

Friday Times

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Local

'Housemaids to go' thrive during pandemic in Kuwait

By Ben Garcia

Online businesses are booming during the pandemic - even those providing household help. Kuwait Times met some domestic helpers working for a company that delivers housemaids to the doorsteps of Kuwaiti houses. "We are a legal company and are gradually introducing a new way of delivering housemaid services 'to go'," said the owner, who chose to remain anonymous.

"This pandemic is a blessing in a way, because household workers can now work in homes of Kuwaitis at an hourly rate," he said. "It means no more mistreatment and no more complaints of overwork, because workers can only work a maximum of 10 hours daily."

Housemaids in Kuwait usually remain in their sponsors' homes throughout the period of contract, which normally is of two years. But with the introduction of housemaids to go, their schedule and work is monitored by a supervisor and salaries are much better than the regular KD 120 monthly. "We are a legitimate company and have a license. We have several workers who are working with us under our visa," the owner told Kuwait Times.

Pandemic grows business

During the pandemic, his company hired holders of article 18 (private sector) visas as well as article 20 (domestic helper) visas to

allow them to earn an extra income. "I see the necessity to help workers. So from July, we accepted those searching for a job even if the work involves cleaning houses or offices," he said.

Migz and Bebot (names changed), both from the Philippines, are earning KD 300 monthly. "When I was working at a house, I was getting a fixed amount of only KD 120 from my sponsor, but now I am earning KD 300 monthly," Bebot said. "I earn even more if you include tips from satisfied customers," she added. She ran away from her sponsor's home in January, and when she learned about the housemaid to go service, she applied for a janitorial job. The company supplies cleaners anywhere in Kuwait, including homes of Kuwaitis.

Bebot wasn't hired immediately as she has a record of absconding from her employer. But she was adamant on earning money during the pandemic for her family back home, so she went back to the cleaning company and met Migz there. "Migz, who is a fulltime worker at the company, told me that housework was netting her KD 300 monthly. I was amazed and excited to hear her story, and said I wanted to work like her," Bebot told Kuwait Times.

Search for better treatment and better pay

"But the difference was that she has legal residence and I don't. On her insistence, I was finally accepted by the boss, but they warned me they are not liable if I am caught

by the police on my way to work. I started in August and I am enjoying it, plus the fact that I am now earning better than being in the house of a Kuwaiti, where you feel like a slave 24/7," said Bebot.

Bebot said she ran away in January because her employer did not protect her against abuse and the rage of a Kuwaiti woman who harassed her at school. "I went to my friend's house in Maidan Hawally. I thought I could get a job easily, but I was wrong. I only got a job in July because of the pandemic," she said.

"I worked with my previous employer for a year, but I was offended by the way I was treated. I normally took the son of my boss to school, but that morning I was mistakenly berated by a Kuwaiti woman because she saw me fighting with the boy in the car. But I wasn't fighting him at all - I was just telling him to sit down properly in the car. That woman thought I was slapping the son of my boss, so she approached the car and spat on me. I told her I wasn't doing anything wrong with the boy, and if she wants she can talk to my boss. I called my boss and when I gave her the phone, instead of talking to her, she smashed my phone on the street and left it broken," Bebot recalled.

"I told my boss to return me to the agency, but they didn't, so one day I just left the house of my sponsor and went directly to my friend's place in Maidan Hawally," she said. "Now I am happy that I am earning KD 300 plus, thanks to the cleaning company

that accepted me despite the fact that I have an absconding record and visa 20."

Migz has a different story. She was one of four helpers at a Kuwaiti house, but their sponsors encountered a family problem and eventually separated. They were all permitted to work anywhere they like. "Three of us work as housemaids to go. The good thing is that our accommodation is paid for by our former boss, so the KD 300 monthly we earn from the company we send to our families back home," she said.

The schedule of housemaids to go is controlled and arranged by a supervisor of the company. "Our income per week is KD 60, but because sometimes we work overtime and on holidays, we can make KD 300 per month. If the customers are happy, we get an additional KD 20-50 in tips. We go twice or thrice a week to each customer's house. We can only work up to five hours at a house and strictly for cleaning chores," she said.

Employing a housemaid can cost an employer around KD 1,000 to KD 1,500 if they go through an agency. These are upfront fees in addition to the monthly salary of KD 120 and living expenses.

The heavy fees fuel a thriving black market of human trafficking via illegal transfers. Sponsors often transfer a domestic helper when she's completed her two year contract (or sometimes before that) by charging an illegal transfer fee. A new sponsor pays the fee and 'acquires' the services of the helper for another two years.

Kuwait reports 795 new COVID cases, five deaths

KUWAIT: The Ministry of Health announced yesterday registering 795 new coronavirus (COVID-19) infections in the past 24 hours, raising the total to 129,638. Deaths reached 799 with the addition of five fatalities. Official spokesperson of the Ministry of Health Dr Abdullah Al-Sanad said that there were 115 patients receiving treatment at the intensive care units, while those still receiving treatment amounted to 8,275. Health authorities conducted 7,403 swab tests in the past 24 hours, raising the whole count to 947,921. The ministry had announced earlier that 822 patients have recovered in the past 24 hours, raising total recoveries to 120,564.

Citizens in London

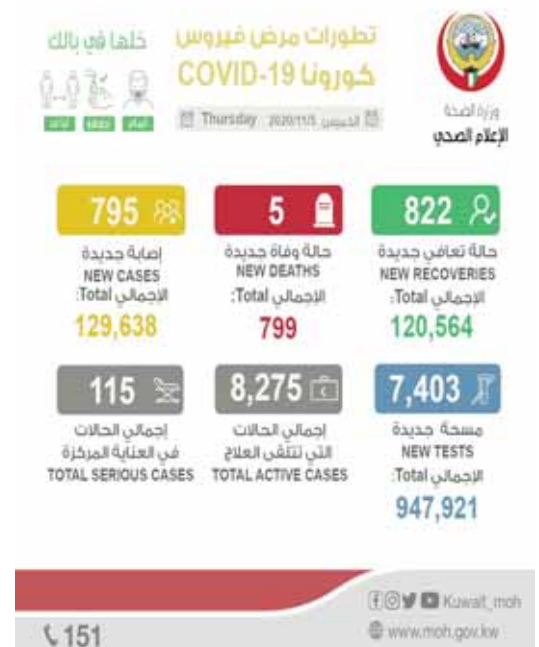
Separately, Kuwait's embassy in London called on its nationals to comply with the four-week lockdown that took effect across the United Kingdom starting yesterday, and

lasts until Wednesday, December 2. Everybody must abide by the safety measures outlined by the UK health authorities to minimize the spread of the novel coronavirus (COVID-19); otherwise they might face a legal measure, the embassy said in a press release on Wednesday evening. The embassy advised its nationals, who might be in need of help, not to hesitate in seeking help via the following phone number of its consular division: 02075903400. While the national lockdown lasts for four weeks, the one in Wales will end on November 17. The restrictions affect the businesses and leisure activities; only schools, universities, groceries, pharmacies and the jobs that could be done online are exempted.

