green light to the Pfizer-BioNTech vaccine - the 16th country to do so and the first in continental Europe - with immuniza-

tion set to start within days. "Those who are particularly vulnerable will have priority," Health Minister Alain Berset said in a video tweet, namely the elderly and those with pre-existing conditions. The United States on Friday authorized Moderna's COVID-19 vaccine for emergency use.

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India virus cases pass 10m, but infections slowing

NEW DELHI: India surged past 10 million coronavirus cases yesterday, official data showed, the second highest in the world, although new infection rates appear to have fallen sharply in recent weeks. The number of cases increased by just over 25,000 in 24 hours, according to the health ministry, while the total number of deaths from the virus in India now stands at 145,136.

In September, the vast nation of 1.3 billion people had been recording daily new cases of almost 100,000 and looked on track to surpass the United States as the worst-hit country. But the outbreak has accelerated in the US and appears to have lost momentum in India, despite the country being home to some of the most crowded cities on the planet.

The United States, with a population a quarter the size of India's, has been reporting upwards of 200,000 new cases daily in recent weeks, 10 times as many as India. India's fatality rate is also considerably lower - less than half that of the US.

Residents in the capital New Delhi told AFP they were still worried but were more comfortable than before about leaving their homes. "Obviously the fear levels have come down over time. Initially, it was more scary," said housewife Huma Zaidi, 46. "But we are still taking precautions like wearing masks when going out and avoiding social gatherings."

India has lifted restrictions on most activities to boost the struggling economy, although some states and territories have re-imposed curbs. "I plucked up my courage and went out for lunch for the first time in six or eight months," said Simpy Dhar, 44, a language instructor. "However, my fear is not eliminated completely. I know coronavirus is still out there."

The 10-million mark came as the world's second-most populous nation gears up for the colossal and challenging task of starting to vaccinate the population next year. The government aims to inoculate 300 million people initially.

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Lab-grown meat makes historic Singapore debut

SINGAPORE: Lab-grown chicken meat made a historic debut at a Singapore restaurant yesterday in a culinary first that its creators said could help reduce the environmental damage involved in human food production. US start-up Eat Just said earlier this month that its product had been approved for sale in the city-state as an ingredient in chicken nuggets after Singapore became the first country to allow the sale of meat created without slaughtering any animals.

Back to school in US as online learning flunks

HOUSTON: The coronavirus pandemic may be raging in the Houston area, but tens of thousands of students in one district are headed back to the classroom in January because of poor results while learning from home. The plight of the town of Pasadena is being repeated across America, as educators fret that online

learning for children because of the health crisis simply might not work.

Until now families in Pasadena could choose between sending their kids to school or keeping them home for remote learning. Nearly half of the nearly 50,000 students in the school district, from kindergarten to high school, stayed home. But their test results after the autumn period of school were disappointing - 40 percent failed at least one subject, compared to 18 percent of those who attended class in person. In the 2019-2020 school year, that proportion was 13 percent for all the district's students.

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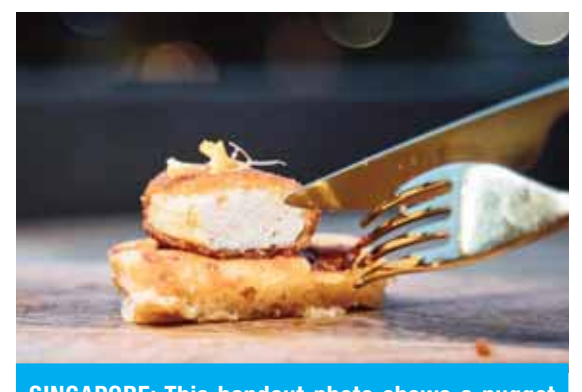
Virus curbs threaten last true HK junk

HONG KONG: The red sails of the "Dukling" junk boat have glided across Hong Kong's Victoria Harbor for more than six decades. But the wooden ship has been docked after new measures to stem a fourth wave of the coronavirus were introduced earlier this month, threatening the city's last remaining antique junk. Strict social distancing rules were brought back after daily cases repeat-

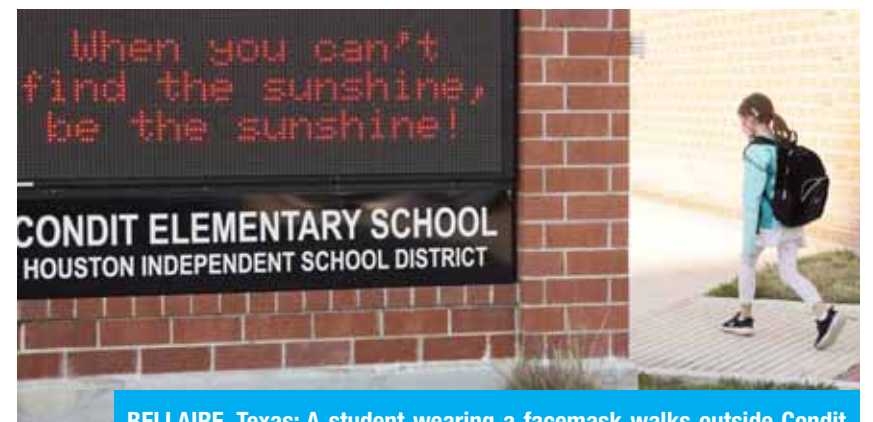
edly spiked to more than 100, their highest levels since July.

Authorities also vowed to ramp up policing of gatherings at private properties and on boats, setting up a dedicated hotline for the public to report any breaches. "In the near future, it is very difficult for us to stay alive," Charlotte Li, Dukling Limited's director of business development, told AFP. The boat requires at least four workers to operate on the water but two resigned during the pandemic over slashed wages, leaving the Dukling short on numbers. "We have to follow and obey the law. But how can we maintain the staff and their families?" Li said.

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SINGAPORE: This handout photo shows a nugget made from lab-grown chicken meat at a restaurant yesterday. — AFP



BELLAIRE, Texas: A student wearing a facemask walks outside Condit Elementary School near Houston on Dec 16, 2020. — AFP



HONG KONG: In this picture taken on Nov 27, 2020, a traditional wooden tourist junk boat "Dukling" sails in the waters of Victoria Harbor. — AFP

Local

Scam callers find innovative ways to lure their victims

Hackers upping their game as technology improves

By Nawara Fattahova

KUWAIT: "Hello! This is Ihsan from XYZ Bank. I'm calling you to update your account information, as your debit card may be frozen if you don't update it now. I need your password." With these words, hundreds or even thousands of victims have been scammed.

The information update ruse is the most recent way of scamming people, after older tricks became known to everyone. The most popular way of scamming in the past few years was when scammers told people they had won a huge amount and they only needed the bank account number to transfer the sum. Other plays for email scams or hacks are those of canceled shipments or orders.

Cases of cybertheft and fraud are rising all over the world, including Kuwait, despite financial institutions warning clients not to provide any personal information to any caller or reply to messages received with such content. Also, scammers always call through online calling apps like Viber, WhatsApp, etc, using the logo of popular local banks. But people should know that banks are supposed to call via the bank's landline and not even a mobile number.

Details of at least one scam are published in newspapers in Kuwait every week, but the real number is higher, as not every victim reports this crime. The latest victim was a 50-year-old man who

reported KD 6,000 was missing from his bank account after getting a call from a scammer claiming he was from the bank. The caller already had his full information including the password, and only asked for the OTP (one-time password). This shows how advanced scammers have become lately.

Two-factor authentication

Cyber security researcher Ali Al-Anezi insists "nobody is fully secure". "We can avoid getting hacked by having a password to access the mobile and computer. It should be a complex password that includes letters, numbers and symbols. Also, users should install two-factor authentication on their phones and emails, which is a program that requires an OTP, which the hacker cannot get unless they have the victim's phone. Furthermore, users

should always update the software on their mobiles and computers," he told Kuwait Times. Scammers are constantly improving to appear more genuine. "Recently, I received an email that appeared to be from a well-known Saudi electronics company, which tried to hack my email through a link. This is just one of thousands of cases. As technology is improving, hackers are also upping their game," added Anezi.

According to him, hackers are focusing more on individuals rather than institutions. "Email phishing scams are more intensive in April, offering special



promotions at the start of the fiscal year, mostly targeting individuals," he explained.

"One of the latest cases was of a Nigerian hacker who was arrested in Dubai after hacking various bank accounts and obtaining the passwords by using special technology. This is similar to the case of a Kuwaiti hacker who hacked various bank accounts and obtained the account number, card number and password, but without the name. He then called the bank and entered this information, and waited for the operator who mentioned the name. If it was the name of a man, he continued the call and demanded any transaction," stressed Anezi.

Many scams operate through WhatsApp. "There have been many cases in Kuwait and abroad, where

the scammer hacks a WhatsApp account and starts sending messages to the contacts of this account requesting a money transfer, saying they are in trouble. Many victims believe the message and transfer the money, as the message is from their friend. But people should be careful, as it's strange to ask for money via message and not a call. So if people receive such a message, they should always call back, not on WhatsApp, but on the actual phone number of their friend," Anezi told Kuwait Times.

"Never provide your password to anyone, not only of your bank account, but even your email. You can also use Windows Hello on your computer for better protection. Try to update your computer every year, and don't forget to password-protect your mobile phone," concluded Anezi.

“Nobody is fully secure”

Army receives first batch of Caracal helicopters

KUWAIT: Chief of the General Staff of the Kuwaiti Army Lt Gen Staff Khaled Saleh Al-Sabah oversaw the commissioning of the first batch of H225M Caracal helicopters into Ali Al-Salem Air Base. This batch is part of a deal to acquire 30 aircraft of this type developed by Airbus, the public relations and moral guidance department of the Kuwaiti Army said in a statement on Thursday. The French-made multirole military utility helicopters will enhance the capacity of Kuwait Air Force particularly in the fields of rapid interventions, search and rescue operations, evacuations and delivery of aid to disaster-hit areas, according to the statement. — KUNA



KUWAIT: Chief of the General Staff of the Kuwaiti Army Lt Gen Staff Khaled Saleh Al-Sabah and other military brass oversee the commissioning of the new helicopters.— Defense Ministry photos



Back to school in US as online...

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"Both groups are worrying me as far as their ability to get the curriculum basics successfully. But those virtual kids, that's something that we're concerned about at this time," said DeeAnn Powell, superintendent of the Pasadena Independent School District. That district covers a small part of Houston itself, plus the towns of South Houston and Pasadena, which are overwhelmingly Latino.

Powell says the pandemic has made life worse for this already economically challenged demographic. "Our kids of course are majority low-income," she said in an interview via Zoom. "When both parents are working, they are less likely to stay home and monitor that the kids are engaged," said Powell. "So I think it is a struggle."

"Sometimes, we find that because of safety reasons the kids aren't left at home. They might be taken to work with their parents or taken to run errands or engaged in different activities during the day and that's keeping them away from their assignments," said Powell. And some adolescents have simply dropped out of school and taken jobs in supermarkets or fast-food restaurants. To help the poorest families, the districts provides computers and pays for their Internet.

Europe battles virus surge as...

Continued from Page 1

paving the way for millions of doses of a second jab to be shipped across the hardest-hit country in the world. The United States is the first nation to authorize the two-dose regimen from Moderna, now the second vaccine to be deployed in a Western country after the one developed by Pfizer and BioNTech.

Millions of doses will start shipping out as early as this weekend from cold-storage sites outside Memphis and Louisville. With the United States now registering more than 2,500 deaths a day from COVID-19, senior US officials including Vice President Mike Pence stepped up to receive early vaccinations on Friday.

Pence's public inoculation was the most high-profile attempt yet at persuading vaccine-skeptic Americans to join a national effort to halt a pandemic that has infected more than 74 million world-

wide. President-elect Joe Biden, who will take office on Jan 20, announced he would take the vaccine, also in public, tomorrow. In Europe, Slovakian Prime Minister Igor Matovic became the latest high-profile figure to test positive for COVID-19 a week after attending a European Union summit in Brussels. The summit is believed to be where Macron also caught the virus. Macron's diagnosis on Thursday led to a host of European leaders and French officials rushing into self-isolation.

Macron, who is working in self-isolation from an official residence outside Paris, "is still presenting the same symptoms of the COVID-19 illness (fatigue, coughing, stiffness)", said a brief statement yesterday, signed by his doctor. But they were not preventing him from carrying out his duties and he was in stable condition. "We have to be vigilant as the virus is gaining in strength again," the French leader said on Friday in a short video message.

In Australia, a cluster of cases on Sydney's northern beaches grew to 38, with residents ordered to stay home from late yesterday other than for essential reasons. New South Wales state Premier Gladys Berejiklian pleaded with Sydney's more than five million residents to remain in their homes. — AFP

But he says teachers are partly to blame - some are not good at working with computers and communicating with students online. "In online school, some of my friends did miss some assignments just because there wasn't anyone to tell them 'you got to do this,' any bells to tell them it's time to switch classes," said Lucas. "They sort of fell asleep at the end of the class." — AFP

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Lab-grown meat makes historic...

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step towards solving climate change and creating the opportunity to feed the world without overwhelming the planet".

Eat Just chief executive Josh Tetrick said this week that the launch "moves us closer to a world where the majority of meat we eat will not require

India virus cases pass 10m, but...

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with health workers and other frontline staff expected first in line. India has yet to approve any vaccines but several drugmakers have applied for authorization, including AstraZeneca, which has partnered with India's Serum Institute, the world's largest vaccine maker.

Health ministry officials were expected to meet the Election Commission - which carries out vast state and national polls - as they map out how to distribute the shots, the Press Trust of India reported Thursday. Experts have cautioned that the country could struggle because of its weak cold-chain infrastructure - needed for keeping vaccines refrigerated - particularly in poor and densely populated urban areas and remote rural regions.

Virus curbs threaten last...

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Li said she felt authorities showed a "lack of caring" for small private companies after excluding attractions like the Dukling boat from public coronavirus subsidies handed out to travel agencies, tour guides and big parks. Ocean Park, an ageing theme park that was making losses even before the pandemic struck, has received billions from a government bailout. "I know the government can't help everyone, but in the tourism industry they need to think more globally," she said.

Junks date back to the Han Dynasty (221-206 BC) and were traditionally used for fishing and transport. Built in 1955 in neighboring Macau, the Dukling is

tearing down a single forest, displacing a single animal's habitat or using a single drop of antibiotics". Demand for sustainable meat alternatives is rising due to growing concerns from consumers about the environment and animal welfare, but other products on the market are plant-based.

Meat consumption is projected to increase more than 70 percent by 2050, and lab-grown alternatives have a role to play in ensuring a secure food supply, the company said. There were concerns that lab-grown varieties would be too expensive, but a spokesman for Eat Just said the company had made "considerable progress" in lowering the cost. — AFP

erated - particularly in poor and densely populated urban areas and remote rural regions.

"All the experience that India has in vaccinating is on the much smaller game of annual vaccinations of children," Satyajit Rath, an immunologist at the National Institute of Immunology, told AFP. "I'm not sure that India's public healthcare systems are sufficiently developed... Even mildly below-freezing requirements (for vaccine transportation and storage) are likely to prove extremely challenging in the rural hinterland's healthcare system services."

Like elsewhere, Indian authorities also have to convince some Indians skeptical about the safety of the shots. A recent survey of 18,000 people across India found that 69 percent said they were in no rush to get vaccinated. LocalCircles, which conducted the poll, cited "limited information about side-effects, efficacy levels and a growing belief in parts of the population that COVID-19 cannot infect them because of their high immunity levels". — AFP

the only authentic junk left - the other remaining vessels are modern replicas. It was owned for 20 years by a Hong Kong fisherman who lived onboard with his family before it became a tourist attraction.

Before the latest restrictions were enforced, the Dukling managed to stay afloat by switching to local tourists and schoolchildren. They readjusted routes and switched English commentary to Cantonese.

"The locals are hearing more about us this year because with no tourists, we have more time and money to spend on promotion in Hong Kong itself," Li said before the new restrictions came on.

Now that source of income has dried up, Li is calling for authorities to preserve the Dukling whatever happens during the rest of the pandemic. The boat's mission is not merely to serve as a tourist attraction, she said, but to preserve Hong Kong's fishing heritage and the city's history. "It's an old boat full of history and stories," Li said. "It's a moving museum, a fishing museum." — AFP

Local

Kuwait's Interior Minister oversees unsealing of drug, weapon seizures



KUWAIT: Minister of Interior Sheikh Thamer Ali Al-Sabah oversees the operation. —Interior Ministry photos

KUWAIT: Minister of Interior Sheikh Thamer Ali Al-Sabah, accompanied by the Ministry's Undersecretary Lt Gen Esam Al-Naham, oversaw the unsealing of two million pills of the narcotic Captagon, nine weapons and wine bottles, recently seized by the security personnel.

The contraband was hidden in an innovative way inside a truck and brought to the country, the ministry's security media and public relations department said in a press statement on Thursday. The seizure

came within the efforts of joint cooperation and coordination between the Kuwaiti Ministry of Interior's Drug Control General Department (DCGD) and the Saudi Ministry of Interior's General Directorate for Narcotics Control, it added. In coordination with the two sides, investigations revealed that there was an attempt to smuggle a large quantity of Captagon inside a truck in Wafra, it noted. After intensifying investigations, collecting information and obtaining a legal permission from the Public Prosecution, the

truck was monitored and seized while moving from Al-Wafra to a camp in Sabah Al-Ahmad, it said, noting that a number of suspects were arrested.

Two million pills of Captagon, ammunition and weapons, and alcoholic drinks were found in the truck, it stated. The accused confessed that they brought these drugs into the country so as to smuggle them to neighboring states, it said.

The seized drugs and weapons, along with the accused, were referred to authorities to take

required legal measures, it made clear. The statement quoted the minister thanking personnel of DCGD for their sincere efforts in combating decisively the attempts of smuggling drugs. Sheikh Thamer also expressed gratitude to the Saudi Interior Ministry, headed by Minister Prince Abdulaziz bin Saud bin Nayef, the statement said. Sheikh Thamer phoned his Saudi counterpart, lauding cooperation and coordination with the security apparatuses in the two countries, it said. —KUNA



KUWAIT: Minister of Interior Sheikh Thamer Ali Al-Sabah received senior Interior Ministry officials at the ministry's building, where they congratulated him on his new post. The ministry's Undersecretary Lt Gen Esam Al-Naham attended the meeting.

Kuwait applauds Yemenis' accord

KUWAIT: The Kuwaiti Foreign Ministry yesterday applauded implementation of the Riyadh accord by the legitimate Yemeni Government and the Southern Transitional Council (STC). The ministry in a statement lauded the accord for military arrangements and forming a government of skilled members, hoping the steps would pave way for reaching the aspired political solution and end the crisis in the brotherly country. It highly valued the major and continuing efforts by Saudi Arabia for hammering out the accord, depicting Riyadh's keenness on stability and security in the region and Yemen.