Three countries

In the meantime, Kuwaiti citizens in the republics of Guatemala, Honduras and Nicaragua have been urged to heed

instructions by local authorities to abide by precautions against the novel coronavirus. Kuwait's embassy in Mexico made the appeal in a statement released early yesterday. The embassy urges the Kuwaiti citizens currently present in these countries to abide by the precautions and health measures declared by the local authorities for combating spread of the novel coronavirus, the mission statement said. It also called on the Kuwaiti nationals in these republics to avoid crowded locations. The mission is reachable round the clock for any assistance on the following phone number: (+52)15513632619. Kuwaiti diplomatic missions throughout the world have urged the citizens abroad to be vigilant against the coronavirus and heed health instructions. The State of Kuwait had evacuated thousands of citizens who were abroad shortly after breakout and spread of the communicable disease. — KUNA



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By Ben Garcia

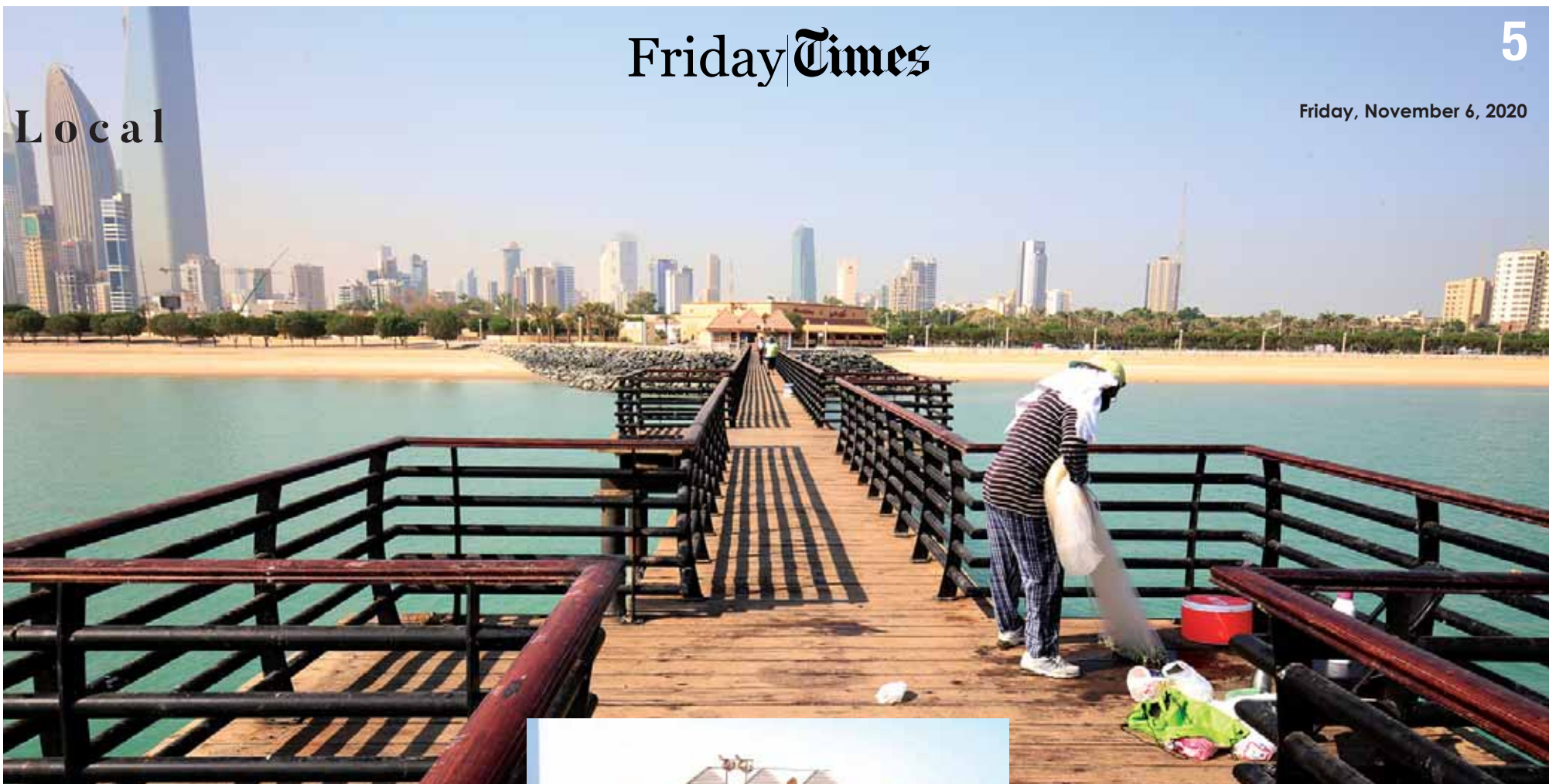
The weather is getting cooler, and many people head to the seaside to relax and unwind. Mo Raqan and Muhammad Ahmed, both from Alexandria, Egypt, said fishing and walking along the beach have become their favorite pastimes, especially during the pandemic. "I am alone now in Kuwait as my family is in Egypt," Ahmed said while fishing along with his friend near the Kuwait Towers.

His wife and children went to Egypt in February, but the planned one-month vacation was indefinitely extended due to the lockdowns and curfews after the COVID-19 outbreak. "I told my wife to stay in our hometown temporarily until everything is settled. I thought at that time that this will not last long, but the vacation has stretched now to nine months," Ahmed said.

Passengers arriving directly from Egypt and 33 other countries are banned from entering Kuwait unless they quarantine in a third country. "It's hard for me and my family to be separated for this long period of time, but that is the best thing to do now since the virus is still around. To overcome the longing for the company of my family, I look for something to do to ease the homesickness and loneliness," said Ahmed.

He said prior to the pandemic, he enjoyed spending time by the seaside with his family almost every week. "I used to walk with my kids on the corniche and enjoy the morning breeze and the sun, especially during my day off. Now I walk alone and it reminds me of them. So I ask my friend to accompany me every week to exercise. Once I told my friend that maybe it will be more relaxing if we go fishing, so we bought a fishing rod and here we are," he added.





Ahmed, who is an administrative assistant at a well-known company in Kuwait, said some of his hobbies back in Egypt were football, fishing and walking. "The good thing is that if I catch a big fish, it will be my source of protein. But I throw the small fish back into the sea," he said.