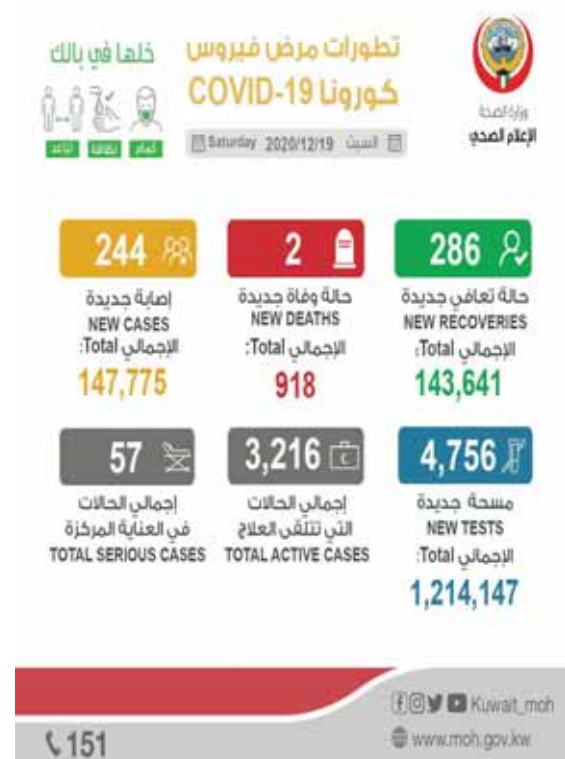
Meanwhile, Secretary-General of the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) Dr Nayef Al-Hajraf lauded the decision made earlier Friday by Yemeni

President Abdrabbuh Mansour Hadi to form a new government representative of the broad political spectrum of the country. In a statement this evening, Dr Hajraf stated support to the efforts of the Yemeni parties to implement the Riyadh Agreement between the Yemeni government and the Southern Transitional Council with a view to putting an end to the standoff in the country.

He voiced hope that all stakeholders would place the interests of the Yemeni people above all considerations and prepare the ground for the new government to exercise its powers in the transitional capital city of Aden and resume the development process in liberated areas. Dr Hajraf appreciated the efforts of the Saudi-led Coalition to Support Legitimacy in Yemen, which led to today's proclamation of a new cabinet lineup. He reaffirmed the GCC members' backing for the efforts to stabilize sisterly Yemen based on the GCC initiative and its executive mechanisms and the UN Security Council Resolution 2216. —KUNA

Kuwait reports 5 COVID deaths over weekend

KUWAIT: Kuwait confirmed 244 new coronavirus infections yesterday to raise the total to 147,775, while two new deaths were recorded, which increased the death toll to 918, the health ministry said. On Friday, Kuwait announced 339 new cases in addition to three deaths. On the other hand, total recoveries increased to 143,641 after Kuwait registered 286 yesterday and 242 on Friday. The number of people hospitalized with the virus stood at 3,216 as of yesterday, with 57 of them in intensive care units (ICU), according to ministry spokesman Dr Abdullah Al-Sanad. Hospitalized cases stood at 3,260 on Friday, including 51 ICU patients. Dr Sanad added yesterday that 4,756 swab tests were conducted over the previous 24 hours, bringing the total up to 1,214,147. Health workers had taken 6,667 swab tests on Friday. Dr Sanad went on to urge the public to follow health precautions, mainly social distancing to help limit the spread of the virus. —KUNA



Kuwait commerce minister stresses achievement

KUWAIT: National development plans should follow a meticulous process to ensure unimpeded progress leading to tangible results, Kuwait's new commerce minister said yesterday, highlighting that "goal achievement" is his primary focus. "We only have one goal in mind and that's to accomplish," Faisal Al-Medlej told the press, adding that development plans should proceed in a timely and effective manner. The minister revealed that a broad "nationalization plan" has taken effect to bring development goals to fruition, saying that any development plan should be carefully assessed and reviewed to translate such strategies into success. Any endeavor undertaken across state bodies should bear the nation's "best interest" in mind, added the minister. —KUNA



Faisal Al-Medlej

Kuwait oil price at \$50.76 pb

KUWAIT: Kuwait's oil price dropped 32 cents to \$50.76 per barrel Friday against \$51.08 pb Thursday, Kuwait Petroleum Corporation (KPC) said yesterday. In international markets, the Brent crude oil rate rose 32 cents to \$50.29 pb while that of the intermediate Texas crude climbed 42 cents to settle at \$46.99 pb. —KUNA



SEAMASTER AQUA TERRA

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

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News in brief

Amir condolences with Turkish President

KUWAIT: His Highness the Amir Sheikh Nawaf Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah sent a cable of condolences yesterday to Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan. In the cable, His Highness the Amir expressed his condolences to the Turkish president over the victims of the fire that broke out at an intensive care unit treating COVID-19 patients in southern Turkey, killing several people. His Highness the Amir also offered condolences to the victims' families, wishing the injured speedy recovery. His Highness the Crown Prince Sheikh Mishal Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah and His Highness the Prime Minister Sheikh Sabah Al-Khaled Al-Hamad Al-Sabah sent similar cables. — KUNA

End of crisis

VIENNA: Romanian Foreign Ministry praised on Thursday Kuwait's efforts to end the Gulf crisis. In a press statement, the ministry stated support to the efforts aiming to ensure the Gulf's unity and stability, and praised the fruitful diplomatic efforts of Kuwait to solve the issue. Romania is confident of the return of the political, economic and commercial ties between the countries of the Gulf which will lead to stability and prosperity, according to the statement. In early December, the United Nations applauded the endeavors of Kuwait in finding the perfect solution to achieve that goal. — KUNA

Sudan off list

KUWAIT: Kuwait Ministry of Foreign affairs hailed on Thursday the US decision to lift Sudan from the list of state sponsors of terrorism. The Ministry congratulated, in a press statement, the Republic of Sudan on the move, wishing the country more prosperity and more achievements. — KUNA

Photo of the Day



KUWAIT: This photo taken yesterday shows an airplane flying over Kuwait. — Photo by Fouad Al-Shaikh

Gulf Bank assists at COVID-19 rapid testing center in Sabhan

KUWAIT: Gulf Bank's sustainability team was present last Wednesday at the Coronavirus Rapid Screening Center in Sabhan, to distribute preventive material to visitors who wished to be screened. The effort took place as part of the bank's unwavering commitment to social responsibility, and as part of its community sustainability efforts in raising awareness about the virus and its prevention.

This initiative comes as part of a wider set of initiatives pioneered by Gulf Bank. Since the outbreak of the coronavirus pandemic in Kuwait, Gulf Bank has worked tirelessly to improve working conditions for both employees and customers alike. During the first stages of returning to normal life, which included the reopening of the bank's branches, the bank launched a mental health campaign for employees to help them cope with the spread of the pandemic and the various health challenges employees may have faced as a result.

The Assistant General Manager of Corporate Communications at Gulf Bank, Ahmad Al-Amir, commented: "Our team was present at the Coronavirus Rapid Testing Center in Sabhan as part of our recognition of the larger societal role that major enterprises contribute in supporting governmental and public efforts. Throughout this initiative, we made every effort to spread positivity and hope to everyone who visited the testing center, and to provide them with the necessary preventive material for the times we are currently



KUWAIT: Gulf Bank's team on site.



A Gulf Bank team member distributes preventative material.

living in, and which will hopefully soon be a thing of the past, God willing."

It is worth noting that Gulf Bank's social media activity was greatly amplified earlier this year, as the bank launched several community sustainability campaigns commensurate with the conditions the country was undergoing, including the lockdown and curfew periods. These initiatives included a physical health and at-home exercise campaign, a home decor and lifestyle campaign, and a financial and economic awareness initiative.

Gulf Bank also launched a mobile application allowing customers to book appointments to visit their nearest branch. The app aims to reduce wait times and make the process of visiting a branch more convenient, especially in light of the current

restrictions imposed by the coronavirus pandemic.

The "Visit Gulf Bank" app is available to download for all Gulf Bank clients on both iOS and Android devices. Gulf Bank customers can book their appointments through the app and specify their preferred date, time and branch, granting them a smoother and faster branch visit.

Gulf Bank is keen on applying all the necessary precautionary measures to ensure the regular sterilization of its locations. These measures include taking customers' temperatures at the entrance, maintaining physical distance, and ensuring both customers and employees are wearing gloves and masks at all times. Gulf Bank is committed to applying the best preventive health measure to ensure the safety of both its clients and employees.

Info Minister congratulates two Kuwaiti award winners

KUWAIT: Minister of Information and Minister of State for Youth Affairs Abdulrahman Al-Mutairi congratulated Kuwaiti engineers Jenan Al-Shehab and Fatma Al-Zalalah on getting several international accolades. In a statement to the press, Mutairi expressed pride as Shehab won two gold medals and an excellence award during her participation in Taiwan's Kaohsiung International Invention and Design EXPO (KIDE) 2020 held on December 10-12. The minister also congratulated Zalalah who

won the 2020 UN Environment Program's Young Champions of the Earth award, to be amongst seven winning scientists, engineers, businessmen and activists all over the world. Mutairi said that Shehab's participation in the KIDE is distinguished, noting that it is a key platform for inventors in the Continent of Asia to display their ideas, research projects and new inventions. More than 500 inventors from more than 26 countries, including the State of Kuwait, are partaking in the KIDE. He lauded as distinguished Zalalah's project that aims at recycling harmful waste at houses, schools and companies, and replacing it with trees and plants. Kuwait's youths are creative and have made progress in various fields, he said, adding that this is an additional achievement to the Kuwaiti youth, mainly the females. — KUNA



Int'l Women's Group celebrate New Year holiday

KUWAIT: To celebrate the spirit of the season and the coming new year, the International Women's Group - Kuwait, held a first ever 'Santa Drive-

through' for its members on Saturday, December 12, 2020. The ladies of IWG Board were present to greet members, as they drove through a specially decorated area with various stalls to collect their 'festive fayre' of chocolates, poinsettias, and annual gifts presented by Santa. The atmosphere was filled with music, laughter and greetings, all conducted in a safe and socially distanced manner, giving members an opportunity to share in person the spirit of love and friendship we have all missed in the pandemic.

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Pompeo blames Russia for massive US cyberattack

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Five rockets fired at US air base in Afghanistan



YEREVAN: Armenians attend a ceremony to commemorate those who died in wars over Karabakh at the Yerablur Military Memorial Cemetery on Friday. — AFP

Armenia mourns Karabakh victims

Opposition keeps up pressure on Pashinyan to resign

YEREVAN: Armenian Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan yesterday led thousands in a march in memory of those killed in a six-week war with Azerbaijan as the Caucasus country began three days of mourning. Pashinyan has been under huge pressure from the opposition to step down after nearly 3,000 Armenians were killed in the clashes with Azerbaijan over the breakaway region of Nagorno-Karabakh.

As Armenia began its period of mourning for the Karabakh war, the opposition kept up pressure on Pashinyan to resign over the handling of the conflict and what they say is a humiliating peace deal with Azerbaijan. Accompanied by top officials, Pashinyan led a thousands-strong procession to a memorial complex in the capital Yerevan where victims of the conflict are buried.

"The entire nation has been through and is

going through a nightmare," Pashinyan said in a video address ahead of the memorial march. "Sometimes it seems that all of our dreams have been dashed and our optimism destroyed," he said. The opposition has called the 45-year-old leader a "traitor" for agreeing to end the war on Azerbaijan's terms.

Pashinyan, whose wife and son were at the front during the conflict, has said he has no plans to quit and the peace deal was Armenia's only option, ensuring Karabakh's survival. The war ended in November with a Moscow-brokered peace agreement that saw the Armenians cede swathes of territory to Azerbaijan which has been backed by close ally Turkey.

'Beg for forgiveness'

Many critics said yesterday the leader should

stay away from the memorial cemetery. "He must not desecrate the graves of our children," Misak Avetisyan, who lost a son in the war, told reporters. The grief-stricken father said the prime minister should get down on his knees and "beg for forgiveness". Many critics chanted "Nikol the traitor" as authorities dramatically beefed up security at the cemetery.

Later yesterday several thousands of opposition supporters gathered for a memorial rally in Yerevan's Freedom Square. "This war did not have to happen," said former prime minister Vazgen Manukyan who the opposition says should replace Pashinyan. He said Armenia under Pashinyan had lost "all allies". Pashinyan's critics have called on supporters to stage a national strike on Dec 22.

A member of the Pashinyan-led procession said

the prime minister should not be blamed for the mistakes of previous leaders. "He is not guilty of anything," said Karo Sargsyan. Pashinyan, a former newspaper editor, was propelled to power in 2018 after he channeled widespread desire for change into a broad protest movement against corrupt post-Soviet elites.

But after the war with Azerbaijan, many now say Pashinyan has betrayed Armenia's interests. Numerous public figures including the influential head of Armenia's Apostolic Church, Catholicos Garegin, have called for Pashinyan's resignation. As part of the peace deal Russia deployed nearly 2,000 peacekeeping troops to Karabakh. More than 5,000 people including civilians were killed during the fighting between the ex-Soviet rivals, who also fought a war in the 1990s over the mountainous region. — AFP

Turkmen leader champions herbal defense

ASHGABAT: Ayna Garayeva, a school teacher in the capital of authoritarian and secretive Turkmenistan, began taking extra sanitary measures in her classroom when the government issued new guidelines in August. As well as standard coronavirus precautions like temperature checks for students, she started fumigating her classroom with the smoke of a herb beloved by the ex-Soviet country's leader. "We are following the instructions as they are laid out," 42-year-old Garayeva told AFP.

In tightly controlled Turkmenistan, which still insists it has no virus cases, the pandemic has led to a boom in a herb whose Turkmen name translates as "medicine for a hundred illnesses". Wild rue - known locally as yuzerlik - has for millennia been popular in North Africa, the Middle East and Central Asia as a panacea for sickness and ill fortune.

But in Turkmenistan, strongman leader and ex-dentist Gurbanguly Berdimukhamedov has gone a step further. In March, he ordered wild rue burning on a "systematic level", trumpeting the bacteria and infection-killing qualities of its faintly intoxicating smoke. At the same time, authorities continued to hold ostentatious mass events and deter citizens from wearing masks. Since the diktat, the cost of a wild rue bundle has grown five-fold to five manats (\$1.43).

In neighboring Uzbekistan, top sanitary doctor Bakhrom Almatov cautioned the herb has "no direct effect" on viruses, despite having healthy properties. "After use, many people start sneezing. When they

sneeze, the body expels dust that has fallen into it," Almatov told local media.

Locking down with zero cases

The World Health Organization declined to comment on wild rue specifically, but said traditional medicine in many countries "is often an important health resource with many applications". Berdimukhamedov joins the leader of Madagascar, who gained notoriety for promoting a scientifically unproven herbal virus remedy at home and abroad.

Herbal remedies have been widely used during the pandemic in countries with struggling public health systems, like Yemen and Sierra Leone. Yet Berdimukhamedov's approach to the pandemic changed after the WHO visited in July. The delegation stopped short of dismissing his boast that that country had zero cases, a claim now only shared by North Korea and a handful of island states.

But it recommended that Turkmenistan adopt measures as if the virus "were already circulating". WHO Europe chief Hans Kluge tweeted weeks later that the group had "expressed serious concern about (a rise) in #COVID19 negative pneumonia" in Turkmenistan during a teleconference with Berdimukhamedov. Kluge said Berdimukhamedov had agreed to allow the WHO to sample virus tests "in-country" and send them to WHO labs for analysis.

Since the July visit, non-food shops and restaurants across the desert republic have been shuttered. A ban on passenger trains and cross-country bus travel has been extended into next year. A mask-wearing regime was put in place in the summer to counter "dust" and unspecified "pathogens". Turkmenistan has yet to cooperate with the WHO's request for confirmatory testing, however.

Mutant-green sanitizer

The WHO told AFP that the request has proven impossible to facilitate due to "travel restrictions".

naked in her living room.

"What is going on?" a terrified Young is heard telling police in the video aired by CBS 2 Chicago. "What are you looking for?" "You've got the wrong house," Young repeatedly tells officers. "Oh my god, this cannot be right," she says. "How is this legal?" Young told the television network that she had just returned from work and was undressing in her bedroom when police broke in. "It happened so fast I didn't have time to put on clothes," she said. "I'm just standing there terrified, humiliated."

Police eventually left after determining they had the wrong address. One officer apologized to Young while others tried to fix her broken door. According to CBS 2, the suspect the police were searching for lived in the same apartment complex and an informant had provided them with the wrong address. Chicago Mayor Lori Lightfoot told reporters she was "appalled" after viewing the video and



ASHGABAT: Turkmen women wearing traditional dress demonstrate how to fumigate a house with the smoke of burning wild rue (known locally as yuzerlik) on Dec 11, 2020. — AFP

Turkmenistan has indeed paused inbound flights, but state media last month said several German doctors unaffiliated with the WHO visited Ashgabat to meet with Berdimukhamedov and receive state awards. Berdimukhamedov's instructions for fumigation are typical of his championing of indigenous fauna and flora.

The all-powerful leader has also feted a national horse breed and a local shepherd dog in statues and various books he reportedly penned. His wild rue drive has caused a rare spurt in innovation in an economy dominated by the state and crushed by a six-year depression in energy prices. An AFP correspondent this month visited a trade exhibition where a state-owned company demonstrated new, cigar-shaped briquettes of dried rue that can smolder for up to 45 minutes. At 10 manats for six blocks, "they should be affordable to the local population," said a representative, who did not introduce himself. — AFP

described the raid as a "colossal failure".

"That could have easily been me," said Lightfoot, who is African American. "We can do better and we will do better as a city," she said. City attorneys had sought to block the release of the video and Lightfoot said she had ordered a review of the release policy. Young's attorney, Keenan Saulter, who is filing a suit against the police department, said a young white woman would not have received the same treatment. "They viewed Miss Young as less than human," Saulter told CBS 2.

Young's case has been compared to that of Breonna Taylor, a young Black woman who was shot dead in Louisville, Kentucky, in March in a botched raid on her home. Taylor's name became a rallying cry during protests against racial injustice this summer following the death of George Floyd, a Black man killed by a white police officer in Minneapolis in May. — AFP

Algerian govt tightens screws on online media

TUNIS: Algeria has announced tighter state controls over online media, sparking alarm in the North African country whose pro-democracy movement is under heightened pressure from the government. President Abdelmadjid Tebboune's government, already accused of stifling free speech, this month published a new decree regulating electronic media in the online Official Gazette.

Among other things, it will force web-based Algerian media outlets to be based within the country and demand that they inform authorities of any "illegal content". The new rules aim to combat "the misuse of this type of modern media" and the spread of "rumors, fake news and fake videos", said Communications Minister Ammar Belhimer.

The decree, which the minister - a former journalist - argues will protect Algeria and its armed forces against malicious attacks, has been roundly decried by media professionals. It amounts to "an absurd ban on an independent electronic press - this is another bad signal", journalist Said Djaafer wrote in an editorial on the website 24HDZ. Hamdi Baala, a journalist at the Twala news site, said that online media has so far been "a free space that is technically and economically beyond the control of the authorities. "With this decree, they want to get control over it."

The new rules, to be enforced over the next 12 months, come at a time the Algerian government has put on trial or jailed a string of activists and journalists associated with the pro-democracy Hirak movement. Hirak's mass demonstrations broke out early last year and forced long-time president Abdelaziz Bouteflika from power in April 2019. They continued after that, demanding a far more sweeping overhaul of a sclerotic political system in place since independence from France in 1962, but ground to a halt as the novel coronavirus pandemic struck. Tebboune, in power since Dec 2019, has sought ostensibly to reach out to the Hirak movement, even as the regime has tightened the screws. Online restrictions are nothing new for Algeria's 22 million Internet users. — AFP

Naked handcuffing of black woman sparks outrage

WASHINGTON: The authorities in the US city of Chicago are coming under fire after a video was released of police handcuffing a naked Black woman after raiding her home in a case of mistaken identity. The police raid took place on Feb 21, 2019 but the disturbing video was only released recently. Police body cameras show officers using a battering ram to break down the door of the home of Anjanette Young and putting the 50-year-old social worker in handcuffs while she stands

International

Pompeo blames Russia for massive US cyberattack

Microsoft notifies more than 40 customers hit by the malware

WASHINGTON: Russia was "pretty clearly" behind a devastating cyberattack on several US government agencies that also hit targets worldwide, Secretary of State Mike Pompeo said. Microsoft said late Thursday that it had notified more than 40 customers hit by the malware, which security experts say could allow attackers unfettered network access to key government systems and electric power grids and other utilities.