"When he invited me to accompany him, I didn't hesitate, since I also wanted to spend some time productively," said his friend Raqan, a branch manager for a signature brand at The Avenues mall. "Fishing is a very relaxing pastime, especially on holidays. If we catch a small fish, we use it as bait. We also buy squid or anything else from the fish market to use as bait," he added.

Kim Muico from the Philippines also turned to fishing to pass his time. "I am doing this regularly now because I don't have a job. I've been here for one and a half hours now, but I haven't caught anything," said Muico. "My company, a cinema in Sharq, is closed till now," he rued. According to him, many of his colleagues left the company to look for other jobs since they have no idea when they will be allowed to reopen.



"Those employed for more than five years were retained, but those who were new to the company were instructed to look for other jobs and were given transfers. Now we are waiting until cinemas reopen, hopefully soon," Muico said. "My wife works at a recruitment company and their office is also closed till now. We both are not working, but thank God they are giving us half the salary, so we are surviving."

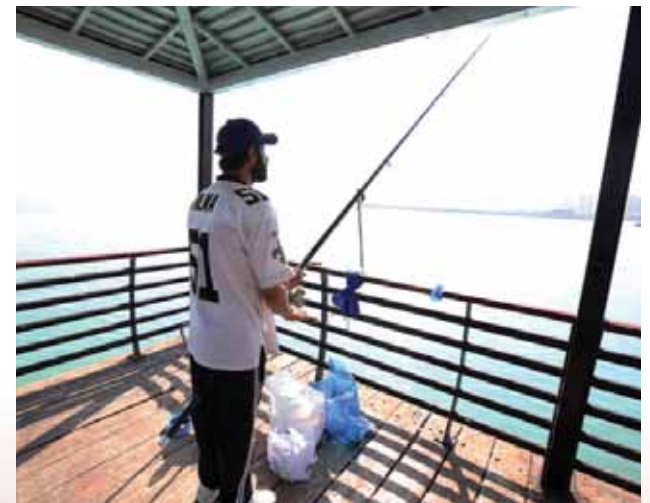


Photo of the Day



KUWAIT: A cyclist and a motorbike rider drive side by side on a main street in Kuwait City yesterday. — Photo by Yasser Al-Zayyat

The pandemic's effect on children with special needs

By Huda Bashir Dawood

The coronavirus has led to the introduction of several strict measures aimed at preventing the spread of the virus. These measures have ended up either in suspension or disruption of several essential services. Some of such measures unfortunately have directly heightened a few serious risks for children with special needs. These children belong to a community that has always virtually lived in an isolation of sorts. Now the newly imposed norms of social distancing and lockdown have further insulated their lives.

"My son needs a routine, and not having one has affected his behavior adversely," says Ahmad's father. Ahmad, 13, has been diagnosed with Autism Spectrum Disorder. Before the pandemic, he was in a special needs school that helped him cope with his developmental and speech delay.

Most children diagnosed with some form of disability start with an early intervention program at a very young age. The help and support of teachers and therapists enable children with special needs to learn necessary skills required for an independent life.

Children can develop basic social, language and motor skills with case-appropriate exercises, some of the tasks being as simple as catching a ball or learning to make eye contact.

But children with special needs require therapies and interactive sessions for the development of their sense of individuality. Due to the restrictions imposed to reduce the risk of infection, many are unable to get the therapies that they need, or the socialization necessary for the development of their basic sense of self.

The cruel change in routine has worsened their overall well-being, damaging the progress they have made so far. Most children are losing the skills that they developed at school. The instincts that most kids are born with – such as to play, speak and respond to others, or even developing normal attention span – could take years for a special needs child to adapt. Most families are struggling with outbursts from these children, as they do not understand why they cannot go outside or to school. This may also lead to regression. "My daughter has become hyperactive; we find it hard to deal with her behavioral changes," says Sarah's father. "I try my best to spend as much time as I can with her for her wellbeing," he adds.

Since intervention is proven to be the best approach for them, being present in a physical classroom with trained teachers and therapists is vital for their development. It is even more necessary for these sessions to be consistent. These sessions offer them routine, personalized structure, better communication skills, and independence, along with the best aca-

ademic support based on their individual needs. It changes their lives from a complete dependency to that of independence which in turn allow these individuals to be valuable contributors to the society.

The stress on the families of children with disabilities is significant even under normal circumstances, and has only magnified during this pandemic when the support systems that are usually available are no longer accessible. The loss of everyday routine, relationships, friendships, and isolation has only intensified the anxiety of these kids. They feel they are being punished for doing something wrong, leaving them utterly confused. These challenges only add to the pressure the parents of these kids already face especially because some of them are medically fragile too.

Parents and teachers are concerned that if these children are deprived of their support system for a longer time, they will not only suffer a loss of hard-earned skills but also develop behavioral problems that were not present earlier. They are an integral part of the society and it is our responsibility to build a world where they can live independently. While most institutions have shifted to online classes and are continuing their education, the most vulnerable have been left out of the whole picture.

— Dawood is a former trainer for special needs children.

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Local

Kuwait's Prime Minister hosts new ambassadors



KUWAIT: His Highness the Prime Minister Sheikh Sabah Al-Khaled Al-Hamad Al-Sabah meets India's Ambassador to Kuwait Sibi George. —KUNA photos



His Highness the Prime Minister Sheikh Sabah Al-Khaled Al-Hamad Al-Sabah meets Spain's Ambassador to Kuwait Miguel Jose Moro Aguilar.



His Highness the Prime Minister Sheikh Sabah Al-Khaled Al-Hamad Al-Sabah meets Iraq's Ambassador to Kuwait Al-Manhal Al-Safi.



His Highness the Prime Minister Sheikh Sabah Al-Khaled Al-Hamad Al-Sabah meets Belgium's Ambassador to Kuwait Leo Peeters.



His Highness the Prime Minister Sheikh Sabah Al-Khaled Al-Hamad Al-Sabah meets Oman's Ambassador to Kuwait Dr Saleh Al-Kharousi.



His Highness the Prime Minister Sheikh Sabah Al-Khaled Al-Hamad Al-Sabah meets Bangladesh's Ambassador to Kuwait Md Ashikuzzaman.



His Highness the Prime Minister Sheikh Sabah Al-Khaled Al-Hamad Al-Sabah meets Sudan's Ambassador to Kuwait Abdulmunem Al-Ameen.



His Highness the Prime Minister Sheikh Sabah Al-Khaled Al-Hamad Al-Sabah meets the Netherlands' Ambassador to Kuwait Laurens Westhoff.



His Highness the Prime Minister Sheikh Sabah Al-Khaled Al-Hamad Al-Sabah meets Austria's Ambassador to Kuwait Marian Alexander Wrba.