"There was a significant effort to use a piece of third-party software to essentially embed code inside of US government systems," Pompeo told The Mark Levin Show on Friday. "This was a very significant effort, and I think it's the case that now we can say pretty clearly that it was the Russians that engaged in this activity."

Roughly 80 percent of the affected customers are located in the United States, Microsoft president Brad Smith said in a blog post, with victims also found in Belgium, Britain, Canada, Israel, Mexico, Spain and the United Arab Emirates. "It's certain that the number and location of victims will keep growing," Smith said, echoing concerns voiced this week by US officials on the serious threat from the attack.

"This is not 'espionage as usual,' even in the digital age," Smith said.

"Instead, it represents an act of recklessness that created a serious technological vulnerability for the United

States and the world." John Dickson of the security firm Denim Group said many private sector companies which could be vulnerable were scrambling to shore up security, even to the point of considering rebuilding servers and other equipment.

"Everyone is in damage assessment now because it's so big," Dickson said. "It's a severe body blow to confidence both in government and critical infrastructure." The threat comes from a long-running attack which is believed to have injected malware into computer networks using enterprise management network software made by the Texas-based IT company SolarWinds, with the hallmarks of a nation-state attack. James Lewis, vice president at the Center for Strategic and International Studies, said the attack may end up being the worst to hit the United States, eclipsing the 2014 hack of US government personnel records in a suspected Chinese infiltration.

"The scale is daunting. We don't know what has been taken so that is one of the tasks for forensics," Lewis said. "We also don't know what's been left behind. The normal practice is to leave something behind so they can get back in, in the future."

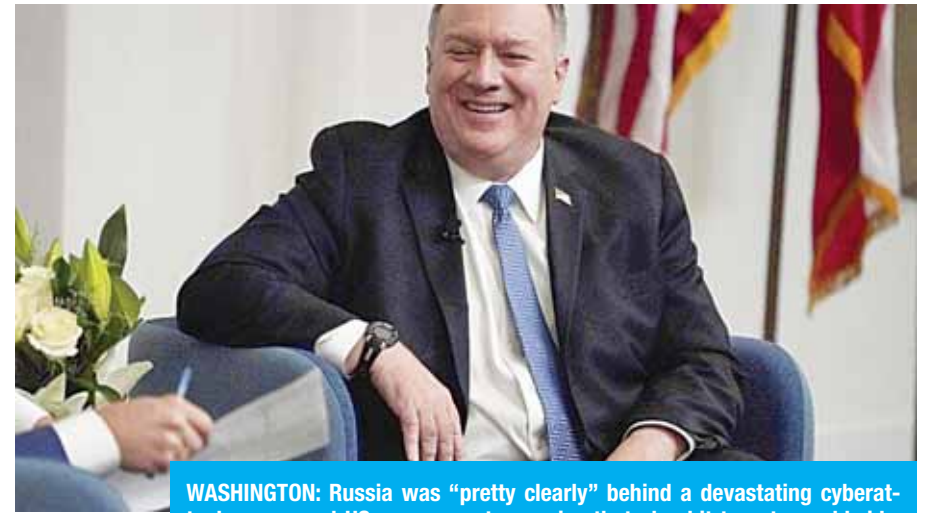
NSA warning

The National Security Agency called for increased vigilance to prevent unauthorized access to key military and

civilian systems. Analysts have said the attacks pose threats to national security by infiltrating key government systems, while also creating risks for controls of key infrastructure systems such as electric power grids and other utilities. The US Cybersecurity and Infrastructure Security Agency (CISA) said government agencies, critical infrastructure entities, and private sector organizations had been targeted by what it called an "advanced persistent threat actor."

CISA did not identify who was behind the malware attack, but private security companies pointed a finger at hackers linked to the Russian government. Pompeo had also suggested Moscow's involvement on Monday, saying the Russian government had made repeated attempts to breach US government networks. President-elect Joe Biden expressed "great concern" over the computer breach while Republican Senator Mitt Romney blamed Russia and slammed what he called "inexcusable silence" from the White House. Romney likened the cyberattack to a situation in which "Russian bombers have been repeatedly flying undetected over our entire country."

CISA said the computer intrusions began at least as early as March this year, and the actor behind them had "demonstrated patience, operational security and complex tradecraft."



WASHINGTON: Russia was "pretty clearly" behind a devastating cyberattack on several US government agencies that also hit targets worldwide, Secretary of State Mike Pompeo said.

"This threat poses a grave risk," CISA said Thursday, adding that it "expects that removing this threat actor from compromised environments will be highly complex and challenging for organizations."

Hackers reportedly installed malware on software used by the US Treasury Department and the Commerce Department, allowing them to view internal email traffic. The Department of Energy, which manages the country's nuclear arsenal, confirmed it had also been hit by the malware but had disconnected affected systems from its

network. "At this point, the investigation has found that the malware has been isolated to business networks only, and has not impacted the mission essential national security functions of the department, including the National Nuclear Security Administration," said agency spokeswoman Shaylyn Hynes. SolarWinds said up to 18,000 customers, including government agencies and Fortune 500 companies, had downloaded compromised software updates, allowing hackers to spy on email exchanges. Russia has denied involvement. —AFP

Mali lost in transition as army expands its role after coup

BAMAKO: Hopes that soldiers behind Mali's coup would swiftly restore civilian rule and tackle jihadism and ethnic violence are fading fast as the army expands its role. Many in the large Sahel country hailed the August 18 putsch as the precursor of a "new Mali"—a nation that would emerge stronger and more stable, its institutions better placed to confront the country's many ills.

Young army officers toppled president Ibrahim Boubacar Keita after weeks of protests sparked largely by his failures to roll back a jihadist insurgency and root out perceived corruption. Threatened by international sanctions, the junta handed power to a caretaker institution which is supposed to last for up to 18 months until elections are held. But disenchantment at the slow pace of reforms is growing, fuelled by anger that figures with army links dominate the body.

Political parties, swiftly ousted from the decision-making process, have almost unanimously denounced the methods of the military. "It would appear that this has been manipulation," said Boubacar Diawara, an expert on public law and governance. Mali is "a fragile country built like a house of cards," he said. "The junta had the possibility of consolidating the foundations, but they did not do it."

Nepotism and inaction remain. Hospitals are overwhelmed with COVID-19 cases, while social discontent is mounting and many public service employees are on indefinite strike. The number of jihadist attacks has declined but there is no evident connection with any political changes in Bamako, the southern capital far from territory frequented by armed Islamists. The latest controversy arose with the creation of the National Transition Council (CNT), designed to take the place of parliament for the transition.

Programmed for failure?

The criteria for appointing the 121 members of the CNT and even the true identity of some of those named remain obscure. Others have been given seats without showing any prior interest.

Filmmaker Boubacar Sidibe is a victim of this. He was a CNT candidate who was accepted, his name placed on file with his date of birth and profession. But when he sat in his place at the inaugural session, a man with the same name introduced himself and stated that seat 101 was reserved for "the military quota." Sidibe was shown out. "We're bringing to the table the same procedural irregularities that we denounced in the past," said Abdourhamane Ben Mamata Toure, former director of training at the National School of Administration, which has produced top civil servants. —AFP



A photograph shows a general view of Kakolo Mountain, the home village of Aboubacar Traore, in South West of Mali. —AFP

Myanmar gang rape victim wins legal battle with military

SITTWE, Myanmar: After being gang-raped by soldiers, steely-eyed Thein Nu went up against Myanmar's powerful military in a months-long fight for justice—a fight that paid off with a rare legal victory. Her three rapists were jailed for 20 years with hard labor, a sentence she hopes will give other survivors the courage to speak up and challenge the military's impunity.

Lodging a legal complaint pitted the 36-year-old mother of four against Myanmar's most powerful institution, whose soldiers have long been accused by rights groups of using rape as a weapon of war in the country's conflict zones. The crime was committed in June in northern Rakhine state—the site of a nearly two-year battle between the military and the Arakan Army, which is fighting for more autonomy for the ethnic Rakhine population.

"Many women like me have already endured the same thing," Thein Nu—who has been given a pseudonym to protect her identity—told AFP. "If I didn't reveal this, it could lead to many more in Rakhine (being abused)." Her victory comes after an initial denial from the military, which said she made up the allegations, and she still faces the glare of widespread social stigma,

Hundreds of Nigerian schoolboys freed after 6-day ordeal

KATSINA, Nigeria: Exhausted and dishevelled, several hundred Nigerian schoolboys seized in a mass abduction claimed by Boko Haram experienced their first full day of freedom on Friday after a nearly week-long ordeal. But relief at their survival mingled with concern that many others could still be captive, and the circumstances of their release remained unclear.

Looking dirty, worn-out and distraught, and most of them without shoes, the boys were brought to the governor's office in Katsina, the capital of Katsina state in northwestern Nigeria, after being released late Thursday. One boy broke down in tears as he was being led into the hall for the reception by state governor Bello Masari. An official took a handkerchief and wiped the tears.

"I am happy, very happy that I will see my father, mother and junior brothers," said another, 14-year-old Ibrahim Sani, smiling but looking tired. The boys were then reunited with their parents.

Hajia Bilikis, a mother who has been waiting anxiously with other parents, spoke of her exultation when she caught sight of her boy, Abdullahi Abdu-

including from her husband who refuses to speak to her.

"I am both happy and sad," she said, still in disbelief that the military tribunal ruled in her favor. "I don't entirely believe this verdict will stop the rape and abuse against women in conflict areas because they (the military) are unreliable people with two faces."

Watershed moment?

In a rare acknowledgement of wrongdoing, the military on Saturday announced the verdict and sentence against the three rapists, trumpeting its own "transparent" investigation of the case. But observers warn it is too soon to judge whether Thein Nu's victory will be a watershed moment for the armed forces—which ruled Myanmar outright until 2011 and still holds sway over many aspects of life in the country. Phil Robertson of Human Rights Watch said it was not yet clear whether the army was ready to tackle alleged atrocities committed by its rank and file.

In the past, its approach has been to deny rape claims outright, and in some cases soldiers file defamation suits against the victim, he said. "It's going to require a lot more than just one case to convince us that some kind of turn has been reached," he told AFP, adding that the military tribunal was held behind closed doors. Nearly six months on, Thein Nu still remembers the night of her horrific ordeal clearly. As dusk fell, gunfire erupted in her village, and she hid with her daughter and granddaughter in her mother-in-law's house alongside other women and children. Close to mid-

Rasaq, 15. "I'm so excited... I have to cry, the cry of joy when I saw him," she said. Governor Masari said the youngsters had been traumatised by what their experience.

"You suffered physically, mentally and psychologically, but let me assure you that we suffered more and your parents suffered more." The boys were given new clothes before they were received also in the governor's office by President Muhammadu Buhari, who spoke in Hausa, a language widely used in northern Nigeria.

Jihadists' claim

The mass assault last Friday by armed men on a rural school in Kankara was initially blamed on criminal gangs who have terrorized the region for years. But on Tuesday Boko Haram, the brutal jihadist group behind the abduction of 276 schoolgirls in Chibok in 2014, claimed responsibility.

Local officials announced late Thursday that the boys had been released and would spend the night in the protection of security agents. A security source, speaking on condition of anonymity, said they had been left in the forest after negotiations between the authorities and the abductors, but gave no further details. "This is a huge relief to the entire country & international community," Buhari said on Twitter.

It remained unclear, however, if all the abducted schoolboys had been released, amid ongoing uncertainty over the number taken in the first place.



This photo taken on December 11, 2020 shows members of the Arakan Women Network speaking to soldiers outside a military court in Sittwe. After a brutal gang rape by soldiers, steely-eyed Thein Nu went up against the powerful Myanmar military in a months-long battle for justice — a self-admitted "courageous" act that paid off in a rare legal victory last week. —AFP

night four soldiers burst into the house and discovered their hiding spot after the baby started crying. "I realized I had no way to escape from three men who are more powerful than me," she said. After the attack, Thein Nu and her children fled the village and headed for Sittwe, where she made the agonizing decision to pursue justice. With the three rapists put away, Thein Nu wants the fourth senior officer—who she believes could have stopped the attack—to face justice as well. —AFP



KATSINA: A man reacts as he reunites with his son who was among those who were kidnapped upon their release in Katsina, on Friday. —AFP

UN chief Antonio Guterres called "for the immediate and unconditional release of those who remain abducted" while commending the rescue of "some of them". He urged Nigeria to make "increased efforts to safeguard schools and educational facilities in the country".

In an interview with state channel NTA late Thursday, Masari said: "I think we have recovered most of the boys, it's not all of them." In a video released by Boko Haram Thursday, a distressed teenager said he was among 520 students kidnapped. —AFP

Death toll rises to 16 in Somalia suicide bombing

MOGADISHU: The death toll from a suicide bombing in Somalia has risen to 16, after a number of people hurt in the blast succumbed to their injuries overnight, security sources told AFP yesterday. Initially, six people including three senior military officials were killed Friday when a suicide bomber

attacked a stadium in the Somali city of Galkayo, ahead of the planned arrival of the country's prime minister. But a local security official told AFP by telephone on Saturday: "The number of people who have died in the blast increased this morning, 16 people, most of them civilians, died, according to the information we have."

Police official Ahmed Abdiasiz said "the location where the blast occurred was overcrowded... so that many people who sustained serious injuries died later. Apart from the members of

the army nearly ten civilians also died in the blast". The Islamist militant group Al-Shabaab has claimed responsibility for the attack, which took place as a crowd waited for the arrival of Prime Minister Mohamed Hussein Roble. The stadium is located in the south of Galkayo, the capital of the north-central Mudug region, and 600 kilometers (370 miles) north of Mogadishu.

Galkayo is divided between two self-proclaimed semi-autonomous states—Puntland and Galmudug, which includes Mudug. On Friday, Galkayo

military commander Colonel Ahmed Dahir said the suicide bomber had targeted "senior military officials who stayed close to the entrance of the stadium."

Al-Shabaab said in a statement that it had targeted the prime minister in the attack, which it claimed had killed the commanders of two local units. The Al-Qaeda-linked group, which is waging a deadly insurgency in Somalia and regularly targets military and government officials, has previously claimed responsibility for similar attacks in the region. —AFP

International

Two die, hundreds flee floods as storm batters Philippines

Fiji scrambles to provide aid as cyclone toll rises

MANILA: At least two people were killed and hundreds forced to flee their inundated homes in the Philippines as torrential rain triggered flooding and landslides in the storm-battered archipelago, officials said yesterday.

Huge waves smashed into a coastal village on Lapu-Lapu island in the central province of Cebu on Friday night, wiping out dozens of houses and leaving around 290 people homeless, Mayor Junard Chan said on Facebook. Photos posted online by the mayor showed piles of wood and bamboo near the few houses still standing after the region was drenched by heavy rain. Rescuers retrieved the bodies of two elderly women who were killed when a landslide hit an area of Mahaplag town before dawn in the nearby province of Leyte, police officer Raquel Hernandez said.

A boy was also pulled from the rubble of his home and treated for his injuries, Hernandez said. About 1,500 people were forced to leave their homes on the major southern island of Mindanao as floodwaters engulfed 13 villages, the National Disaster Risk Reduction and Management Council said.

The Philippines is hit by an average of 20 storms and typhoons every year, which typically wipe out harvests, homes and infrastructure in already impoverished areas. The latest storm comes after a succession of typhoons in recent months pummeled the country, taking the lives of 148 people, destroying hundreds of thousands of houses, wrecking cash crops and leaving swathes of the country without power.

Meanwhile, the devastation in Fiji following Cyclone Yasa was compared to a war zone yesterday as reconnaissance flights showed entire villages wiped out and authorities put the cost at hundreds of millions of dollars. The death toll rose to four with aid workers fearing it will increase when contact is re-established with outlying areas. A state of natural disaster has been declared for 30 days as emergency services scramble to provide food and clothing to the worst affected areas.

The superstorm slammed into Fiji's second-largest island Vanua Levu late Thursday, leaving a trail of destruction and affecting 93,000 people, according to the National Disaster Management Office.

Of the 24,000 people who evacuated their homes at the height of the storm, 16,113 are still unable to return. A New Zealand Air Force reconnaissance flight flew over the area on Saturday to assess the scale of the damage, with reports of houses, crops and entire livelihoods wiped out.

The storm also damaged schools and caused widespread flooding and landslides.

"We've been receiving pictures of Kia island. We have seen total devastation. It looks like a war zone," Save the Children Fiji chief executive Shairana Ali told AFP. "Houses have been smashed to pieces and nothing remains. People are really desperate for shelter and desperate for food. There's obviously huge psychological damage." Communications with the eastern Lau islands group were cut during the storm and the extent of



People push a half-submerged tricycle through a flooded street due to heavy rains caused by tropical depression Vicky in San Francisco town, Agusan del Sur province on the southern island of Mindanao on Friday. — AFP

damage there was unknown.

National Disaster Management Office director Vasiti Soko said that while it would take days to assess the full scale of the damage, "we are likely looking at hundreds of millions of dollars."

She said the immediate focus was on restoring critical infrastructure, re-establishing communication

with severely affected areas and maintaining public safety. The deaths of a 45-year-old man and a three-month-old baby were confirmed after the storm swept through on Friday, and Soko said two more bodies had since been found. One, a 70-year-old man, was inside his home when the roof blew away and timber fell on his head. — AFP

Five rockets fired at US air base in Afghanistan

KABUL: A major US air base north of Kabul was targeted in a rocket attack yesterday but there were no casualties or damage to the airfield, NATO and Afghan officials said. Five rockets were fired at Bagram Airfield in Parwan province at 6 am, said Waheeda Shahkar, spokeswoman for the provincial governor. She said 12 rockets were mounted on a vehicle and five of them were fired at the base, while police defused the other seven.

A NATO official also confirmed the rocket attack. "Rockets were fired towards Bagram Airfield this morning. Initial reporting is there were no casualties and the airfield was not damaged," the official said. No group has immediately claimed responsibility for the attack, and the Taliban denied any involvement. The jihadist Islamic State group previously claimed responsibility for a similar rocket attack on the base in April. In recent months, IS has claimed several assaults in Kabul, including two rocket attacks that struck several residential areas in the capital, causing fatalities.

15 children killed

At least 15 children were killed when a motorbike laden with explosives blew up near a religious gathering in eastern Afghanistan on Friday, officials said. The children had gathered at a home in Ghazni province to recite Quran verses, a regular activity on the Islamic holy day of Friday, when the blast happened. Violence has surged in Afghanistan in recent months despite the government and the



GHAZNI: People carry the body of a victim following a blast, at a provincial hospital in Ghazni. At least 15 children were killed when a motorbike laden with explosives blew up near a religious gathering in eastern Afghanistan Friday, officials said. — AFP

Taliban launching peace talks to end the country's grinding war.

"Unfortunately, as a result of this incident 15 people, all children, were martyred," said Wahedullah Jumazada, spokesman for the province's governor. Ahmad Khan Seerat, spokesman for the provincial police force, confirmed the blast, which he said was a Taliban attack. He added that 20 others were wounded, including children. Interior ministry spokesman Tariq Arian earlier said the group had gathered to recite the Koran in remote Gilan district, about 120 kilometers (75 miles) from Ghazni city, the provincial capital. Taliban and government forces have regularly clashed in the province, where the insurgents con-

trol several areas.

Thirty security personnel were killed last month when a suicide car bomber struck an army base near Ghazni city. The government's talks with the Taliban—which opened in September in the Qatari capital of Doha—are currently on a break until early January. The country has witnessed an increase in fighting, with the Taliban accused of trying to get an upper hand in the talks through violence.

Afghan forces have also battled a number of attacks blamed on the Islamic State group in recent months. Between January and September this year, more than 2,100 civilians were killed and more than 3,800 wounded in the violence, according to the UN mission in Afghanistan. —AFP



AMRITSAR: Members of Shaheed Bhagat Singh Welfare Club shout slogans as they take part in a sit-in hunger strike in support of farmers yesterday. — AFP

India PM defends farm reforms

NEW DELHI: Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi said Friday his government was a victim of "lies and conspiracy" as it struggled to defuse growing protests by tens of thousands of farmers threatening to encircle New Delhi. With more protesters gathering at entrances to the capital every day, Modi stepped up efforts to placate the rural agitation against his market reforms.

Protesters have blocked major roads into Delhi for more than three weeks opposing laws which enable them to sell produce on the open market instead of just through state-run bodies that guarantee a minimum price. So far, the protesters

have mainly come from northern Indian states. But on Friday a union in the central state of Maharashtra said thousands of members would join the protesters.

Modi said in a video speech to one farmers' group that opposition parties had exploited the protests, despite having supported the rural reforms. The government's rivals were "spreading lies for their own political gain. They are using the farmers' shoulders to fire their guns", he said. Claims that minimum prices would be ended were just part of the "lies and conspiracy".

"I just want to make the farmers' lives easier," Modi said. Agriculture employs about 70 percent of India's 1.3 billion people and accounts for 15 percent of its \$2.7 trillion economy. Five rounds of talks between ministers and unions have failed to produce a breakthrough. — AFP

US Navy to be 'more assertive' in China in Pacific

WASHINGTON: The US military warned its warships would be "more assertive" in responding to violations of international law, citing in particular Beijing, which has expansionist ambitions in the South China Sea. In a document setting objectives for the US Navy, Marines and Coast Guard for the coming years, the Pentagon stressed that several countries, notably Russia and China, "are contesting the balance of power in key regions and seeking to undermine the existing world order."

"Our globally deployed naval forces interact with Chinese and Russian warships and aircraft daily," the document said, noting their "growing aggressiveness" and calling China "the most pressing, long-term strategic threat." The latest incident between the US and China naval forces took place in late August, when Beijing said it had driven an American warship from the disputed Paracel archipelago. The Asian power claims almost all of the islands of the South China Sea, territorial claims disputed by other countries in the region including Vietnam, Malaysia, the Philippines and Brunei.

To counter China, the US has been sending ships to the region more frequently to carry out what it calls "freedom of navigation" operations. To maintain strategic advantage over the Chinese Navy whose "battle force has more than tripled in size in only two decades," the US Navy plans to modernize with smaller, more agile and even remotely piloted ships. US ships will also "accept calculated tactical risks and adopt a more assertive posture in our day-to-day operations," the statement said. For Navy Rear Admiral Jay Bynum that means being "more responsive, more assertive." "In the past, our behavior was de-escalation. We would turn away and would minimize risk in those individual contacts," he said, noting that the Navy "might be ceding ground" with the approach. — AFP

News in brief

Suicide bomber kills 3 in Nigeria

KANO: A teenage girl killed at least three people when she blew herself up in a crowd in north-east Nigeria's Borno state, militia and humanitarian sources said yesterday. "We evacuated three dead bodies and two people who were seriously injured from the scene," said aid worker Abubakar Mohammed. The attack happened in the town of Konduga, about 38 kilometers (24 miles) from the regional capital Maiduguri. The attacker set off her explosives among a group of men at a hangout next to the local chief's home, said Ibrahim Liman, an anti-jihadist militia leader who gave the same toll. — AFP

Russia puts satellite into orbit

MOSCOW: A Soyuz rocket blasted off from the Vostochny cosmodrome in Russia's Far East on Friday, putting into orbit 36 UK telecommunications and internet satellites, the Roscosmos space agency said. The launch was the first and only one to take place from the cosmodrome this year, Roscosmos said. The rocket took off at 1226 GMT, the space agency said, carrying satellites made by the British-based company OneWeb. Nearly five hours later space agency chief Dmitry Rogozin said that all the satellites had reached their intended orbit. —AFP

Canada to share excess vaccine doses

MONTREAL: Canada, which has placed orders and options on more than 400 million doses of coronavirus vaccine, will share any excess doses with other countries once its population is inoculated, Prime Minister Justin Trudeau said Friday. Canada, which launched its vaccination campaign this week, has erred on the side of caution to ensure all of its 38 million people have access to jabs. "As Canada gets vaccinated, if we have more vaccines than necessary, absolutely we will be sharing with the world," Trudeau said in an interview with CTV, which will be broadcast in full today. — AFP

Slovenian health minister resigns

LJUBLJANA, Slovenia: Slovenian Health Minister Tomaz Gantar resigned Friday over tensions within the ruling coalition prompted by Prime Minister Janez Jansa's handling of the health crisis and attacks on the media. Gantar's resignation came a day after his party DESUS, which represents the country's pensioners, quit the four-party coalition led by Jansa. The party accuses Jansa of using the coronavirus pandemic to attack critical media and strengthen his control over state institutions in the mould of his ally, nationalist Hungarian Prime Minister Viktor Orban. — AFP

Trudeau on Canadians held in China

OTTAWA: Prime Minister Justin Trudeau said Friday he hoped to get "good news" about two Canadian citizens who have been held in what he called "arbitrary detention" in China for two years. Michael Kovrig, a former diplomat working as a senior advisor for the International Crisis Group, and businessman Michael Spavor were first detained on December 10, 2018 on spying charges. Their arrest came just days after the detention in Vancouver of a top executive for Chinese tech company Huawei, Meng Wanzhou, on a US warrant. Relations between Ottawa and Beijing have since deteriorated. —AFP

Business

SUNDAY, DECEMBER 20, 2020

Post-Brexit talks grind amid fish spat

Negotiators grapple with an impasse over post-Brexit fishing rights

BRUSSELS: EU and UK negotiators held "technical talks" in Brussels yesterday with no sign of them breaking an impasse over post-Brexit fishing rights in time to save a trade deal. Sources on both sides said fishing is now the main obstacle to any pact that could be in place on January 1 to prevent a sudden return to tariffs that would deal an economic jolt on both sides of the Channel.

"It remains very blocked," one EU diplomat said. One EU diplomat said Barnier had proposed EU fishermen giving up nearly a quarter of the value of the fish they catch in UK waters. Britain is understood to be holding out for getting back much more than half. The UK has suggested this compromise last for three years before it is renegotiated, whereas Europe is holding out for seven. "It's all down to numbers now," the European diplomat said.

The EU's pointman in the talks, Michel Barnier, has consulted member states that share fishing waters with Britain on the haggling over the issue, the diplomat said. The European Parliament has highlighted a deadline of midnight (2300 GMT) on Sunday as the last moment to receive a deal for review if MEPs are to ratify it before the end of the year under streamlined procedures.

Their UK parliamentary counterparts are in recess, but can be recalled within 48 hours to do likewise.

But EU capitals are not binding themselves to the European Parliament's deadline. France's European affairs minister, Clement Beaugue, warned that time left to get a deal was "a matter of hours," echoing words used by Barnier a day earlier. But, he told French radio, talks will not be called to a halt even if they go past Sunday.

"We won't do that because what is at risk is whole

sectors like fishing, like sustainable competition conditions for our businesses," he said.

'Concerns' Britain not ready

The urgency of reaching a deal is being driven home by scenes of long lines of trucks at the entrance to the freight rail link that goes through the Channel tunnel as British companies frantically stockpile.

A group of UK MPs warned in a reported released Saturday that Britain has not yet installed all the complex IT systems and port infrastructure needed to ensure post-Brexit trade with the EU runs smoothly. "With just seven working days until the end of the transition period, significant concerns remain," said Hilary Benn, a prominent Labor MP who chairs the cross-party Committee on the Future Relationship with the EU that put out the study. Disruption is inevitable whether a deal happens or not. Outside the single market, British and European traders will have to fill out import-export, health and tax forms to send and receive goods. A deal would lighten that burden by removing tariffs, but there would still be traffic snarls as checks on truck loads and drivers' papers are carried out.

Even small things, such as the truck drivers' lunches, will come under border scrutiny: the British government warned packed ham and cheese sandwiches are banned from entry into Europe under meat and dairy restrictions that apply to non-EU arrivals.

Weighing up fish

The European Union linked the fishing rights issue to the overall trade deal from the start. It is an economically tiny activity for both sides, but politically potent, able to galvanize media and voters. Both sides have come down from their initial positions, with



BRUSSELS: A general view through the door of the hemicycle ahead of a debate on the future of the relation between the EU and UK at a plenary session of the European Parliament in Brussels on Friday. —AFP

Britain accepting some EU boats will continue to ply its waters and EU countries recognizing their catches there will have to be cut.

The haggling is over how much, for what species, in what waters exactly, and for how long a fishing agreement should last before it is put up for review. The EU and Britain share stocks of 125 species of fish, some of

which migrate across what will be the post-Brexit maritime boundaries, others which spawn in one part and swim in another.

Regardless of any trade deal, both sides are bound by the UN Convention on the Law of the Sea to jointly manage those stocks to prevent overfishing them to extinction. —AFP



US blacklists Chinese firms including SMIC

WASHINGTON: The United States on Friday announced it has imposed export controls on 77 Chinese companies including the country's biggest chipmaker, SMIC, restricting its access to US technology over its alleged ties to China's military. The announcement in the final weeks of President Donald Trump's term comes after relations between Washington and Beijing soured under his administration, which saw the US start a trade war with China and expand its list of sanctioned entities to a few hundred Chinese companies and subsidiaries. In a statement, Commerce Secretary Wilbur Ross said the designations, which restrict US companies' abilities to do business with the firms, are over an array of charges including human rights abuses, the activities of the Chinese military, particularly in the South China Sea, as well as theft of US technology.

"China's corrupt and bullying behavior both inside and outside its borders harms US national security interests, undermines the sovereignty of our allies and partners, and violates the human rights and dignity of ethnic and religious minority groups," Ross said. "Commerce will act to ensure that America's technology-developed and produced according to open and free-market principles is not used for malign or abusive purposes." SMIC has received billions of dollars in support from Beijing and is at the heart of its efforts to improve the country's technological self-sufficiency.

In a call with reporters, a senior Commerce Department official said Washington has evidence that SMIC has worked with the Chinese military on developing short- and medium-range ballistic missiles and exoskeletons for soldiers, but had been in talks with SMIC for months on a way to avoid the designation. "We're adding SMIC to the entity list mostly because we need to make sure US intellectual property and manufacturing capabilities are not being used by SMIC's clients to continue to support the military-civil fusions efforts within China," the official said. "We simply no longer could stand by and watch our adversary using our technologies to support its military capabilities."

That company holds some 70 percent of the global drone market, and the US Department of the Interior last year grounded its fleet of the company's drones amid rising security concerns over Chinese electronics.

Beijing yesterday accused the United States of "bullying" after Washington announced export controls on dozens of Chinese firms over alleged ties to China's military. —AFP

UK lorry drivers face Brexit ban on ham-and-cheese sandwiches

LONDON: British lorry drivers crossing the Channel next year will face a new regulation that may be hard to swallow: a ban on ham-and-cheese sandwiches, the UK government has warned.

The government gave the example of the popular sandwich filling in guidance for hauliers issued Friday, warning that bringing into the European Union foods that contain meat or dairy, even for personal use, will be forbidden. The rule is intended to prevent the entry of foods that could spread diseases. It will apply not just to lorry drivers, but

Struggling Syria farmers turn to fern for fodder

KFAR TAKHARIM, Syria: To dodge skyrocketing prices for animal fodder in Syria's last major rebel bastion, farmer Ayman Ibrahim has turned to an aquatic fern used as a fertilizer in Asian rice paddies.

Azolla, which looks more like a pond weed than a fern, is regarded as an invasive plant in much of the world but is used to feed livestock in parts of southeast Asia. Ibrahim, a former tailor who took up farming in the rebel-held Idlib region after fleeing fighting in Syria's second city of Aleppo in 2016, says the plant has given him huge savings over traditional animal feeds like hay or silage.

Azolla is highly productive with the ability to double its weight in seven days, according to the UN Food and Agriculture Organization. The plant is rich in proteins and has been used as a feed for cattle, fish and poultry in Vietnam; and for pigs in Singapore and Taiwan.

"We want Azolla to spread here," Ibrahim told

Stimulus debacle pushes unemployed Americans to the edge

WASHINGTON: First, they lost their jobs to the coronavirus pandemic, and now many of the more than 20 million people unemployed in the United States may lose something else: the government aid keeping them afloat through the world's worst COVID-19 outbreak.

Congress could still act to extend the benefits provided under the CARES Act rescue package enacted in March, which will otherwise expire on December 26. But for many of the jobless, lawmakers' months of dithering-along with the indifference of the overstretched US unemployment systems—have already taken a toll:

On hold

Before the pandemic, Tamora Israel, 37, was a full-time goldsmith, part-time journalist and co-

owner of an art gallery in Massachusetts who aspired to finish her degree and get into filmmaking. Months later, she's jobless, living in Georgia, sharing a house with her parents and younger brother and trying to figure out how a family of four can survive with only \$2,000 a month and one licensed driver—which happens to be herself.

Her days once spent reporting community news or pursuing entrepreneurship are now filled with shuttling her mother to dialysis appointments and picking up groceries. Then there's the time spent on the phone with Massachusetts unemployment administrators to convince them to restart payments they stopped when she left the state—which Israel said should not have happened.

"I keep calling back everyday just to be annoying, and remind them I'm a person that needs money," she said. Life, she expects, will likely stay this way for a while. Her mother's illnesses and need for care mean Israel can't get another job right now.

A felony conviction on her father's record means under Georgia law he isn't eligible for food assistance that could ease the family's financial

stress. "We're all just spinning plates in the air because we don't know what happens next. We're ok for now, but if we get one unexpected bill, we're screwed," she said.

Speaking up

In a time of uncertainty, Grant McDonald is sure of one thing: he will be out of work for a long, long time. A video director and designer for live events, McDonald, 31, figures the theaters and concert halls he works in will be among the last to reopen, meaning laid-off workers in his industry will need government aid for months more. Believing Congress wasn't hearing enough from unemployed persons like himself, he joined forces earlier this year with a colleague in the entertainment industry to create ExtendPUA.org. The group helps people lobby their representatives to renew the CARES Act's provisions, including Pandemic Unemployment Assistance (PUA), the program keeping McDonald from having to move out of his apartment in New York and in with his father on the other side of the country. —AFP

to everyone leaving Britain for the EU.

This is one of the new rules that will enter force when Britain leaves the customs union and the EU single market at 2300 GMT (midnight Brussels time) on December 31, after a transition period when old rules for imports and exports still applied. Failing to declare foods such as ham-and-cheese sandwiches and hand them over for disposal could lead to a fine or criminal prosecution, according to the European Union's advice leaflet. The ban on such snacks comes despite the EU allowing imports for personal use of up to 20 kilograms (44 pounds) of fresh fish or lobster.

Meat extracts and meat concentrates are also allowed, meaning that another British favorite Bovril, a meat extract paste used to make a drink, should be acceptable. British lorry drivers will also face more significant hurdles: new border controls that are expected to cause severe congestion around ports and a mass of new red tape including permits to enter the county of Kent, where the ferry port of Dover is located.

AFP on his farm overlooking the town of Kfar Takharim. "The animals want to eat it," he said, scooping up Azolla weeds from a shallow pool using a kitchen strainer. "There is a big difference between offering them a green plant and dry feed."

'High demand'

The 25-year-old father of two started raising livestock in the Idlib region after he failed to find work as a tailor. But in the years since he started, the Syrian pound has plummeted in value, leading to sharp increases in the cost of imported goods. Compounded by the coronavirus pandemic, the economic crisis has led food prices to increase by 249 percent, plunging millions into hunger. The cost of animal fodder also rose sharply so Ibrahim embarked on a search for a cheaper alternative.

"After a year of researching on the internet, I found out about the water fern and was able to import it from Egypt via Turkey," he said. Imported as live plants not as spores, Azolla was at first difficult to transport to Syria, especially since it can't survive long without water, Ibrahim said.

The first four shipments fell through, with the plants arriving dead.

Ibrahim then reduced the size of his order and improved transport so that the plant could arrive before drying out. His first 10 kilograms (22 pounds)



A lorry (front) leaves as other freight lorries queue to board their ferries at the port of Dover on the south coast of England on Friday. —AFP

Britain and the EU have still not managed to secure a post-Brexit trade deal with stumbling blocks including fishing rights. —AFP



Syrian farmer Ayman Ibrahim harvests Azolla aquatic ferns used as livestock feed in the town of Kfar Takharim in Syria's northwestern Idlib province. —AFP

of viable Azolla arrived last June.

"We immediately planted them in the pools," where they have replaced 70 percent of the animal fodder he was previously using. The cost of feeding his livestock has fallen from \$300 a month to \$100 at most. Ibrahim is so satisfied with the results that he started selling his surplus Azolla production to other farmers. "I was surprised by the high demand," he said. —AFP

Business

Dutch fishermen fear Brexit talks collapse could sink their trade

Highly-charged issue of fishing rights threatens to torpedo hopes of a trade deal

IJMUIDEN, Netherlands: Fishermen in the Dutch port of IJmuiden are bringing home the last catch of the year, but if Brexit talks fail it could be their last from British waters for years to come.

As dock workers offload pallets of frozen fish from trawlers at the busy river mouth port just west of Amsterdam, a political storm is brewing that could sink their business. The highly-charged issue of fishing rights threatens to torpedo hopes of a trade deal when the UK leaves the EU single market on January 1. Without a deal the Dutch will be unable to ply the British waters they have been using for centuries. "Whether we will fish purely in European waters or British waters as well remains to be seen," says Arnout Langerak, 47, director at the fifth-generation Cornelis Vrolijk fishing company.

"Dutch people, Dutch fishermen have been fishing there for 400 years already or even longer. We would like to do that in the next 400 years," he said on Friday.

'Brits eat fish and chips'

While commercial fishing makes up a relatively small chunk of the economies of coastal nations like Britain, France and the Netherlands, it has an outsize political importance.

The fate of under-threat fishing communities like IJmuiden goes to the heart of ideas of national sovereignty and identity—and of trade. In IJmuiden, truck after truck is being stacked with pallets of frozen fish from the trawlers, which are landing their final catch of 2020.

Many of the ships will leave the port after Christmas to trawl for what will become the first

catch of the new year, but under uncertain terms. The Dutch fishing industry, including the processing and trade of fish, prawns and shellfish has a yearly turnover of around 4.5 billion euros (\$5.5 billion).

It provides jobs for as many as 7,000 people and is represented by some 216 companies in the Netherlands, according to figures by the Dutch umbrella fishing federation the Visfederatie.

At the nearby Cornelis Vrolijk plant, teams of workers were gutting and cleaning a constant stream of herring, to be packed for eating by Belgian, Dutch and German consumers. One major frustration for the Dutch—who love nothing more than dropping a raw herring fillet down their throats—is that the British don't eat many of the fish that are in their own waters.

"The Brits, they eat mainly fish and chips, no herring, no mackerel, what we are used to eating. They are eating cod," said Langerak. "It's typical that they want more of the quota that they are not consuming themselves."