KUWAIT: His Highness the Prime Minister Sheikh Sabah Al-Khaled Al-Hamad Al-Sabah received, at Seif Palace yesterday, a number of newly-assigned foreign ambassadors to the country, on the occasion of assuming their posts. He hosted the envoys of India Sibi George, Spain

Miguel Jose Moro Aguilar, Iraq Al-Manhal Al-Safi, Belgium Leo Peeters, Oman Dr Saleh Al-Kharousi, Bangladesh Md Ashikuzzaman, Sudan Abdulmunem Al-Ameen, the Netherlands Laurens Westhoff and Austria Marian Alexander Wrba. Foreign minister assistant for Eu-

rope affairs Ambassador Walid Al-Khubaizi, foreign minister assistant for the Arab homeland affairs ambassador Fahad Ahmad Al-Awadhi and foreign minister assistant for GCC affairs ambassador Nasser Hajji Al-Muzain attended the meetings. —KUNA

Kuwait customs seize 'largest ever' quantity of shabu drug



KUWAIT: Deputy Prime Minister, Interior Minister and Minister of State for Cabinet Affairs Anas Al-Saleh supervises the drugs' seizure operation. —Interior Ministry photos

KUWAIT: The General Administration for Drug Control (GADC) seized 270 kg of 'shabu' (methamphetamine) in an operation carried out on Wednesday night under the supervision of Deputy Prime Minister, Interior Minister and Minister of State for Cabinet Affairs Anas Al-Saleh. The seizure, the largest of its kind for such illicit drug in Kuwait's history, took place at

Shuwaikh Port, the Interior Ministry's General Directorate of Relations and Security Media said in a press statement. Acting on tips and surveillance, the GADC personnel tracked down a group of drug smugglers and managed to intercept two vehicles carrying salt bags, which turned out to be containing the shabu stored in the form of salt-like powder. The smugglers were

caught red-handed, the statement noted. Saleh expressed appreciation for the dedication of the GADC officers and their relentless efforts to combat drug smuggling and protect the Kuwaiti society against addiction. He also thanked the customs officers for their cooperation with the GADC, the statement added. —KUNA

News in brief

Rainfall predicted during weekend

KUWAIT: Kuwait is expected to experience rainy weather during the weekend as clouds were predicted to start accumulating as of last night, according to the Kuwait Meteorological Center said. Today's weather is expected to be moderately hot and partially cloudy and humid, the center's forecaster Abdulaziz Al-Qarawi said, adding that rainfall is expected tomorrow amid identical weather conditions throughout the country. The maximum temperature predicted for today is 35 C degrees, while the minimum is expected to drop to 15 C degrees. —KUNA

Foreign minister hosts Iraqi envoy

KUWAIT: Foreign Minister and Acting Information Minister Sheikh Dr Ahmad Nasser Al-Mohammad Al-Sabah received yesterday the Iraqi Ambassador to Kuwait Al-Manhal Al-Safi. Assistant for affairs of the foreign minister's bureau Ambassador Saleh Al-Loughani and a number of the ministry officials attended the meeting. —KUNA

Kuwait oil price up

KUWAIT: Kuwait oil gained 33 cents during Wednesday's trading to close at \$39.42 per barrel (pb) compared with \$39.09 pb the day before, Kuwait Petroleum Corporation (KPC) said yesterday. Benchmark Brent futures also \$1.52 to \$41.23 pb and West Texas Intermediate edged \$1.49 higher to \$39.15 pb. —KUNA

Five fire stations battle Fahaheel carpentry blaze



KUWAIT: Firemen battled a blaze reported in a carpentry in Fahaheel's industrial area yesterday morning. Firefighters from five different fire stations rushed to the scene in response to an emergency call

made at 9:11 am. They worked together to contain the flames, and then extinguished the blaze quickly before it could spread since the carpentry contained wood and other flammable material. They were able

to put out the fire successfully and managed to prevent the flames' spread and human injuries, Kuwait Fire Force said in a statement. An investigation was opened to determine the cause of the fire.



Fresh curbs for
England, Italy as US
sets new case record

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India-made COVID vaccine could be launched as early as February

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Confident Biden edges ahead

Trump claims fraud in knife-edge US election

WASHINGTON: The knife-edge US presidential race tilted toward Democrat Joe Biden yesterday, with wins in Michigan and Wisconsin bringing him close to a majority, but President Donald Trump claimed he was being cheated and went to court to try and stop vote counting.

Tallying of votes continued through a second night in the remaining battleground states where huge turnout and a mountain of mail-in ballots sent by voters trying to avoid exposure to the coronavirus made the job all the harder. Both men still had paths to winning the White House by hitting the magic majority threshold of 270 of the electoral votes awarded to whichever candidate wins the popular vote in a given state.

But momentum moved to Biden, who made a televised speech from his hometown of Wilmington, Delaware to say that "when the count is finished, we believe we will be the winners." By flipping the northern battlegrounds of Michigan and Wisconsin, and also winning formerly pro-Trump Arizona, Biden reached 264 electoral votes against 214 so far for Trump.

To reach 270 he was hoping next to add the six electoral votes from Nevada, where he had a small and shrinking lead, or, even better, the larger prizes of hard-fought Georgia or Pennsylvania.

In stark contrast to Trump's unprecedented rhetoric about being cheated, Biden sought to project calm, reaching out to a nation torn by four years of polarizing leadership and traumatized by the Covid-19 pandemic, with new daily infections Wednesday close to hitting 100,000 for the first time.

"We have to stop treating our opponents as enemies," Biden, 77, said. "What brings us together as Americans is so much stronger than anything that can tear us apart."

Trump claims being cheated

However, Trump, 74, claimed victory unilaterally and made clear he would not accept the reported results, issuing unprecedented complaints—unsupported by any evidence—of fraud. "The damage has already been done to the integrity of our system, and to the Presidential Election itself," he tweeted, alleging without proof or explanation that "secretly dumped ballots" had been added in Michigan.

Trump's campaign announced lawsuits in Michigan, Pennsylvania and Georgia and demanded a recount in Wisconsin. In Michigan, the campaign filed a suit to halt vote tabulation, saying its "observers" were not allowed to watch at close distances.

Tension also shifted to the streets, even if so far there has not been the kind of unrest that some feared just ahead of the election, prompting businesses in several major city centers to board up windows. In Detroit, a Democratic stronghold that is majority Black, a crowd of mostly-white Trump supporters chanted "Stop the count!" and tried to barge into an election office before being blocked by security. US news networks showed an aggressive pro-Trump crowd also gathering outside a vote counting office in the important Arizona county of Maricopa, which includes Phoenix.

Burly law enforcement officers formed a protective line at the facility's doors. Some of the protesters openly carried firearms, which is legal in the state, while people chanted "Count the votes!"