'Devastating'

The fishermen are in no doubt about the impact of a no-deal. "Dutch freezer trawlers fish 70 percent of their catch in British waters," says Gerard van Balsfoort, 68, President of the Dutch-based European Pelagic Freezer-trawler Association. "A no deal means no access. That means we lose 70 percent of our turnover for these (Dutch) companies. That is devastating."

Pelagic freezer trawlers catch fish living near the surface of the sea such as herring, mackerel, and sardines, then freeze them to keep them fresh until they get back to port.



Fishermen unload their catch from Dutch fishing boat Klasina in Den Helder, in the Netherlands' North Holland. — AFP

Britain is adamant that it will decide who gets to fish in its waters after January 1, but Brussels wants to secure a long-term agreement guaranteeing access for EU boats. EU negotiator Michel Barnier said on Friday there were "just a few hours" to overcome divisions with Britain, and confirmed fishing remains the slipperiest issue. In ports like IJmuiden where generation after generation has relied on the trade, feelings are running high, but the

Dutch say they want a fair deal.

"Dutch fishermen used to fish in British waters for generations, for centuries, so they don't want to stop doing that," said Van Balsfoort. "What they want is continued access to British fishing waters."

"So access to UK markets is crucial for EU fishermen and access to the EU market is vital for British fishermen." "This is the Brexit deal on fisheries to be made," he said. — AFP

US Congress agrees stopgap to avert shutdown

WASHINGTON: US lawmakers struggling to reach a critical pandemic relief and federal spending deal struck a last-minute agreement Friday to avert a midnight shutdown of the government and extend negotiations through the weekend.

Congressional leaders are frantically trying to resolve sticking points in a roughly \$900 billion measure aimed at providing emergency relief for millions of Americans on the verge of losing key benefits.

Because the pandemic relief plan is tied to passage of a separate \$1.4 trillion federal spending package, the impasse threatened to temporarily shut down the government—a scenario not unheard of in politically divided Washington, but disastrous given the worsening economy and record daily death tolls from COVID-19. On the brink of a shutdown, the House of Representatives voted 320 to 60 late Friday to extend funding for federal agencies through today to allow negotiators to finish their stimulus package.

The Senate quickly passed the measure by voice vote, and President

Donald Trump signed the bill hours before the midnight deadline. Talks on the relief package appear stuck, in part, over a Republican proposal to limit the Federal Reserve's ability to provide credit for businesses and other institutions.

"We are hopeful that they will reach agreement in the near future," number two House Democrat Steny Hoyer said. "They have not reached one yet. There are still some significant issues outstanding."

A package to aid struggling businesses and jobless workers is seen as critical to getting the world's largest economy back on its feet amid a resurgence of Covid-19 infections, even as new vaccines offer hope that an end to the pandemic may be in sight.

Without an agreement, millions of unemployed workers will lose their special pandemic benefits before the end of the year, and a moratorium on evictions is set to lapse within days.

Democrats warn that if the Fed's ability to extend lifelines is restricted, the fiscal crisis could be compounded



WASHINGTON, DC: Speaker of the House Nancy Pelosi leaves a meeting on Capitol Hill on December 18, 2020 in Washington, DC. —AFP

in US states, particularly if Congress fails to pass assistance to state and local governments.

'Stability at risk'

President-elect Joe Biden has pushed back fiercely against the Fed proposal, which reportedly would prevent the central bank from restarting emergency lending programs that expire this year and could limit its response in future crises. The measure "could put our future financial stability at risk," Brian Deese, whom Biden has selected to chair the National Economic Council, said in a statement.

"The package should not include unnecessary provisions that would hamper the Treasury Department and the Federal Reserve's ability to fight economic crises," Deese added.

Lawmakers have yet to even see the final language on the stimulus deal or the government funding package, and some warn that both need more time. The pandemic package is expected to include aid for vaccine distribution and logistics, extra jobless benefits of \$300 per week, and a new round of \$600 stimulus checks—half the amount provided in checks distributed last March. —AFP

EU, China push to seal investment deal by end of year

BRUSSELS: The European Union and China said Friday they were closing in on an investment agreement after seven years of painstaking negotiations. The two economic powerhouses are keen to tie up the landmark pact—which would allow greater access to their lucrative markets—before the end of the year.

"Negotiations have entered the last stretch," Chinese foreign ministry spokesman Wang Wenbin told journalists in Beijing. In Brussels, EU officials briefed ambassadors from the bloc's 27 member states that "95 percent" of the deal had been wrapped up, sources said.



BRUSSELS: The European Union and China said Friday they were closing in on an investment agreement after seven years of painstaking negotiations.

The deal would be a major boost for both sides and strengthen economic ties before the arrival of US president-elect Joe Biden in the White House in January, as Beijing squares off with Washington over trade. Europe hopes to conclude a "political agreement" by the end of the year, but hurdles remain over China's commitment to labor rights, the EU sources said.

"We are not quite there yet but it's definitely feasible that, if things move forward as they are moving now, that we can conclude still this year," EU executive vice president Valdis Dombrovskis told Bloomberg TV. Brussels insists it wants to secure the same treatment for its firms in China as it grants Beijing and will not swallow unfavorable terms just to get the years-long negotiations over the line.

"The EU remains committed to the end of year deadline for conclusion of the negotiations, provided we have a deal worth having," an EU Commission spokesman said. —AFP



How EU and US are trying to rein in tech giants

PARIS: Tech giants have changed our daily lives but governments around the world are worried they are out of control.

Google, Apple, Facebook, Amazon and Microsoft—dubbed the GAFAM—are accused of not paying enough taxes, unfair competition, stealing media content and threatening democracy by spreading false information. As the European Union unveils tough draft rules to rein them in and dozens of US states hit Google with antitrust suits, here is a global overview of the attempts to regulate the companies.

Taxation

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

Outside the EU, Britain has imposed a two percent tax on some digital services. Beyond Europe, in

2016 India imposed a tax on online advertising, and Australia slapped a 10 percent VAT rate on digital services such as streaming, downloading games and applications for mobile streaming, e-books and data storage. These moves have not impressed the United States, the home of the so-called GAFAM. The outgoing Trump administration has threatened customs duties in response. Negotiations on a worldwide tax on multinationals led by the Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development broke down in October.

Nobbling competition

The digital giants are regularly criticized for dominating the market by elbowing out rivals.

The EU slapped 8.25 billion euros (\$10 billion) in fines on Google between 2017 and 2019 for dominating the market via its Android system. Microsoft was fined 561 million euros by the EU in 2013 for imposing its search engine Internet Explorer on users of Windows 7. Amazon and Apple are also being probed. But the biggest potential change came on Tuesday when the bloc unveiled plans for mammoth fines of up to 10 percent of turnover on tech firms that break competition rules. Those guilty of "repeated breaches of law which endanger the security of European citizens" risk being broken up or temporarily banned from the EU. —AFP

News in brief

Openreach to create 2,500 jobs

LONDON: Openreach, a division of British telecoms giant BT, announced Friday plans for 2,500 new engineering jobs across the UK next year as it upgrades broadband services. Work on connecting households and offices to faster and more reliable broadband will see supply chains create a further 2,800 jobs, it added. "Openreach today bucked the prevailing economic trend by creating 5,300 new UK-based engineering jobs... during 2021," a statement said. Finance minister Rishi Sunak hailed the announcement, coming one day after he again extended the government's furlough scheme paying the bulk of wages for millions of private-sector workers during the coronavirus pandemic. —AFP

IMF approves \$1.67bn in aid to Egypt

WASHINGTON: The board of the International Monetary Fund on Friday approved the release of a second tranche of aid valued at \$1.67 billion for Egypt, saying public debt and COVID-19 threatened its economic recovery. In June, the board approved a one-year, \$5.2 billion financing package for Egypt. With the latest disbursement, more than \$3.6 billion will have been released. "The Egyptian authorities have managed well the Covid-19 pandemic and the related disruption to economic activity," Antoine Sayeh, the IMF deputy managing director, said. —AFP

China sales boost Nike results

NEW YORK: Nike scored a big jump in China sales in the second quarter and reported better-than-expected results on Friday, following a coronavirus hit earlier in the year. After suffering declines in revenues in the last two quarters, Nike reported an increase in sales in the quarter ending November 30 as it bolstered direct selling efforts to consumers in the wake of upheaval in the retail industry. The sports giant said more than 90 percent of company-owned stores are now open, with some at reduced hours. However, the company continues to experience declines in customer traffic in many regions due to COVID-19, Nike said. —AFP

Uzbekistan to sell shares in Coke bottler

TASHKENT: Uzbekistan announced Friday it plans to sell government shares in a local company that bottles Coca-Cola and was once viewed as a cash cow for the former ruling family. The government agency responsible for managing the ex-Soviet state's assets said in a statement that potential investors should express an interest in purchasing the shares before 1800 local time (1300 GMT) on December 31. Coca-Cola Ichimligi Uzbekistan's revenues grew 46 percent in 2019, according to the statement, which noted that Rothschild & Co would be retained as financial consultants for the future sale. —AFP

German business morale ticks up

FRANKFURT: German business confidence unexpectedly rose in December, a key survey showed Friday, even as the country ends the year back under a new lockdown to curb a second coronavirus wave. The Ifo institute's monthly confidence barometer rose to 92.1 points from 90.9 in November. Analysts surveyed by Factset had expected the index to suffer a third consecutive dip. "While the lockdown is hitting certain sectors hard, overall the German economy is showing resilience," Ifo president Clemens Fuest said in a statement. —AFP

Business

Ooredoo Kuwait wins Gold at MENA Digital Awards 2019

MyOoredoo App wins 2019 'Best Application' (Mobile/Tablet)

KUWAIT: Ooredoo Telecom, the first to introduce innovative digital services in Kuwait, has won the prestigious recognition as the 'Best Application' (Mobile/Tablet) at the MENA Digital Awards 2019 for its innovative MyOoredoo Application.

The 'Best Application' recognition underlines Ooredoo's proven track-record in innovation, and its strong competencies in enriching people's digital lives. The award also honors "MyOoredoo" as the best mobile app on any platform (iOS, Android, Windows Phone, Blackberry) that demonstrate originality, newness, and creativity. Tapan Tripathi - Chief Marketing Officer at Ooredoo Kuwait said: "Since 1999, our founding vision was to 'Enrich people's digital lives' and we continue to uphold this commitment by building and sustaining a successful competitive strategy that contributes to the growth of technological advancement for better services demanded by customers."

Tripathi added: "Today, I am proud to say that our MyOoredoo App monthly transacting active users have exceeded 1 million unique users. Indeed, we are strengthening our footprint in the

digital world, in which MyOoredoo App is just one of our efficient competencies, and having received the MENA Digital Awards 2019's 'Best Application' (Mobile/Tablet) affirms our digital excellence."

MyOoredoo App is a friendly-user mobile application allows consumers to conduct different activities including: paying bills or recharge multiple lines at once, paying freely with K-Net or Credit Card, activating Nojoom account and keep track of the collected points, activating several digital services and buy e-vouchers, checking the latest Ooredoo offers, and more. The company regularly updates its application, MyOoredoo, to enhance the customers' digital experience through introducing new features that allow them to manage their lines digitally without the need to visit any branch or contact the call center agents.

Some of the app unique features are: the launch of Kuwait's first Digital Mobile Plan (ANA), Gamification of MyOoredoo App by adding Spin & Win on every recharge for our prepaid customers, Gamification of Ooredoo Surprise which is a unique feature offering every

customer a tailor-made offer that is designed to suit his needs where we offer for every 5 Ooredoo surprise purchases one free purchase, more than 70 digital services were added offering customers variety of music, movies, series, and digital vouchers where they can buy using Ooredoo Pay, Nojoom Hot deals offering customers lifestyle deals, App Exclusive offers for prepaid, and postpaid customers, in addition to the WhatsApp support service via MyOoredoo App to allow customers a variety of methods to better contact Ooredoo at any time. The MENA Digital Awards (MDA) is a bespoke award show whose purpose is promote digital innovation and media in the MENA region. It is the first awards show to honor digital efforts in the region.



Tapan Tripathi



BoJ extends virus-linked lending program

TOKYO: The Bank of Japan extended an emergency virus-related lending program but kept its monetary easing policy unchanged Friday, as the country faces a record spike in new COVID-19 cases.

In May, the central bank launched a new lending scheme aiming to channel funds to small and medium-sized businesses suffering from the economic fallout of the coronavirus pandemic. At a two-day policy meeting, the Bank of Japan (BoJ) extended the end-date for those measures by six months to September 2021.

It made no change to its ultra-loose monetary policy, however-keeping the key interest rate at minus 0.1 percent and the 10-year government bond yield target at 0.0 percent. "Japan's economy has picked up, but the pace of improvement is expected to be only moderate while vigilance against the novel coronavirus continues," the central bank said.

"Financing, mainly of firms, is likely to remain under stress for the time being," it added, referring to the extension of the lending program. Speaking later, bank boss Haruhiko Kuroda emphasized its commitment to its longstanding policies, including the still-distant goal of two percent inflation.

"We're not going to revise the two percent inflation goal," he told reporters. "In regard to the interest rate level, it is expected to hover at the level of the current long and short-term rates or lower."

"We don't plan on revising the negative interest rate either," he said, apparently quashing speculation that the long-standing position could soon be up for discussion. The pandemic has wrought global economic carnage, with Japan only just exiting recession, and many countries have announced massive cash injections.

Japan has seen a relatively small coronavirus outbreak overall, but the nation has reported record numbers of new infections in recent weeks. The BoJ's move comes after the government approved more than \$700 billion in fresh stimulus this month to fund projects from anti-virus measures to green tech-the country's third such package this financial year.

On Thursday, Tokyo Governor Yuriko Koike and her staff warned that the capital's hospitals were struggling to provide routine care because of the sharp rise in new coronavirus cases.

The city, which is preparing to host the virus-postponed Olympics next summer, raised its alert level for pressure on medical services to the top of a four-tier system for the first time. —AFP

Tesla to join elite S&P index, shaking up Wall Street

NEW YORK: Tesla is set to join an elite group of companies in a key Wall Street index, a move which gives greater prominence to the high-flying electric carmaker and forces money managers to reshuffle their portfolios. The company founded by Elon Musk becomes part of the Standard & Poor's 500 index on Monday, which means that investment funds based on that index will be holders of the stock.

Tesla stock has already seen a spectacular rise this year of 680 percent, and with a market capitalization of some \$600 billion it will be the richest company to enter the prestigious S&P index.

It is the ninth most valuable firm in the world, just behind Facebook. Even though its car production is modest compared with rivals, Tesla's growth prospects have spurred investors to push up its value so that it's now worth more than General Motors, Ford, Toyota, Honda, Fiat Chrysler and Volkswagen combined.

Portfolio shuffling

As a result of the change in the S&P, stock index mutual funds and exchange traded funds-favored by many small investors — will need to hold Tesla

shares in proportion to its weight in the index, which is currently around one percent. This could force some significant reshuffling since Tesla is replacing Apartment Investment, with a value of just 0.02 percent of the S&P index.

S&P Dow Jones Indices, which manages the index of the 500 firms, said it expects a record shift of some \$80 billion with the entry of California-based Tesla. The change could also encourage "active" portfolio managers who measure their performance against the benchmark index to buy Tesla to keep pace.

But some analysts say these changes may have already been priced into Tesla and that buying pressure for Tesla could diminish. And skeptics say Tesla could see a long-overdue correction from its dizzying gains.

"We recommend investors not weight Tesla shares in their portfolio in equal proportion to the S&P because Tesla shares are in our view and by virtually every conventional metric not only overvalued, but dramatically so," said Ryan Brinkman of JP Morgan in a research note.

Pierre Ferragu of New Street Research offered a cautious view, noting that "the market is probably getting ready for S&P 500 inclusion, and this probably supported the stock greatly in recent weeks and months." This could lead to a pullback for Tesla, according to Ferragu.

But the analyst said Tesla may still be a good long-term bet, setting a price target for Tesla in 2025 at \$1,200, compared with \$655 at the close on Thursday.



In this file photo Tesla CEO Elon Musk talking to media as he arrives to visit the construction site of the future US electric car giant Tesla in Gruenheide near Berlin. Tesla is set to join an elite group of companies in a key Wall Street index, a move which gives greater prominence to the high-flying electric carmaker and forces money managers to reshuffle their portfolios. —AFP

Jefferies analyst Philippe Houchois said Tesla poses some unique challenges for investors because of how it is shaking up the auto sector with its electric vehicles (EVs) and a different way of doing business than rivals. "We don't believe Tesla can dominate autos given industry structure and politics, but multiple challenges to the auto business model (EVs, batteries, software, autonomy, design-to-manufacture and direct selling) ensure a durable competitive edge, with a 'messianic' brand reaching far beyond autos," the analyst said. —AFP

Energy nominee Granholm brings Detroit savvy to green push

NEW YORK: Since stepping down as Michigan's Governor, Jennifer Granholm, President-elect Joe Biden's nominee as Energy Secretary, has spoken often about the need to boldly rethink energy policy in light of climate change. Granholm, who was officially nominated Thursday night by Biden, has sketched out a national "race to the top" whereby states could compete for clean energy funds, with the Sunbelt offering up solar energy, Texas leading on upgrading the electric grid and Michigan on revamping autos, a sector she knows intimately.

An outspoken champion of Biden's during the presidential campaign as a CNN commentator, Granholm recently argued that the "private sector needs greater support and political will from our policymakers to help us fully realize the potential of a zero-carbon future," according to a November newspaper column. If confirmed by the Senate, Granholm will have a chance

to try to put some of these ideas into action, although energy experts caution against expecting overnight change in the system.

Her appointment has been applauded by environmentalists, who have pressed for a muscular approach to green energy after climate skeptic Donald Trump withdrew the US from the Paris climate agreement and gutted key environmental measures of his predecessor Barack Obama.

Noting Granholm's opposition to major petroleum projects such as the Keystone pipeline, Greenpeace senior climate campaigner Lisa Ramsden praised Granholm's selection over fossil fuel-friendly appointees, while adding that Granholm has "her work cut out for her to prove she can lead the transition to a more just, democratic, clean energy system." Frank Maisano, an energy communications expert at lawfirm Bracewell in Washington, predicted Granholm would win Senate confirmation without significant trouble, but warned that she and other Biden environmental picks will struggle if they expect overnight change. "A lot of these issues are going to run into reality, not just political reality, but technical reality," he said in an interview.

Electric car revolution?

Born in Canada, Granholm served as governor of Michigan from 2003



Since stepping down as Michigan's Governor, Jennifer Granholm, President-elect Joe Biden's nominee as Energy Secretary, has spoken often about the need to boldly rethink energy policy in light of climate change.

through 2011 after a four-year term as the state's attorney general. Granholm's tenure overlapped with the 2008 financial crisis and the ensuing US auto industry bailout on which she worked closely with Biden and Obama.

As governor Granholm also signed laws requiring greater use of renewable energy, as well as a directive on

environmental justice, another benchmark issue among progressives in the vetting of Biden's Cabinet picks. Since the bailout, Detroit's "Big Three" have announced significant investments in zero-emission autos, with General Motors touting an "all-electric" future and Fiat Chrysler and Ford also unveiling numerous electric vehicles and manufacturing changes. —AFP

Global stocks dip as talks on stimulus, UK-EU deal drag on

NEW YORK: Global stock markets retreated Friday along with the pound, as investors focused on long-running US stimulus talks on Capitol Hill and whether Britain and the European Union can finally agree to a post-Brexit trade deal. Major US indices pulled back from Thursday's records as markets awaited resolution of congressional talks on another relief package for the coronavirus-ravaged US economy.

Lawmakers have said negotiations are in the home stretch, but there was still no deal Friday evening ahead of a midnight deadline to avert a government shutdown.

"While there's a lot of optimism about stimulus, it's important not to count on it," said TD Ameritrade's JJ Kinahan in a note Friday morning. "It's easy to see things going south and the market taking it pretty hard, with so much stimulus premium already built in. Hope for the best, but prepare for the worst, as the saying goes." Republicans and Democrats braced for possibly working through the weekend to con-

clude a \$900 billion deal aimed at providing emergency relief for millions of struggling families and businesses amid signs of a worsening economy and as the country sees record high death tolls from the coronavirus pandemic.

Still, many analysts remain hopeful.

"While the stimulus saga is still not over, the two sides will likely strike a deal before the end of the year," said Gorilla Trades strategist Ken Berman. Meanwhile, British and EU negotiators took their grueling quest for a post-Brexit trade deal into the weekend after failing again on Friday to resolve the highly-charged issue of fishing rights. The pound was under pressure, while bourses in Paris, Frankfurt and London all fell.

"This week ends just like last week with the market focused on an apparent Sunday deadline to approve a Brexit deal," remarked AJ Bell investment director Russ Mould.

Sterling has fallen "as government ministers and (British Prime Minister) Boris Johnson himself have appeared to pour cold water on the prospects of a deal," said Mould. "Overall though investors are seeing this as bluster intended to enable the UK side to claim victory in the negotiations assuming an agreement is eventually brokered," he added. The UK will leave the EU single market in less than two weeks and time has all but run out for an agreement to be approved that heads off a severe economic shock. —AFP

Fed tweaks banking curbs to allow some buybacks

WASHINGTON: The Federal Reserve on Friday eased rules on major US banks meant to protect the financial system during the COVID-19 pandemic, allowing share buybacks and dividends to resume in certain circumstances. The central bank this year ordered 34 major US banks to suspend share buybacks in the last two quarters of 2020 and to limit dividend payments.

However on Friday the Fed modified its regulations, saying for the January-March period of next year, "both dividends and share repurchases will be limited to an amount based on income over the past year." Firms not earning income won't be able to pay dividends or make share repurchases, the central bank said.

Shortly after the announcement,

JPMorgan Chase said it would repurchase \$30 billion in shares starting in the first quarter. The Fed also released results of its second banking stress test of the year, which found that financial institutions "generally had strong levels of capital" even as they faced an uncertain outlook. "The banking system has been a source of strength during the past year and today's stress test results confirm that large banks could continue to lend to households and businesses even during a sharply adverse future turn in the economy," Fed Vice Chair for Supervision Randal K Quarles said. The Fed normally conducts one stress test a year, but added a second in 2020 given the pandemic and the United States' entry into a recession. —AFP

Classifieds

Sunday, December 20, 2020

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Expected Weather for the Next 24 Hours

BY NIGHT: Rather cold to cold with light variable wind to light to moderate north westerly wind with speed of 06 - 28 km/h with a chance for fog forming over some areas.

BY DAY: Fair and Visibility will improve gradually with light to moderate north westerly wind to light variable wind with speed of 08 - 30 km/h.

WEATHER WATCH			Fog	
STATION	MAX. REC.	MIN. EXP.	SFC. CHART 19/12/2020 1200 UTC	
KUWAIT CITY	19 °C	14 °C		
KUWAIT AIRPORT	19 °C	10 °C		
ABDALY	16 °C	09 °C		
BUBYAN	16 °C	12 °C		
JAHRA	19 °C	12 °C		
FAILAKA ISLAND	- °C	- °C		
SALMIYAH	17 °C	14 °C		
AHMADI	- °C	- °C		
NUWASIB	20 °C	11 °C		
WAFRA	21 °C	11 °C		
SALMY	16 °C	09 °C		

4 DAYS FORECAST						
DAY	DATE	WEATHER	Temperatures		Wind Direction	Wind Speed
			MAX.	MIN.		
Sunday	12/20	Fair and Visibility will improve gradually	20 °C	10 °C	NW-VRB	08 - 30 km/h
Monday	12/21	Fair with a chance for fog forming at night	20 °C	09 °C	VRB-NW	06 - 28 km/h
Tuesday	12/22	Fair and some scattered clouds will appear with a chance for light fog forming at night	21 °C	09 °C	VRB	06 - 22 km/h
Wednesday	12/23	Fair and Clouds will increase gradually with a chance for rain that might be thundery later on	23 °C	11 °C	VRB-SE	10 - 40 km/h

TOMORROW PRAYER TIMES	
Fajr	05:12
Sunrise	06:37
Zuhr	11:45
Asr	14:35
Sunset	16:53
Isha	18:16

RECORDED YESTERDAY AT KUWAIT AIRPORT	
MAX. Temp.	19 °C
MIN. Temp.	14 °C
MAX. RH	94 %
MIN. RH	65 %
MAX. Wind	N 28 km/h
TOTAL RAINFALL IN 24 HR.	0 mm

Hospitals

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

Clinics

Kaizen center	25716707
Rawda	22517733
Adaliya	22517144
Khaldiya	24848075
Kaifan	24849807
Shamiya	24848913
Shuwaikh	24814507
Abdullah Salem	22549134
Nuzha	22526804
Industrial Shuwaikh	24814764
Qadsiya	22515088
Dasmah	22532265
Bneid Al-Gar	22531908
Shaab	22518752
Qibla	22459381
Ayoun Al-Qibla	22451082
Mirqab	22456536
Sharq	22465401
Salmiya	25746401

CHANGE OF NAME

I, **Ameena**, D/o Esa Amir Perwaz, holder of Indian Passport No. Z3827496 issued in Kuwait on 3/7/2017, R/o 16-3-528/B, Chanchalguda, Hyderabad, Telangana 500024, have changed my name to Ameena Esa Amir Perwaz for all purposes vide Affidavit dated 17/11/2020.

Airlines

Kuwait Airways	171
Jazeera Airways	177
Turkish Airlines	1884918
FlyDubai	22414400
Qatar Airways	22423888
KLM	22425747
Royal Jordanian	22418064/5/6
British Airways	22425635

Automated enquiry about the Civil ID card is
1889988

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Call MSALHOTLINE 128

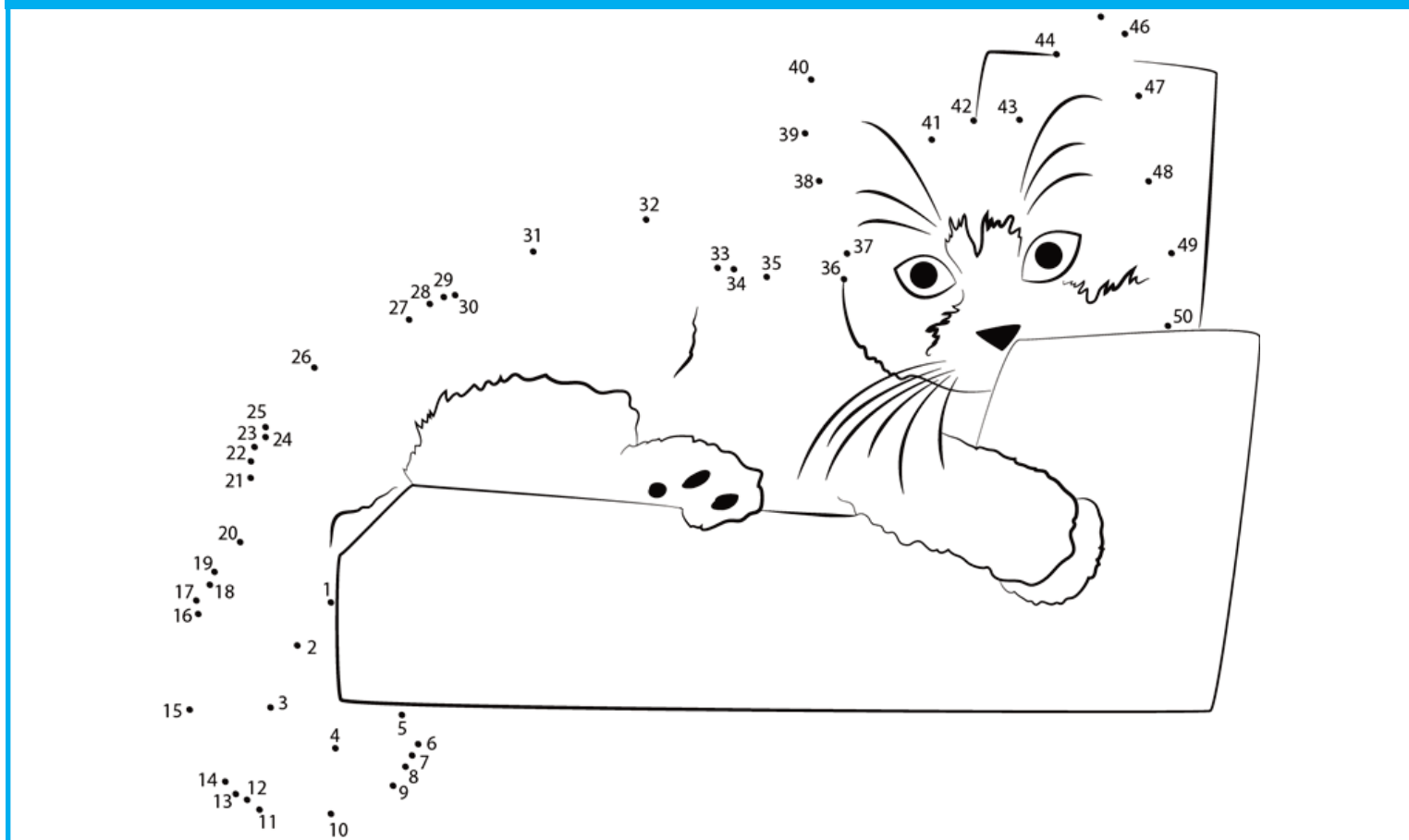
Word Search

African Animals Word Search

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

AARDVARK	MEERKAT	SERVAL
BABOON	MONGOOSE	SPRINGHARE
BAT	OSTRICH	VULTURE
BONOBO	PANGOLIN	WARTHOG
BUFFALO	PORCUPINE	WATERBUCK
CHEETAH	RHINOCEROS	WILDBEEST
CHIMPANZEE	SABLE	ZEBRA
CROCODILE		
ELEPHANT		
GAZELLE		
GELADA		
GENET		
GIRAFFE		
GORILLA		
HARTEBEEST		
HEDGEHOG		
HIPPOPOTAMUS		
HONEY BADGER		

Join the Dots



STAR TRACK

<p>Aries (March 21-April 19) Aries, you shouldn't even try to find a reasonable explanation for what goes on around you today. There isn't one. Be carried by the tides of emotions from the past that run through your body and soul. There's no use trying to control them - they need to come out. Instead, take the time to revitalize yourself in the intimacy of your home or at a friend's, if possible.</p>	<p>Cancer (June 21-July 22) You like to give people advice and help them find direction in their lives - sometimes when they haven't even asked. But now it's your turn to feel a little lost. You may need to get away from it all to get some perspective on your life. What about taking a trip to some faraway land? Today is a good day to make your future vacation plans.</p>	<p>Libra (September 23-October 22) Certain very narrow-minded people may get on your nerves. You're lucky enough to be an open, tolerant person, Libra. You take people and situations just as they come. Today you may find yourself in the middle of negotiations between two people with opposite views. Help them open their eyes to each other's point of view.</p>	<p>Capricorn (December 22-January 19) The atmosphere may seem a bit oppressive today, Capricorn. You like to be free to do what you want to do, and it may bother you that the people around you don't make themselves available to you. They seem preoccupied by their own business. This could bring out some old wounds that haven't completely healed.</p>
<p>Taurus (April 20-May 20) Today you may ask yourself if you're satisfied. How is your personal life? Do people live up to your standards or are you always left feeling dissatisfied? It may be time to make some important decisions in your life. What do you really want out of life? You might find some of the answers today.</p>	<p>Leo (July 23-August 22) Leo, you may put your integrity under the microscope today. We all have deep convictions that we would never let go of. But society pressures us, and it isn't always easy to live in perfect harmony with our ideals. The question to ask yourself today is just how willing are you to change your most heartfelt beliefs in order to live in society? Do you have the courage of your convictions?</p>	<p>Scorpio (October 23-November 21) Today you will be able to explore the power of your emotions. Don't try and fight what you call your "oversensitivity." A force from childhood will permeate you and help you to find out what your real needs are. Shouldn't you think about staying away from people who influence you a little too much? Think about it and go with your emotions.</p>	<p>Aquarius (January 20-February 18) You may be inclined to stay in bed today with the latest best seller, Aquarius. Who wouldn't want to spend the day this way? Alas, that isn't going to happen. The planets are practically pulling the covers off you and pushing you out of bed. There's work to be done! And more importantly, there are people you need to talk to right now. Put a bookmark in the book. It can wait.</p>
<p>Gemini (May 21-June 20) Nothing is simple where your family is concerned. If you've forgotten that, don't worry. Today will remind you. You may have to deal with some of your lingering problems with certain family members. You will find you have all the energy you need in order to find the solutions to the conflicts that have been eating at you for a while.</p>	<p>Virgo (August 23-September 22) Your freedom is more important to you than anything else in your life. It's often very difficult for you to get involved, whether personally or professionally. Nevertheless, today you may have to think about it. Could it be that your thirst for freedom is just an escape? You may need to ponder this question. Who knows? You could decide to take the leap!</p>	<p>Sagittarius (November 22-December 21) Sagittarius, you feel secure in the warmth and depth of your emotions. Today you will have the opportunity to reenergize and regenerate yourself from the inside out. Take advantage of the energies at play to deepen your relationships with the people you love. Get to know them even better. Your powers of seduction will mesmerize them.</p>	<p>Pisces (February 19-March 20) You have a lot to offer, Pisces. Everyone appreciates what you have to contribute. Yet you've been unable to give yourself credit for all that you've accomplished. It would be worthwhile to take some time to contemplate why this is so. You have a strong need to be loved, but you must first love yourself. Your family and friends will support you, but first you must support yourself.</p>



Photos show homes are decorated for Christmas in the Brooklyn neighborhood of Dyker Heights in New York City. — AFP photos

Despite COVID, Brooklyn neighborhood still a flashy Christmas village

In a New York where traditional holiday performances are cancelled, Rockefeller Center tree viewings are timed and travel is ill-advised, it's beginning to feel a lot like the Covid Grinch stole Christmas. But in Brooklyn's illuminated Dyker Heights neighborhood, not even a pandemic can keep the festive spirit down. The quasi-suburban residential district features large single-family homes that in late November start

time. "It's such a festive spirit at a time when things are, you know, uncertain and scary for a lot of people," the 47-year-old told AFP in front of a home draped with thousands of glittering lights.

According to local lore the tradition began in the mid-1980s, started by a woman named Lucy Spata in honor of her mother's memory. Her home is barely visible behind the lavish display fea-



shimmering with elaborate holiday displays. This year tourism is reined in as are bus tours to the southwestern Brooklyn neighborhood that proudly displays its Italian-American heritage. But its in-your-face Christmas glow is still drawing large crowds, albeit with most in masks.

"I'm in awe," said Eric Steiner, who journeyed from Manhattan with his husband to see the displays for the first

turing angels, Santas, nutcrackers and a gold throne with crimson upholstery where gawkers can snap photos. "A lot of people are getting depressed," said holiday lights tour guide Robert Perez. "I think this brings a little laughter and happiness."

'For the children'

Vincent Privitelli generally begins decorating his home just after



Halloween, and it takes about a month to put all the elements in place, including bedazzled evergreen arches. The 33-year-old who sometimes appears in costume as Rudolph said he and his family debated whether it was appropriate to decorate in 2020. "I said 'you know what, I'm gonna do it this year' with Covid and all, for the children. We need something positive," he said, with a string of vintage-style bulbs around his neck. Tour guide Perez said this year is different in that most people coming for the lights are local—"you had people coming in from Italy, Europe" in the past, he said.

For Christine Kong, who ventured over from neighboring New Jersey, the holiday season has provided a moment to "reflect on everything that happened this year." It's "a different type of excitement-and I guess hopeful, to what's to come in 2021." "Because it can't get worse than this," the 31-year-old said. The festivities gridlock traffic and make

parking impossible but the lights are a boon to local businesses.

Robert Cicero of John's Deli serves cup after cup of hot chocolate, along with the occasional hero sandwich dripping mozzarella and red sauce. "I thought it would be a big thing that people weren't going to come-but I guess the people are coming because they want to be outdoors" and still get in the holiday spirit, Cicero said. "Listen, everybody loves Rockefeller Center," he continued, referring to the city's annual tree made famous by decades of pop culture references. But Cicero said the timed, five-minute viewings at that attraction this year make places like Dyker Heights more enticing. "Christmas in Dyker Heights... that's really what it comes down to," said Privitelli, who has lived there 30 years. "Who needs Rockefeller Center?" — AFP



TUNISIA WORKS TO PRESERVE ITS JEWISH HERITAGE

Tunisia is struggling to protect North Africa's Jewish heritage, threatened by vandalism, looting and the smuggling of valuable artefacts bearing witness to the long history of the region's Jews. While many of Tunisia's own synagogues and Jewish graveyards lie neglected, the country has also become a conduit for antiques pilgaged in lawless neighboring Libya. "A huge number of antiques have been looted in Libya, and people are trying to smuggle them to Europe," said Habib Kazdaghli, a historian at Tunisia's Manouba University. Kazdaghli is campaigning for the creation of a museum of the country's Jewish heritage—a sensitive subject given public opposition to Israel.

Jews have lived in North Africa for over 2,000 years, a community strengthened by multiple waves of immigration, notably an influx of refugees expelled from Spain at the end of the 15th century and the arrival of Italian Jews in the 17th. But their numbers have dwindled in recent decades, with many emigrating to Israel, leaving homes, synagogues and graveyards abandoned and vulnerable to looters. And in the decade since uprisings brought political unrest to Tunisia and plunged Libya into war, smuggling gangs have taken advantage of the chaos to plunder valuable Jewish antiques and sell them to European collectors. Tunisian authorities regularly announce seizures of such goods, some dating back as far as the 15th century.

'Unique in the world'

In October, the Interior Ministry said it had confiscated two 10-metre (33-foot) scrolls in the coastal city of Nabeul, along with five small books in Hebrew. In 2017, police seized a 15th-century handwritten copy of all five books of the Torah, on 37 meters of bull skin. The ministry described the item as "unique in the world", and said unnamed foreign buyers had attempted to obtain it. In another raid in January, the police said they had seized six Hebrew documents that smugglers admitted they were hoping to sell for 1.5 million dinars (\$556,000).

Tunisian authorities said a specialist network of antiques smugglers had stolen the items from Libyan museums. "Can you believe someone would steal the word of God and sell it?" asked Perez Traboulsi, a prominent elder of Tunisia's Jewish community. Souad Toumi, an expert on Jewish heritage at Tunisia's national Bardo museum, said she had recorded "dozens of stolen Hebrew artefacts that turned out to be important and rare".

Many of them are old manuscripts, often meticulously written, sometimes in gold ink and stitched together with thread made from sheep or ox intestines. The subjects include religious songs and prayers, rulings, geometric decoration, plant and animal decoration, diagrams of human bodies and constellations, Toumi said. The artefacts bear witness to a well-integrated Jewish community in Tunisia, with some members serving in parliament and even as ministers.