This combination of pictures created Wednesday shows Democratic presidential nominee Joe Biden and US President Donald Trump during election night speeches. — AFP

Just before midnight local time, Maricopa authorities posted new vote totals, with Trump slashing Biden's Arizona vote lead from 79,000 to under 69,000, a gap of 2.4 percent with 86 percent of precincts reporting. Georgia's largest county of Fulton, which includes parts of Atlanta, was processing ballots through the night. Over a 90-minute period Biden narrowed Trump's lead there from 29,000 votes to 23,000, with 95 percent of precincts reporting.

The tight nature of Georgia's race-Biden trails Trump by half a percent—raises the prospect of a recount.

Be 'patient'

The US election—usually touted as an example to newer democracies around the world—brought statements of international concern, with German Defense Minister Annegret Kramp-Karrenbauer warning of a "very explosive situation." An observer mission from the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe, which monitors votes around the West and former Soviet Union, found no

evidence of election fraud and said Trump's "baseless allegations" eroded trust in democracy.

Unless Biden racks up a winning score earlier, the whole contest could eventually wind up being decided by the winner of Pennsylvania, where Trump's initially big lead dwindled rapidly.

The state is a major target for Trump campaign lawyers, who have already challenged its rule on allowing mailed-in ballots received after Election Day to be counted in the US Supreme Court.

Tom Wolf, the state's Democratic governor, insisted on everyone being "patient" and promised all votes would be "counted fully." The tight White House race and recriminations evoked memories of the 2000 election between Republican George W Bush and Democrat Al Gore. That race, which hinged on a handful of votes in Florida, eventually ended up in the Supreme Court, which halted a recount while Bush was ahead. The US Elections Project estimated total 2020 turnout at a record 160 million including more than 101.1 million early voters. — AFP (See Pages 11-12)

US Election

Peaceful protests in New York as tensions mount in Detroit

Oregon police face off with far-left protesters

NEW YORK: Thousands of Joe Biden supporters marched in New York to demand every vote in the tight presidential election be counted, as some Donald Trump supporters protested in Detroit demanding a halt to ballot counting in the key state of Michigan. New York demonstrators were peaceful and spanned generations, with marchers heading from Fifth Avenue towards Washington Square Park in the heart of Manhattan's Greenwich Village.

In New York's Democratic stronghold demonstrators were hopeful but wary of calling it for their candidate Biden just yet. "We need to count every vote in this election," said Sarah Boyagian, part of the Protect The Results Coalition behind the demonstration organized under tight police supervision. "Donald Trump has claimed the election before every vote is counted and we are sending the message that that is not acceptable," the 29-year-old said AFP.

John Fraser, 47, said he's "worried Trump is going to void the vote." "I am not sure Biden has won, we have to wait until all votes are counted," said the software developer, adding: "I am worried that democracy is hanging by a thread right now."

The Detroit protest outside a ballot processing center were far more tense, according to an AFP photographer and clips on social media. Cries of "stop the count!" rang out in the city in Michigan—where US media declared Biden the victor—as Trump's campaign announced a lawsuit to try and suspend the vote count, claiming its team was denied proper access to observe vote counting. So-

cial media clips showed protestors with fists raised prevented from entering the center by police.

Meanwhile, Oregon police and National Guard troops in camouflage trucks pursued far-left protesters around the US city of Portland as a riot was declared late Wednesday, making at least 10 arrests. The northwestern city that has seen continuous protests since summer had been placed on high alert by Governor Kate Brown, who extended an election-night emergency order amid fears of violent clashes over the contested US polls. A heavy law enforcement presence flooded the streets after a handful of demonstrators broke off from hundreds-strong anti-Trump protests to shatter storefront windows, and a man believed to have thrown a Molotov cocktail was arrested.

The Multnomah County Sheriff's Office cited "widespread violence" in the city's downtown area, including glass bottles thrown at police who advanced on demonstrators.

An AFP journalist at the scene witnessed two arrests during a skirmish on a street corner that left protester Michael Ream with a bloodied face. "It's the same thing it always is—just horrible conduct of the police force and the terrible legacy that they carry every day," the 38-year-old PhD student told AFP as police handcuffed him. Asked whether this week's contested election had brought him to the streets, he replied: "More or less. I mean, I haven't been out (protesting) in a while." Portland has seen months of clashes between police and demonstrators, angered at the



PORTLAND: Oregon State Troopers block a street as they confront protesters in Portland, Oregon on Wednesday during a demonstration called by the "Black Lives Matter" movement, a day after the US Presidential Election. — AFP

repeated killings of Black Americans by law enforcement officers across the country.

The protesters involved in Wednesday's clashes had earlier attended a 300-strong peaceful rally in a downtown park hosted by a coalition of anti-capitalist groups featuring lectures, music and slogans including "The Vote is Over. The Fight Goes On." Rally organizer Evan Burchfield told AFP the city had been using the police as a "tool of political repression" for years and that "nothing is actually going to change" if Joe Biden is elected.

Another group of protesters who had gathered by Portland's river Wednesday vowed to "protect the results" of Tuesday's close-run election and held banners proclaiming "Count Every Vote."

"We want Trump out of office, that's the main focus," one rally leader told the crowd, to loud cheers. Several of the demonstrators were openly carrying firearms, including rifles, and one anti-racism and anti-imperialism banner showed an image of an assault rifle, with the slogan "We Don't Want Biden. We Want Revenge." — AFP

Could courts again decide US election?

WASHINGTON: Democrats and Republicans girded for a legal showdown to decide the winner of the tight presidential race between Republican Donald Trump and Democrat Joe Biden.

After Trump declared he was ready to go to the US Supreme Court to dispute the vote counting, his campaign announced a recount demand in Wisconsin and lawsuits in Michigan and Pennsylvania, three states critical to winning the presidency. US networks have called Michigan and Wisconsin for Biden, while Pennsylvania remains a tossup.

Late Wednesday the Trump campaign filed suit in a fourth battleground, Georgia, as the president's lead there shrank to less than a percentage point. Trump's behavior raised the specter of the election ultimately being decided, as in 2000, by a Supreme Court ruling on how states can tally votes.

The lawsuits

The Trump campaign lawsuits attack a unique aspect of the 2020 election—that millions of voters cast mail-in ballots because of the coronavirus pandemic.

The COVID-19 threat forced states to promote mailed ballots and change rules on how they would be collected, verified and tabulated. That included extending the periods for receiving bal-

lots, due to an overburdened US Postal Service, adding time for vote-counting. The Republicans say some of those changes were decided or implemented improperly and in ways that favor Democrats. In Pennsylvania the Trump campaign said it would join an existing Republican suit over the state's deadline extension for receiving mail-in ballots.

If successful, they have the potential to disqualify tens of thousands of ballots that arrived after November 3. The Pennsylvania Supreme Court ruled that the extension legal, and last week the US Supreme Court declined to get involved.

But the high court left the door open for a post-election challenge. Trump's campaign also said it was suing to have Pennsylvania ballot counting temporarily halted, alleging the process was being hidden by Democrats. In Philadelphia the counting was live-streamed. And they sued over changes to voter identification-made to adjust to the pandemic-saying it violated the election code. In Michigan, the Trump campaign sued to halt ballot counting saying they were not given "meaningful access."

The Georgia suit wants counties to "separate any and all late-arriving ballots from all legally cast ballots" that arrived by the 7:00 pm Election Day deadline, Trump deputy campaign manager Justin Clark said.

Can courts decide the election?

In 2000 the White House contest between Republican George Bush and Democrat Al Gore rested on one state: Florida. With Bush ahead by just 537 votes, and with problems with the state's punch-card ballots, the Gore campaign sought

a statewide recount.

The Bush campaign appealed the case to the US Supreme Court, which ruled to effectively block the full recount, handing Florida—and the election—to Bush. Experts say such lawsuits are only practical if focused on a real problem and the vote gap is narrow. If the margin separating candidates in that state is two or three percentage points—say, a 100,000 vote difference in Pennsylvania—"that's pretty difficult to be litigating at the end of the day," said Derek Muller, a law professor at the University of Iowa. However, said Muller, "if it comes down to one state, then I would expect really serious litigation."

Skittish Supreme Court

If a campaign or candidate sues over state regulations, it has to first exhaust its options in the state justice system before heading to federal court and the US Supreme Court. By piggybacking on the existing ballot extension case, the Trump campaign has raised its chances of reaching the high court.

But the Supreme Court has been cautious over involvement in voting matters that are decided by states, and is aware that it risked its standing as an independent body by effectively handing the 2000 election to Bush. A case would put the political leanings of the court's six conservative and three liberal justices in the spotlight—especially on Amy Coney Barrett, who joined the court only last month. Trump said he rushed her appointment in part so she could be in place to hear any election cases. The Supreme Court felt like it needed to intervene in 2000, "but it's not necessarily clear they would feel the same way today," said Muller. — AFP

US Election

World reacts differently to the hotly-contested US election race

From warnings to good wishes and mockery

PARIS: From warnings to good wishes and mockery, governments around the world have reacted very differently to the hotly-contested US election race between US President Donald Trump and challenger Joe Biden as votes continue to be counted.

Here is a selection:

Russian red rag?

"Everything that concerns our country is seen in the United States like a red rag to a bull," Kremlin spokesman Dmitri Peskov told reporters yesterday. "That's why we won't make any comment. Americans probably need to put some order in their own affairs themselves." He added, however, that the uncertainty linked to the election results in the world's biggest economy "could potentially have negative consequences for the world, above all for the global economy".

Iranian irony

"What a spectacle!" Iranian supreme leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei tweeted Wednesday. "One says this is the most fraudulent election in US history. Who says that? The president who is currently in office."

Observers offended

The head of an international observer mis-

sion to the US elections accused Trump of a "gross abuse of office" after the US president called the polls a fraud and demanded that vote counting be halted. "The most disturbing thing was that with presidential fanfare of the White House, that is, with all the insignia of power, the American commander-in-chief called for an end to the count because of his purported victory," Michael Link from the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe told the German daily Stuttgarter Zeitung.

Brazilian bias

Brazilian President Jair Bolsonaro said he hoped Trump would win. The far-right leader, who has been dubbed a "Tropical Trump," has cultivated a close relationship with the Republican president. "You know where I stand, I've been clear. I have a good relationship with Trump. I hope he'll be reelected," Bolsonaro told supporters on Wednesday.

Balanced Britain

Britain insisted its close partnership with the United States was in safe hands whoever came out on top—Trump or Democrat challenger Biden. Prime Minister Boris Johnson, a populist ally of Trump, refused to be drawn in parliament when grilled about the Republican's premature claim of victory.

But Foreign Secretary Dominic Raab said: "I'm not worried about the relationship."

EU worries

Spain's Foreign Minister Arancha Gonzalez Laya underlined the importance of respecting institutions. "There are many populists who don't like institutions," she said Thursday. "I'm not speaking here about the United States, but populists in general around the world. That's why it is so important to protect our institutions... because ultimately they are the guarantors of our democracy."

German Defense Minister Annegret Kramp-Karrenbauer said Wednesday the United States was facing a "very explosive situation" and a possible systemic crisis.

French agenda

France's Foreign Minister Jean-Yves Le Drian reinforced recent statements from Paris that the nature of US-EU relations had permanently changed under Trump. Europe needs to build a "new transatlantic relationship, which is a new partnership" irrespective of who wins, he said Thursday.

France under President Emmanuel Macron is keen for Europe to move away from its reliance on American military might for defense in particular.



WASHINGTON, DC: US President Donald Trump gestures after speaking during election night in the East Room of the White House in Washington, DC, early Wednesday. —AFP

Melania admirer

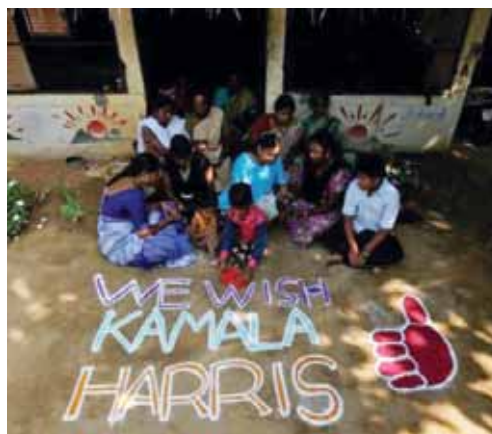
Ignoring the caution of his EU colleagues, the prime minister of Melania Trump's homeland—Slovenia—went out on a limb Wednesday to congratulate Trump for winning re-election. "It's pretty clear that American people have elected Donald Trump and Mike Pence for four more years," Janez Jansa wrote on Twitter. Jansa, along with Hungary's Prime Minister Victor Orban, was one of the few EU leaders to endorse Trump's candidacy, and said Biden would be "one of the weakest US presidents in history". —AFP

Harris's ancestral village in India gets festive

THULASENDRAPURAM, India: Villagers in the Indian ancestral home of Kamala Harris painted slogans on roads wishing her victory yesterday, as Joe Biden, her Democrat running mate in the US presidential election, moved closer to the White House.

Thulasendrapuram, located about 320 km (200 miles) south of Chennai, is where Harris's maternal grandfather was born more than a century ago. "From yesterday, we are excited about the final result," said Abirami, a resident of the village. "Now, we are hearing positive news. We are waiting to celebrate her victory." Many of her neighbors watched updates from the count on their mobile phones. The lush, green village in the south of the country has also been decked out in posters of Harris, with prayers offered at the local Hindu temple.