Jewish exodus

By the time Tunisia gained independence in 1956, it had over 100,000 Jewish residents. Economic woes and tensions sparked by the Arab-Israeli conflict have pushed most to leave. Tunisia has no diplomatic relations with Israel and many Tunisians are against normalization. But some 1,500 Jews remain, mostly on the island of Djerba, site of the oldest synagogue in Africa. It is claimed the building includes stones from the original temple of Solomon and one of the oldest Torah scrolls in the world.

Jews have been visiting the island on pilgrimage for more than 200 years, according to Traboulsi, who organizes the annual event usually attended by thousands from across the world. Numbers have dwindled since Tunisia's 2011 revolution and a string of deadly jihadist attacks. Under the regime of Zine El Abidine Ben Ali, antiques smuggling was a taboo subject—but some close to the toppled dictator were later found guilty of such crimes. —AFP

Lifestyle | Features

ANIME 'DEMON SLAYER' SET TO DETHRONE GHIBLI CLASSIC FOR JAPAN BOX OFFICE CROWN

An anime epic in which a teenager hunts down and beheads demons has become the surprise sensation of Japanese cinema during the pandemic, and could soon be the country's top-grossing film of all time. "Demon Slayer", a full-length flick based on the hit manga series is threatening to dethrone Studio Ghibli's "Spirited Away", the fantastical 2001 tale that won an Oscar for best animated feature. The story of Tanjiro, whose life transforms when his family are killed in a demon attack, has taken 30.3 billion yen (\$290 million) at cinemas since its October release. At one recent screening in Tokyo, a group of female friends told AFP they had come to see the film because "it's a hot topic" in Japan. Drawing long lines around the country, "Demon Slayer" has dispatched "Titanic" from the number two spot and looked on track to beat Hayao Miyazaki's classic by Christmas.



This picture shows the final volume of the popular manga Demon Slayer or "Kimetsu no Yaiba" on display at a book store in Tokyo.

But this week, there was a plot twist: the Ghibli film's total sales were revised upwards to take into account a re-release over the summer-raising its takings to 31.7 billion yen and staving off "Demon Slayer" a little longer. The new film's stunning success comes despite—and perhaps because of—the pandemic, with people in Japan urged to avoid crowds, putting most other forms of mass entertainment off-limits. Kei, a 25-year-old who saw the film with his sister, said he thought people with more free

numbers of new cases have been recorded in recent weeks. The country has not implemented the strict lockdown measures seen elsewhere and movie theatres have largely stayed open, though with restrictions including mask-wearing.

'Invisible, frightening threats'

A sophisticated marketing campaign, including tie-ups with shops and restaurants, and well-known actors voicing the characters have also helped boost the film—whose full title is "Demon Slayer: Kimetsu no Yaiba the Movie: Mugen Train". And some say the relative dearth of other recent high-profile releases means it may have faced less competition than in a normal year. But Yuka Ijima, an assistant professor at Tokyo's Daito Bunka university who focuses on manga and psychology, said "Demon Slayer" also taps into some particularly relevant themes, with its focus on family ties and the battle between good and evil.

"In the past, the concept of a 'demon' was used to embody invisible, frightening threats, like diseases and epidemics including smallpox," which could resonate with people's fears during the virus crisis, she told reporters recently. The film, set in Japan's 1912-26 Taisho era, began life in 2016 as a manga series published in the popular comic magazine "Shonen Jump". Its popularity grew when it was adapted into a televised ani-



Pedestrians walk past a poster promoting the anime movie Demon Slayer — Kimetsu no Yaiba the Movie: Mugen Train — at a cinema in Tokyo. — AFP photos

me series, and sales of the manga boomed this spring when the Japanese government urged residents to stay home to stem the spread of Covid-19.

The movie's spring release was pushed back to October, "at a time when there was a certain sense of security" as infections in Japan declined and people felt more comfortable going to the cinema, Ijima said. Its success has been a rare bright spot in the economic malaise that has accompanied the pandemic in Japan. One research institute estimated the entire series has generated an eco-

nom ic impact of 270 billion yen (\$2.6 billion) in Japan alone. And "Demon Slayer" fever shows no sign of abating.

Long queues formed outside manga shops earlier this month for the release of its 23rd tome, the final instalment of a series that has sold more than 120 million copies overall and been translated into 14 languages. The film has already been distributed elsewhere in Asia with releases in Europe and the United States planned for next year. — AFP

STAR WARS' BOBA FETT ACTOR JEREMY BULLOCH DIES AT 75

British actor Jeremy Bulloch who played infamous bounty hunter Boba Fett in the original "Star Wars" films has died at the age of 75. He died on Thursday in hospital in Tooting, south London, "following health complications, including several years living with Parkinson's disease", his website said. "Jeremy had a long and happy life as an actor and was best known for his roles in the films Summer Holiday, Star Wars and James Bond," it added. Born in Market Harborough, Leicestershire, Bulloch appeared in several classic television shows in the 1970s and 80s including "Doctor Who" and "Robin of Sherwood", and had supporting roles in three James Bond movies.

But he is best known for playing fan favourite Boba Fett in "The Empire Strikes Back" and "The Return of the Jedi". He landed the role after a call from his half-brother Robert Watts, who was an associate producer on "The Empire Strikes Back". "I'd never managed to give Jeremy a job on film," Watts said in 2008, according to the StarWars.com website. "So I rang him up and said, 'If the suit fits, the part's yours.' He came in and it fit."

His "unforgettable performance as notorious bounty hunter Boba Fett has captivated audiences since he first appeared," the official Star Wars Twitter account said. "He will be remembered not only for his iconic portrayal of the legendary character, but also for his warmth and generous spirit which have become an enduring part of his rich legacy."

'Quintessential English gentleman'

Fellow "Star Wars" actors paid tribute to him on social media. "Jeremy Bulloch was the quintessential English gentleman," Mark Hamill, who played Luke Skywalker, said on Twitter. "A fine actor, delightful company & so kind to everyone lucky enough to meet or work with him. I will deeply miss him & am so grateful to have known him." Billy Dee Williams, who played Lando Calrissian, tweeted: "Today we lost the best bounty hunter in the galaxy... RIP Jeremy Bulloch."

Although Boba Fett was a relatively minor character in the films, he was a firm favourite with fans and is currently played by New Zealand actor Temuera Morrison in the popular television series "The Mandalorian". Daniel Logan, who played a young Boba Fett in "Star Wars Episode II: Attack of the Clones", said it brought him to tears to announce the death of Bulloch. "RIP legend! I'll never forget all you've taught me!!" he posted on Instagram with a photograph of the two of them. While Boba Fett was never seen without his helmet, Bulloch showed his face in a couple of minor parts in "The Empire Strikes Back" and "Revenge of the Sith". —AFP



Jeremy Bulloch



Karl Shale poses with a copy of the newly released album McCartney III by British musician Paul McCartney in the Sounds of Universe record store in London. — AFP photos



Karl Shale poses with a copy of the newly released album McCartney III by British musician Paul McCartney.

Paul McCartney urges vaccine take-up as new album released

British pop legend Paul McCartney on Friday urged people to get vaccinated against the coronavirus, as he celebrated the release of a new solo album crafted during this year's lockdown. The former Beatle, who revealed in October he had resurrected unfinished music to complete the record, said the internet had allowed so-called antivaxxers' misleading messages to "take hold". "I will (have the vaccine), and I'd like to encourage people to get it too," he told BBC radio. "There used to be anti-vaccine people, that was OK, that was their choice. "But with the internet now these things really take hold and so you do get these people who won't take it."

The new album "McCartney III", released a week later than originally planned, is his third eponymous solo album. It follows months of work at his

home studio in Sussex, in southern England, on previously started and new songs. It has all been written, produced and performed by McCartney, who has said he had not intended to release an album in 2020 until the pandemic forced him to stay at home for months. The former Beatles frontman had been set to headline this year's Glastonbury festival, on its 50th anniversary, before it was cancelled due to the pandemic. Britain imposed a months-long lockdown from late March as Covid-19 first swept the country, which has now seen more than 65,000 deaths due to the virus, among the worst tolls in Europe.

McCartney's new release coincides with the 50th anniversary of his first solo endeavour, "McCartney", released as the "Fab Four" went their separate ways in 1970. A follow-up, "McCartney II",

came a decade later. The latest collection of tracks was mostly built from live takes of McCartney on vocals and guitar or piano, before overdubbing with his bass playing and drumming. Pictures for the album were shot by McCartney's daughter, the photographer Mary McCartney, with additional images by his nephew Sonny McCartney and some that he took himself on his phone.

Keeping the photography in the family mirrors how the pop icon illustrated earlier solo albums, with his late wife Linda McCartney shooting the artwork for "McCartney II". Linda also took many of the photos displayed on the gatefold cover of the original 1970 "McCartney" album. — AFP

Oscars museum delayed again as pandemic grips Los Angeles

The long-awaited opening of Los Angeles' Oscars museum was postponed again Friday due to the pandemic, with officials saying its scheduled April debut would be "irresponsible" as the city grapples with record coronavirus cases. The Academy Museum of Motion Pictures, dedicated to the magic of movies and set to host iconic Hollywood treasures from Judy Garland's "Wizard of Oz" ruby slippers to Dracula's cape, has been beset by delays.

It had been set to finally open April 30, the week after the Academy's flagship event—the Oscars—but will now welcome visitors from September 30. President Bill Kramer said in a statement that the museum was "ready and eager to welcome visitors in the spring," but "with the current surge of Covid-19, it would be irresponsible to maintain an April opening." "We know a new day is coming for us all, and when it does, the Academy Museum will be ready to offer our visitors the remarkable experience we have all been wanting."



In this file photo a general view of the Academy Museum during the Academy Museum of Motion Pictures in Los Angeles, California on February 7, 2020. — AFP

California has emerged as the latest epicenter in the US Covid-19 outbreak, reporting more than 52,000 new cases Wednesday. Even as vaccinations began this week, intensive care units have run out of beds at multiple hospitals across southern California. Los Angeles health officials estimate about one in 80 county residents are currently infected. All indoor Los Angeles museums are closed due to Covid restrictions, with a regional "stay-at-home" order in effect until at least December 28. The Oscars themselves were postponed by eight weeks to April 25, after the coronavirus pandemic shuttered movie theaters and wreaked havoc on Hollywood's release calendar.

The futuristic Academy museum contains a 1,000-seat theater inside a seemingly-suspended glass, steel and concrete orb designed by Renzo Piano, connected by sky bridges to a converted department store housing the main galleries—and the recently installed 25-foot (7.5-meter) shark model used in "Jaws." "Now it's just a matter of patience, for all of us, as we look ahead to opening our doors on September 30," said museum chair and Netflix content chief Ted Sarandos. — AFP

Queen Elizabeth's Christmas speech will be available on Amazon Alexa

Queen Elizabeth's annual Christmas speech will be available on Amazon's Alexa devices this year. The 94-year-old royal's special message will be heard for the first time on the cloud-based voice service on December 25. In 2012, Amazon Kindle users were able to read the speech on the firm's e-readers after it was broadcast. Alexa Europe director Eric King said: "After a challenging year, millions of people from across the Commonwealth will be eagerly awaiting Her Majesty the Queen's message on Christmas Day. "By creating this

world-first innovation, just as we did in 2012 with the release of the Queen's Christmas speech on Kindle, we hope that even more people will be able to enjoy the uplifting words of Her Majesty. "This really is one for the history books and showcases just how far technology has advanced since the very first speech was delivered back in 1932."

The longest-serving British monarch will record her speech from Windsor Castle, where she and husband Prince Philip, 99, will be spending the holidays this year, instead of Sandringham in Norfolk, due to the Covid-19 pandemic. A Palace spokesperson confirmed: "Having considered all the appropriate advice, the Queen and the Duke of Edinburgh have decided that this year they will spend Christmas quietly in Windsor." In order to play the Queen's Christmas speech, simply ask: "Alexa, play the Queen's Christmas message" or "Alexa, play Queen Elizabeth's Christmas Day message." —BangShowbiz



Queen Elizabeth

Photo of the Day



Canoeist, Vavrinec Hradilek seen in Wanaka, New Zealand. - Photo taken from www.redbullcontentpool.com

India slump to lowest ever score as Australia clinch opening Test

Previous Test low was 42 against England in 1974

ADELAIDE: A devastated India crashed to their lowest ever score of 36 yesterday as Australia ran riot to win the opening Test in Adelaide by eight wickets after Josh Hazlewood and Pat Cummins produced a bowling masterclass. India started the third day of the pink-ball Test on nine for one and with a 62-run lead, looking to build a competitive second innings total for the hosts to chase.

But their hopes were left in tatters by a wicket with bounce and deviation as Hazlewood took 5-8, including his 200th Test wicket, and Cummins 4-21. Wicketkeeper Tim Paine claimed five catches as the bowlers found the edge. "I didn't expect it to come that quick, I was expecting a real dogfight," said skipper Paine. "To hang in, give our bowlers a chance, and then turn up and start the day the way we did, full credit to our bowling attack again."

"It's nice to get off to a good start. Chuffed with the way we bowled in this Test."

It was an incredible Indian collapse, with no batsman reaching double figures during a capitulation that lasted less than 22 overs, in contrast to their battling first innings' 244. That included skipper Virat Kohli, who fell for four and now heads home for the birth of his first child, leaving his stunned team to face three more Tests, starting in Melbourne on Boxing Day, without him. Ajinkya Rahane will assume the captaincy. "It's very hard to put those feelings into words," said a disconsolate Kohli.

"We had a lead of 60-odd when we arrived, and then just collapsed. We played two days of good cricket to get in a position and then just lost it in an hour. It really hurts." India's previous Test low was 42 against England at Lord's in 1974. Their 36 was the joint fourth lowest of all time, with New Zealand's 26 facing England in 1955 at Auckland the worst ever. The carnage left Australia, who scored 191 in the first innings, needing 90 to win, with out-of-form Joe Burns hitting a confidence-building 51 not out, including a six to win the match. Matthew Wade made 33 and Marnus Labuschagne six with Steve Smith not out one.



ADELAIDE: Australia's Matthew Wade (center) plays a shot on the third day of the first cricket Test match between Australia and India in Adelaide yesterday. — AFP

In trouble

Cummins wasted no time removing nightwatchman Jasprit Bumrah for two in the second over of the day, tempting him to push at a slower ball that popped back up to him. That brought the stubborn Cheteshwar Pujara to the crease. He saw off an over from Cummins, but that was as good as it got for the veteran who fell without scoring.

Cummins, the world's number one Test bowler, sent down a delivery that had to be played and Pujara caught an edge that carried to wicketkeeper Paine. It left India on 15 for three, and it only got worse with opener Mayank Agarwal back in the pavilion five balls later for nine, again caught by Paine on Hazlewood's opening delivery. Hazlewood and Paine again combined to get rid of Rahane for nought, after

which Cummins picked up the massive wicket of Kohli. The superstar batsman had smacked Cummins for four but was gone the next ball after a review, caught by debutant Cameron Green as he attempted a cover drive.

At 19 for six, India were in real danger of making their lowest ever score and when Wriddhiman Saha (4) chipped a Hazlewood delivery to Marnus Labuschagne and Ravi Ashwin was out next ball it became a reality. A four from Hanuma Vihari spared them some shame, taking India past New Zealand's all-time low. But Vihari (8) didn't last much longer, caught by Paine with Hazlewood again doing the damage to complete an excellent five-wicket haul, before Mohammed Shami was forced to retire hurt after a Cummins thunderbolt hit his right arm. — AFP

News in brief

Premier League, beIN seal deal

LONDON: The Premier League and Qatari broadcaster beIN Sports have announced a TV rights deal worth a reported \$500 million for the Middle East and North Africa region that will run until 2025. The agreement, for the 2022-2025 rights cycle, means beIN, which has been the league's broadcast partner since 2013, can show all 380 matches live each season across all 24 countries in the region. British newspaper reports said 19 of the 20 Premier League clubs supported the deal, with Newcastle the only club to vote against. Mike Ashley's club are in a legal dispute with the Premier League over a failed takeover of the club by a Saudi-backed consortium. The bid attracted scrutiny due to the piracy of sports broadcast rights, including Premier League matches, and the state's human rights record. The new TV deal will cover Saudi Arabia even though subscribing to beIN, the Arab world's leading sports channel, has been difficult for Saudi fans since the kingdom's 2017 boycott of Qatar. — AFP

Newcastle players struggling

LONDON: Newcastle United boss Steve Bruce says some of the club's coronavirus victims are battling extreme exhaustion as they attempt to fight their way back to fitness. The Magpies will once again be without a number of unnamed players for Saturday's home match against Fulham as a result of the lingering effects of the COVID-19 outbreak, which prompted the club to close their training ground at the end of last month. Defender Federico Fernandez and midfielder Isaac Hayden have returned to the fold in the past week but some of their team-mates have not been so fortunate. "We've had the full range," said Bruce. "We've had vomiting, sores, mouth ulcers, no smell, no taste - but the big thing, of course, and which is the worrying thing, is the welfare of one or two or three of them. "It's not great at all. We're still going to be weeks and that long-term COVID is something which you wouldn't think possible in young, fit, athletes. Unfortunately, it is so." — AFP

Heinze named Atlanta coach

LOS ANGELES: Atlanta United named former Argentina international Gabriel Heinze as the team's new head coach on Friday. The former Manchester United, Paris Saint-Germain and Real Madrid defender joins the Major League Soccer side after a successful stint with Argentina's Velez Sarsfield. "This is a milestone moment in Atlanta United history, and we couldn't be more excited to welcome Gabriel as our next head coach," Atlanta president Darren Eales said in a statement. "We cast the net widely for this important hire, and Gabriel quickly emerged as the No. 1 candidate. Gabriel is one of the top coaches in South American soccer and we are delighted that he chose Atlanta United. "Whilst his resume speaks for itself, Gabriel's playing philosophy and commitment to youth development closely align with our ideas at Atlanta United, and we are happy to welcome him as we move into our club's next chapter." — AFP

Women's nordic combined event

RAMSAU AM DACHSTEIN: Tara Geraghty-Moats made history on Friday when she won the first ever World Cup women's nordic combined skiing event, held in Ramsau am Dachstein, Austria. American Geraghty-Moats, who was in sixth place following the morning's ski jump, finished in first place ahead of Norway's Gyda Westvold Hansen and Japanese skier Anju Nakamura after the five-kilometer cross-country race. "Today here in Ramsau was a dream come true, it was something that I was thinking about since I was 10 years old," said the 27-year-old. "I just kept telling myself I could do it... huge thanks to my team and the FIS (International Ski Federation) for finally inviting the women to the big leagues." Nordic combined skiing had been an exclusively male sport at the top level before this season, but is now open to female athletes. Women will also compete in the discipline at this year's Nordic World Ski Championships, which are being held in Oberstdorf, Germany, between February 23 and March 7. — AFP

Suter kicks off defense with win

VAL-D'ISERE: Switzerland's Corinne Suter started the defense of her World Cup downhill title with an impressive victory in Val d'Isere on Friday, edging out Sofia Goggia. The 26-year-old Suter, who claimed both the downhill and super-G globes last season, beat Goggia in the first downhill of the campaign by just 0.11 seconds. American Breezy Johnson was only nine hundredths of a second further back in third place, claiming her first ever podium finish on the circuit. Two-time downhill world champion Ilka Stuhec had to settle for fourth. It was Suter's third career World Cup win after one in each of the speed events earlier this year. "I skied really well at the top of the course and in the middle part, much better than in training," said Suter, who came close to having a leg amputated following a blood infection in June 2018. "I took more direct lines. I felt a lot of pressure for this first downhill of the season, but I'm really happy to have finished the race like that." — AFP



Women Open Table Tennis tournament

By Abdellatif Sharaa

KUWAIT: The women Open Table Tennis tournament was won by Arabi Club's player Minwah Al-Shimari

after defeating Fatat Club player Shahad Al-Enezi 3-0. Meanwhile Hawraa Asad from Fatat Club won third place after defeating Kifaya Al-Uwairdhi 3-2. The Final matches were held at Salwa Al-Sabah Club hall and was attended by Deputy Chairman of Table Tennis Federation Khalid Al-Khudhari, technical director Sabri Jamaan, administrative director Ahmad Al-Qallaf and chairwoman of the women committee Khalida Al-Ali. The officials awarded the winners with their cups and prizes.