Biden leads the count and has predicted he will win but closely contested states - including Arizona, Georgia, Nevada and North Carolina - were still tallying votes, leaving the election outcome uncertain. Harris's grandfa-



CHENNAI: Women and children sit next to a message for US Democratic vice presidential nominee Kamala Harris in Painganadu near the village of Thulasendrapuram where Harris' maternal grandfather was born and grew up, in Tamil Nadu state, India, yesterday. —AFP

ther P V Gopalan and his family moved to Chennai nearly 90 years ago. He retired there as a high-ranking government official. Harris, who was born to an Indian mother and a Jamaican father who both immigrated to the United States to study, visited Thulasendrapuram when she was five and has repeatedly recalled walks with her grandfather on the beaches of Chennai. —Reuters

Africans amused but alarmed by election aftermath

ABIDJAN/CONAKRY: For plenty of Africans, President Donald Trump's actions in the aftermath of the US election have been a cause for dark humor, but others have reacted with dismay or disbelief. In countries whose own recent elections were marred by accusations of cheating and violence, some expressed alarm about the signal that Trump's premature declaration of victory, allegations of fraud and flurry of lawsuits might send to their own leaders. "Trump is setting a bad example for Africa and a country like ours. You cannot proclaim yourself in an election where you are a candidate when justice exists," said Mory KeÔta, a car parts dealer in Guinea.

Dozens were killed in protests before and after the West African country's president won a controversial third term last month. "It's a total disgrace," said Bachir Diallo, a Guinean mining executive. "Such a mess is worthy of a banana republic."

As the vote count pointed towards a victory for Democrat Joe Biden, others felt a sharp sense of irony seeing events play out in a developed nation whose authorities regularly admonish African leaders for not respecting democratic norms. When the US Embassy in Guinea's neighbor Ivory Coast called on Wednesday for dialogue and commitment to the rule of law following another disputed presidential election, it triggered an avalanche of reactions.

"I believe the playground response is 'why you talking about yourself?'" one Twitter user retorted.

"What we are seeing from Trump is not different from what we have been seeing in African politics. However, it is terrifying to see this in America," said Tito Kisiya, a sales executive in Tanzania, whose presidential election last week drew criticism from US Secretary of State Mike Pompeo.

Even so, some who followed the US election found positives to take away. "It's calm, and there is no violence," said Viviane Asseke, a schoolteacher in Ivory Coast, where more than 10 people have died in clashes since the president won a third term that opponents consider unconstitutional. —Reuters

International

Friday, November 6, 2020

Ethiopia MPs back emergency in Tigray amid military campaign

PM orders military operations amid escalation of a long-running feud

ADDIS ABABA: Ethiopian lawmakers yesterday endorsed a six-month state of emergency in the northern region of Tigray, a day after Prime Minister Abiy Ahmed ordered military operations there in an escalation of a long-running feud. The move is part of an attempt by Abiy, winner of last year's Nobel Peace Prize, to assert federal control over a region whose ruling party has openly defied him for months and brands him as illegitimate. The lower house of parliament "unanimously approved" the state of emergency in a session Thursday morning, state-affiliated Fana Broadcasting Corporate said.

According to the country's constitution, under a state of emergency the government has "all necessary power to protect the country's peace and sovereignty" and can suspend some "political and democratic rights". A senior government official told AFP that in Tigray this could lead to a curfew, searches without warrants, transportation and communications restrictions and the detention of "any person that [officials] suspect is taking part in illegal activities that threaten the constitutional order".

The state of emergency could also be extended beyond Tigray if needed, the official said. Abiy announced military operations in Tigray Wednesday morning. He said the move came in response

to an "attack" by the region's ruling party, the Tigray People's Liberation Front (TPLF), on a military camp there. Speaking on state television Wednesday night, Abiy said there would be further operations in the "coming days". "In general, when the operations are finished we will disclose them to the public," he said.

The government has not revealed a timeline or a clear military objective for the campaign, though a spokesman for a newly-formed crisis committee said Wednesday the goal was to "liberate" the region from the TPLF. Abiy said the initial attack produced "many martyrs", but officials have not provided much information on subsequent military operations.

Fighting so far appears to have been largely concentrated in western Tigray, diplomats and aid workers said. The TPLF dominated politics in Ethiopia for nearly three decades before Abiy came to power in 2018 on the strength of anti-government protests.

Under Abiy, Tigrayan leaders have complained of being unfairly targeted in corruption prosecutions, removed from top positions and broadly scapegoated for the country's woes. In previous weeks, tensions had been rising over control of military assets in the region. —AFP



ADDIS ABABA: This frame grab from a video obtained from the Ethiopian Public Broadcaster (EBC) on Wednesday shows Ethiopian Prime Minister Abiy Ahmed saying that he is ordering a military response to a deadly attack by the ruling party of Tigray. — AFP

Doctor's self-funded test lab leads way in Somalia's COVID fight

MOGADISHU: Having scraped money together following medical studies abroad, Somali doctor Abdullahi Sheikdon Dini opened Mogadishu's first advanced diagnostic laboratory in January.

Its arrival could hardly have been better timed because, just two months later, the coronavirus epidemic reached the Horn of Africa country. Since then Medipark Diagnostics, which he runs with five other doctors who pooled \$1 million to buy equipment, has become a linchpin of the country's creaking, donor-supported health infrastructure. Hospitals in the battle-scarred city that once had to wait weeks for blood test results now use the lab to test for conditions including HIV and hepatitis.

But, as the Somali government has acknowledged, it is in the fight against COVID-19 that Medipark has made its most visible mark. "We had the supplies and our molecular pathologists were in touch with other pathologists doing COVID-19 tests in other countries," said Dini, 37, whose studies took him to India and China.

Until July, Medipark was the only private lab in the city testing for the virus, but since then its technicians have trained government health workers to conduct tests.

"We were needed ... and we were appreciated," he said. Medipark has arranged import pipelines of reagents needed for tests, including the polymerase chain reaction (PCR) test used for COVID-19. It employs staff from Kenya, Lebanon and India to operate and maintain equipment imported from Europe, Asia and the United States. Somalia has been plagued by conflict since 1991, and outbreaks of diseases such as cholera are common.

More than 2 million people do not have enough food. Many live in crowded, unsanitary camps, creating fears COVID-19 could scythe through a vulnerable population. So far, that hasn't hap-

pened. The health ministry has recorded 4,229 infections and 107 deaths in the pandemic though, with large swathes of the country are off limits due to the fighting, that is likely to be an undercount.