There were 42 participants in the refresher tournament from Arabi Salwa Al-Sabah, Fatat and Fatayat Al-Oyoun clubs. Khalid Al-Khudhari lauded the level of many players, as the competition was very strong in the final rounds. He thanked Salwa Al-Sabah Board of Directors and Chairwoman Naeema Al-Ahmad for hosting the tournament. Chairwoman of KTTS women committee Khalida Al-Ali said she is happy with the tournament (the first in 2020-2021 season).

Borussia Dortmund's Bundesliga title aspirations suffer fresh dent

Moukoko becomes youngest Bundesliga scorer



Dortmund's German forward Youssoufa Moukoko

BERLIN: Borussia Dortmund's Bundesliga title aspirations suffered a fresh dent on Friday as they crashed to a 2-1 defeat at Union Berlin on the night their striker Youssoufa Moukoko became the league's youngest ever goalscorer. After Liverpool loanee Taiwo Awoniyi headed Union into the lead early in the second half, Moukoko leapt into the air to celebrate making history when he equalised for Dortmund aged just 16 years and 28 days.

Moukoko broke the previous record of Leverkusen's Florian Wirtz, who was 17 years, 34 days when he scored against Bayern Munich in June. However, Moukoko's delight was short-lived as Dortmund again conceded from a set-piece with Union centre-back Marvin Friedrich heading the winner from a corner with 12 minutes left. "We have now lost two league games through set-pieces - that's a disaster," Dortmund defender Mats Hummels fumed to DAZN, also referring to November's 2-1 shock home defeat to Cologne.

"We're simply beating ourselves up, that can't be allowed to happen." Saturday's 5-1 thrashing at home to Stuttgart cost head coach Lucien Favre his job, but Dortmund's defensive woes were exposed again by Union, who also beat them 3-1 in eastern Berlin last season. Despite bouncing back in mid-week with a 2-1 win at Werder Bremen under caretaker coach Edin Terzic, Dortmund were again punished for yielding possession easily and sloppy defending.

This is Dortmund's fifth defeat this season, leaving them fourth in the table, six points behind Leverkusen

who hosted Bayern Munich in yesterday's top-of-the-table clash. Union, who held European champions Bayern to a 1-1 draw in their previous home game, climb to fifth, just a point behind Dortmund. They deservedly took the lead behind closed doors when Awoniyi slipped his marker Giovanni Reyna and headed past Dortmund goalkeeper Roman Buerki on 57 minutes. "The fact that an opposing striker was so free is unforgivable," Hummels complained after the final whistle.

Having previously hit the Union woodwork, Moukoko made history three minutes later when he stabbed home the equalizer, but Friedrich was left alone in the area to head the winning goal in off the post. "It's great that we win the game through two set-pieces," Union captain Christopher Trimmel told ZDF. "There was a lot of passion, no opponent has it easy against us." The Bundesliga starts a two-week winter break after this weekend and Dortmund have a tough month ahead in January when they face RB Leipzig, Bayer Leverkusen and Borussia Moenchengladbach. However, Moukoko clearly has a bright future after now claiming three records in the last month. "You have to congratulate the young 16-year-old on his Bundesliga goal, that's something very special," Trimmel added graciously. Moukoko also became the Champions League's youngest player ten days ago, coming off the bench in the win at Zenit St Petersburg with Dortmund through to the last 16 where they face Sevilla. He also became the youngest player in Bundesliga history on November 21 - the day after his 16th birthday.—AFP

Kuwait Football League roundup

By Abdellatif Sharaa

KUWAIT: Kuwait Football League (the ranking phase) kicked off Thursday with three matches, between Qadisiya vs Shabab, Yarmouk vs Khaitan and Kazma vs Sulaibkhat. Qadisiya succeeded to continue in their winning ways and defeated Shabab 2-0 as Lucas Gaucho scored in the 43rd minute while Fahad Al-Ansari scored in the 85th. Qadisiya raised

their point total to 28 while Shabab remained at 18. The match saw exchanges between the two teams with real threats to either side during most of the first half until the 43rd minute when Lucas scored.

In another match, Kazma defeated Sulaibkhat 2-0. Kazma's Abdallah Al-Fahad scored early in the 7th minute - followed by another goal by Yaqoub Al-Tarawh which was taken from the penalty spot. Kazma now has 25 points while Sulaibkhat remained at 5. The match started in an exciting fashion, though Kazma had real control while Sulaibkhat focused on defense. Kazma's first goal came from a kick from a distance by Abdallah Al-Fahad.

Meanwhile, leaders Nasr Club had another win on

Friday against Jahra 1-0. Nasr's goal was scored by Jordanian player Ahmad Al-Riyahi in the 10th minute and this took their point total to 29. Al-Jahra are now struggling with 11 points. Nasr established their dominance from the first half. The match ended with the score 1-0. Salmiya defeated Burgan 2-1 as Nayef Zuwayd scored in the 34th minute while Alex Lima scored in the 75th. Burgan's goal was scored by Rami Bushnaiba in the 58th minute. Salmiya now has 25 points while Burgan has 11 only. In another development, Khaitan increased their chances to remain in the premier league by defeating Yarmouk 4-2, thereby raising their point total to 14, while Yarmouk and Sulaibkhat are in the lower league.



Ligue 1 leaders sold to investment fund

LILLE: Gerard Lopez has sold Ligue 1 leaders Lille to Callisto, a subsidiary of the Merlyn Partners investment fund, a source close to the club told AFP on Friday. The new owners have installed Olivier Letang, a 48-year-old former sporting director at Paris Saint-Germain and president of Rennes, as CEO. Lopez, a Spanish-Luxembourgish businessman, bought Lille from Michel Seydoux in January 2017.

They finished 11th in the table that season, dropped to 17th the following year but have since finished second and fourth. This season they lead the league after 15 matches and have progressed from the group stages of the Champions League for only the second time, the previous occasion was in 2006.

"I have achieved my goal and I believe that it is now time for a new owner to take over and for me to concentrate on other sporting endeavours," said Lopez in a statement issued by the club. Lopez also leaves the club deeply in debt. He borrowed more than 225 million euros (275 million dollars) from Elliott Management during his first months in office. He was pushed towards the exit by the American

investment fund, to which he had repaid less than half of this sum.

"Given the recent difficulties in Ligue 1 and in particular the uncertainty surrounding the TV rights contract for the French championship, it is important that the LOSC is owned by a reputable owner with recognized financial strength such as Merlyn," Lopez said. Luxembourg-based Merlyn said in the statement that it focused on "long-term" investments in European assets. It said Lille's "outstanding debt will be significantly reduced and new equity will be injected into the club." Merlyn said it had hired Letang as CEO because it wanted "to build a new, experienced and strong leadership within the club."—AFP



Second, final round of the Jet Ski race

KUWAIT: The second and final round of the Jet Ski race (Endurance 2020) that was organized by the Jet Ski committee of Kuwait Sea Sports Club concluded as the organizers honored the winners. Club's

Relations and Information Director Salman Al-Khulaifan said the second round witnessed a highly heated competition among participants. Al-Khulaifan said the round that lasted one day was composed of two runs of 35 minutes each with 26 participants. Rashid Al-Dawas won first place, followed by Humoud Al-Mudhayan and Ahmad Al-Dawas respectively. In the other rounds, Humoud Al-Mudhayan won the first place, followed by Ahmad and Rashid Al-Dawas.



'So many people': Latest Qatar World Cup venue

AL-RAYYAN, Qatar: Qatar inaugurated its latest stadium on Friday for the 2022 World Cup with a half-capacity 20,000-strong crowd who had all tested for the coronavirus or antibodies beforehand but with minimal social distancing. The launch of the Ahmad Bin Ali stadium, 24 kilometers west of the capital Doha, marks one of the largest sports gatherings anywhere in the world since the start of the pandemic.

In New Zealand, more than 20,000 fans attended the Super Rugby Aotearoa six days after the country declared itself COVID-free. Similar numbers are attending some National Football League games in the US despite surging infections and deaths. Fans were able to apply for tickets to Friday's event if they either tested positive for virus antibodies, or tested negative for Covid-19 at accredited clinics in the days before the opening.

Organizers said 10,000 seats would be reserved for each category at the ground which until Friday was known as the Rayyan Venue. Qatari IT consultant Ahmed al-Beharri, 25, said "it was proof we are capable of organizing the big events". "It's been a long time since I've been with so many people," he said. "I never thought it would be possible to have 20,000 people at an event like this." The 40,000-seat ground, which will host seven matches during Qatar 2022 up to and including the round of 16 stage, hosted the domestic Emir Cup final as its inaugural match.

Favourites Al-Sadd, coached by former Barcelona and Spain player Xavi Hernandez, beat minnows Al-Arabi 2-1 in front of an audience that included the country's ruler, Emir Sheikh Tamim bin Hamad Al-Thani and FIFA boss Gianni Infantino. "Even with a physically distanced crowd, I could feel the passion of the fans," said Infantino.

Live		Matches on TV
		(Local Timings)
ENGLISH PREMIER LEAGUE		
Brighton & Hove Albion v Sheffield	15:00	beIN Sports
Tottenham Hotspur v Leicester	17:15	beIN Sports HD 1
Manchester United v Leeds	19:30	beIN Sports HD 1
West Bromwich v Aston Villa	22:15	beIN Sports
SPANISH LEAGUE		
Celta de Vigo v Deportivo Alaves	16:00	beIN Sports
Granada CF v Real Betis	18:15	beIN Sports
Cadiz CF v Getafe CF	20:30	beIN Sports HD 3
SD Eibar v Real Madrid	23:00	beIN Sports HD 1
ITALIAN CALCIO LEAGUE		
Torino FC v Bologna	14:30	beIN Sports
Benevento v Genoa	17:00	beIN Sports HD 7
Cagliari Calcio v Udinese Calcio	17:00	beIN Sports
Inter Milano v Spezia Calcio	17:00	beIN Sports HD 4
US Sassuolo v AC Milan	17:00	beIN Sports HD 5
Atalanta v AS Roma	20:00	beIN Sports HD 4
SS Lazio v SSC Napoli	22:45	beIN Sports HD 4
GERMAN BUNDESLIGA		
SC Freiburg v Hertha Berlin	17:30	beIN Sports
VfL Wolfsburg v VfB Stuttgart	20:00	beIN Sports
FRENCH LEAGUE		
Stade brestois 29 v Montpellier	15:00	beIN Sports HD 6
FC Nantes v Angers	17:00	beIN Sports HD 10
Saint Etienne v Nimes Olympique	17:00	beIN Sports HD 9
RC Strasbourg v Bordeaux	17:00	beIN Sports HD 8
FCO Dijon v AS Monaco FC	17:00	beIN Sports HD 6
Lorient v Stade Rennais	19:00	beIN Sports HD 6
LOSC Lille v Paris Saint-Germain	23:00	beIN Sports HD 6

The event coincided with Qatar National Day which, in two years, will be the date of the World Cup final. Despite strict rules inside the stadium mandating masks, assigning seats, and a ban on eating, social distancing was absent in the fan zone before kick-off.



AL-RAYYAN, Qatar: Photo shows a view of the start of the Amir Cup final football match between Al-Sadd and Al-Arabi at the newly-inaugurated Al-Rayyan Stadium in Al-Rayyan, Qatar, which will host matches during the Qatar 2022 FIFA World Cup finals. — AFP

Thousands of spectators, some un-masked, flocked around a stage to watch breakdancing and Bollywood renditions while a compere unsuccessfully encouraged social distancing. Live music and dancing remains forbidden under strict virus prevention measures still in force in several settings including bars. "In theory, no one should have it (COVID-19)," said one organizer as he headed into the stadium ahead of the game. Security officers confiscated food and drink as well as hand sanitizers under existing rules banning fans from bringing liquids into matches.

Inside, white crosses closed off seating while green ticks indicated places open for fans who mostly respected the rules although some clustered behind the goals. "I felt very safe. They had us sit with one seat empty between us to have social distancing and minimize risk of contagion," said Valentina, a Venezuelan student. —AFP

14 India slump to lowest ever score as Australia clinch opening Test



15 'So many people': Latest Qatar World Cup venue



15 Dortmund's Moukoko becomes Bundesliga youngest goalscorer



Ruthless Liverpool crush Palace 7-0

Man City edge past Southampton



LONDON: Liverpool's Egyptian midfielder Mohamed Salah (right) scores his team's sixth goal past Crystal Palace's Spanish goalkeeper Vicente Guaita during the English Premier League football match between Crystal Palace and Liverpool yesterday. — AFP

LONDON: Liverpool sent a chilling warning to the rest of the Premier League yesterday, smashing seven goals past Crystal Palace as Manchester City climbed to fifth in the table. Jurgen Klopp's holders-despite being dogged by injuries this season—are already six points clear at the top of the table after humiliating Palace 7-0. It was the first time the Reds had won an away match in the English top-flight by a margin of seven goals in their illustrious history.

Manchester City, dethroned as champions last season, edged past in-form Southampton 1-0 to keep Liverpool in sight, but the Merseysiders are going to take some catching. Pep Guardiola's men did what was needed but they have mustered just 19 goals this season—compared with 36 for free-scoring Liverpool.

Klopp's outfit built on the momentum of their last-gasp win in the top-of-the-table clash with Tottenham in midweek.

Roberto Firmino and Mohamed Salah scored twice at Selhurst Park while Takumi Minamoto, Sadio Mane and Jordan Henderson also found the net. The German boss has repeatedly bemoaned the fixture scheduling that requires teams to play at lunchtime kick-offs after Wednesday evening games, but his side suffered no hangover from their midweek exertions against Spurs. "The boys are capable of that. It will not happen every week but it can happen," he said.

"It just clicked today. After a really intense period for the boys they should be really proud of how they came through that results-wise." Victory ensured Klopp's side will be top of the league at

Christmas for a third successive season and, on this evidence, it is difficult to see how they are going to be stopped from winning a record-equalling 20th league title. "We will have a good Christmas," said Klopp.

"The season is not finished unfortunately, there are a few more games to come." Salah had been given a rare rest from the start, but his Japanese replacement Minamoto took just three minutes to open the scoring when he was teed up by Mane for his first Premier League goal. Mane ended his longest goal drought as a Liverpool player—nine games—with an excellent turn and low finish from Firmino's pass.

A clinical counter-attack made it three before the break as this time Firmino latched onto Andy Robertson's cross

before calmly flicking the ball beyond Vicente Guaita.

Klopp then took the chance to give Mane a rest, but the Senegalese voiced his frustration at being removed to be replaced by Salah. The Egyptian played his part for the fifth with the pass into Firmino, who has now scored as many goals in his past two games than his previous 27 Premier League appearances. Salah then moved to the top of the Premier League goalscoring charts with 13 goals in as many games this season with a late double by heading home from a corner before bending an incredible effort into the top corner.

City win

Manchester City have had an inconsistent start to the season but moved to

within a point of Southampton thanks to Raheem Sterling's first-half strike at St Mary's. Sterling turned a well-struck low Kevin De Bruyne cross into the back of the net in the 16th minute. Southampton responded well with several first-half chances.

Theo Walcott and Jannik Vestergaard had the best of them but could not beat goalkeeper Ederson. The home side were hit by the first-half departure of leading scorer Danny Ings with an injury and despite second-half pressure could not find an equalizer. City, now unbeaten in five league games, are fifth in the table with 23 points, one point behind Southampton, who have played a game more. Everton hosted struggling Arsenal and Fulham traveled to Newcastle in the later kick-offs yesterday. — AFP



AL WAKRAH, Qatar: Ulsan's players celebrate winning the AFC Champions League finals against Iran's Persepolis yesterday at the Al-Janoub Stadium. — AFP

Ulsan win Asian Champions League

DOHA: Ulsan Hyundai Motors won the Asian Champions League for the second time in history after a Junior Negrao double gave them a 2-1 victory over Iran's Persepolis yesterday. The South Korean giants also achieved the feat in record fashion, winning their ninth consecutive match in the tournament to equal their winning streak of 2012 when they won the title for the first time. But this time they were even more emphatic, scoring at least two goals in each match on their way to the title, an unprecedented achievement in the tournament.

Persepolis missed out on the Asian crown for the

second time in three years, having lost to Japan's Kashima Antlers in the final in 2018. This was the fifth time in history that a team from Iran had fallen at the final hurdle of Asia's premier competition, thus extending the country's title drought on the continental club scene since 1993. Persepolis had topped from Asia's west zone in Qatar's bio-secure bubble after the COVID-19 pandemic forced the Asian Football Confederation to halt the tournament in March.

Al Hilal of Saudi Arabia, the 2019 champions, were kicked out during the group phase after a spate of coronavirus infections in the squad left them without enough fit players, easing Persepolis' path to the final. While Ulsan had played eight games in 23 days in Doha before yesterday's final, Persepolis had three weeks off and only arrived in Qatar a few days ago. The Iranians though battled gallantly yesterday, but only keeping the marauding Ulsan forwards at bay but

also drawing first blood at Qatar's Al Janoub Stadium, built for the 2022 World Cup.

At the stroke of half-time, Ulsan defender Park Soo-ho lost his balance in the midfield and Mehdi Abdi displayed great awareness to steal the ball and produce a brilliant solo run before beating goalkeeper Jo Soo-huk to the bottom left corner. Ulsan, however hit back in the fourth minute of first-half stoppage time after they were awarded a VAR-assisted penalty when Ahmad Noorollahi fouled Yoon Bit-Garam inside the box.

Negrao couldn't believe his luck as goalkeeper Hamed Lak blocked his spot-kick with a full-stretch dive, but the ball rebounded in the Brazilian's direction and he was left with the easiest of tap-ins to score his sixth goal of the tournament. Ulsan had their tail up after that but they required another VAR-assisted penalty to score their second goal in the 55th minute. — AFP

Messi equals Pele's record

MADRID: Lionel Messi scored his 643rd goal for Barcelona yesterday to equal Pele's record of goals for a single club as the Spanish giants were held 2-2 by Valencia. Messi headed in from Jordi Alba's cross after his first-half penalty was saved to equal the mark set by the Brazilian great for Santos. But Messi was left frustrated as a dogged Valencia forced a draw that leaves Barcelona eight points behind leaders Atletico Madrid, who beat Elche 3-1 earlier in the day. Barcelona started slowly and went a goal behind to Mouctar Diakhaby's unchallenged header from a corner after half an hour. Antoine Griezmann earned the penalty that led to Messi's record-equalling goal when the Frenchman was nudged over by Jose Gaya.

Messi's spot-kick was saved by Jaume Domenech but the ball rebounded and from Alba's dinked cross, the Argentine headed the ball into the net to draw level with Pele. Barcelona went ahead thanks to a superb scissor kick from Uruguayan Ronald Araujo. But Valencia's pressure was rewarded when Maxi Gomez got in front of Barca central defender Oscar Mingueza to turn in a cross and equalize. Philippe Coutinho drove a shot just wide with 12 minutes remaining and Messi curled a free-kick wide but Barcelona were forced to share the points. — AFP