Medipark lab is next to Hotel Shamo, where a 2009 bombing killed 19 people during a medical student graduation. Dini was there and the memories are still raw, but he and his fellow doctors are proud to be back home. "I am glad to help my community and make a difference," said Ali Muse, who practiced in Rwanda and South Sudan before returning two years ago to help open the lab. — Reuters



Somali doctor Abdullahi Sheikdon, the managing director of Medipark Diagnostics lab that runs tests for the coronavirus disease (COVID-19), checks on a patient at the laboratory in Mogadishu. — Reuters

EU calls for halt to Israeli demolition of Palestinian buildings

BRUSSELS: The EU yesterday called on Israel to cease demolishing Palestinian homes in the occupied West Bank and lift a threat to demolish Palestinian schools, calling them "an impediment towards the two-state solution". The statement, issued by the spokesman for EU foreign policy chief Josep Borrell, came two days after Israeli bulldozers razed a Bedouin village near Tubas in the Jordan Valley, leaving its nearly 80 inhabitants homeless. Israel's army stated the homes were "built illegally" in an area used for military training. The EU statement said that half the Palestinians made homeless in the demolition were children.

"This large-scale demolition confirms once again the regrettable trend of confiscations and demolitions since the beginning of the year," it said. It added that Israel has also threatened to raze 52 Palestinian schools, including one in Ras Al-Teen in the West Bank that was co-funded by the EU and EU member states.

"The EU calls for the protection of children, including ensuring their right to education in a safe and secure school environment," the statement said, noting that education is a basic human right.

"The EU reiterates its call on Israel to halt all such demolitions, including of EU-funded structures, in particular in light of the humanitarian impact of the current coronavirus pandemic," it said. — AFP

International

Fresh curbs for England, Italy as US sets new case record

WHO-led COVID drug scheme doubles down on antibodies, steroids

LONDON: England's 56 million people joined much of western Europe in a second coronavirus lockdown yesterday, as the United States set a fresh daily record with close to 100,000 new infections. European governments are struggling to contain a fresh wave of the pandemic, which has now infected more than 11 million across the continent.

The new stay-at-home orders from London came as Denmark said it would cull its entire population of more than 15 million minks after a mutation of the virus was found to have spread to people from the otter-like mammals. British Prime Minister Boris Johnson announced an England-wide shutdown as daily death tolls hit their worst levels since May and with warnings that hospitals could soon be overwhelmed. It prompted crowds across the nation to queue outside soon-to-close shops, book a last-minute haircut or head to the pub for a final pint, as business owners fretted over the impact of the lockdown on their bottom line. "We will be paying this off for years," said Joe Curran, landlord of The Queen's Head pub in central London. "This lockdown will cost us thousands on top of the thousands so far." The new restrictions run until December 2 and mandate a return to working from home where possible, along with the closure of all non-essential shops and services. Schools will stay open. Britain is among the world's hardest-hit countries with just over a million virus cases and nearly 48,000 deaths.

England's lockdown follows similar measures in the other nations of the United Kingdom—Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland—as well as France and Germany. Parts of Italy will join that list from Friday, with shops selling non-essential goods to be shut in hard-hit areas and people largely confined to their homes except for work, health and emergency

reasons. Authorities have also announced a nationwide curfew between 10:00 pm and 5:00 am. "We don't have alternatives," Prime Minister Giuseppe Conte said during a televised press conference on Wednesday night. Russian President Vladimir Putin recently said he had no plans for a lockdown but that resolve may be tested after the country set two new records Wednesday—for daily infections, at nearly 20,000, and daily death toll, at nearly 400.

Mass mink cull

Other drastic measures were planned for Denmark, where authorities said they would cull the country's entire mink population "as soon as possible". The Scandinavian nation is the world's largest exporter of mink fur but the creatures have been found to carry a mutated version of the virus that has spread to humans. Prime Minister Mette Frederiksen said that discovery could threaten the effectiveness of any future Covid-19 vaccine. The United States recorded its worst ever daily caseload — 99,660, according to Johns Hopkins University—as the winner of the country's presidential election was still being determined.

There were 1,112 deaths Wednesday, according to the same tally. More than 9.4 million people have been infected and 233,000 have died in the United States since the disease was first detected in China late last year. Infection rates have surged to record highs across the country since last month, especially in the north and the Midwest. A World Health Organization-led scheme to supply COVID-19 drugs to poor countries is betting on experimental monoclonal antibody treatments and steroids but is shunning Gilead's remdesivir blockbuster therapy, an internal doc-



LONDON: A woman carries boxes as she walks in Soho, central London yesterday as England enters a second novel coronavirus COVID-19 lockdown. —AFP

ument shows. The WHO draft document, seen by Reuters and dated Oct. 30, says the priorities are to secure monoclonal antibodies in a tight market and to boost purchases and distribution of cheap steroid dexamethasone, of which it has already booked nearly 3 million courses of treatment for poorer countries. Monoclonal antibodies are manufactured copies of antibodies created by the body to fight an infection. —Agencies

News in brief

Dutch cull 215,000 chickens

THE HAGUE: Dutch health workers have culled some 215,000 chickens after an outbreak of a highly-contagious strain of bird flu was detected on a farm in the country's southeast, agricultural authorities said yesterday. "Bird flu was detected at a poultry farm specializing in battery hens," at Puiflijk, about 20 kilometers (12.5 miles) northwest of the Dutch city of Nijmegen, the Agriculture Ministry said. —AFP

Canada reports rare swine flu

MONTREAL: Canadian health authorities on Wednesday reported the country's first case of a human infected with the H1N2 virus, a rare strain of swine flu. The case, detected in the western province of Alberta in mid-October, appears to be isolated "and there is no increased risk to Albertans at this time," local health officials said in a statement. "This is the only influenza case reported in Alberta so far this flu season," the statement read.

Ex-deputy Paris mayor in dock

PARIS: A deputy mayor of Paris who is facing an inquiry over claims he raped and abused a man several times in the 1990s was questioned by investigators yesterday, a source close to the case said. Christophe Girard resigned in July under pressure from opposition politicians and women's groups over his ties to Gabriel Matzneff, an award-winning writer now hit by a paedophilia scandal. A few weeks later, Girard himself was accused of abusing a minor in a New York Times report, leading prosecutors to open a preliminary rape inquiry that includes determining if the claims still fall within statutes of limitation. —AFP

Elite European anti-jihadist force takes first steps in Sahel

GAO, Mali: Inside a military base in northern Mali, a concrete bollard emblazoned with French, Estonian and Swedish flags marks a zone reserved for a new anti-jihadist unit of elite European troops. Dubbed Task Force Takuba, the new joint deployment marks a coup for France, which has sought partners in its long fight against Islamist militants in Africa's vast Sahel region. French troops first deployed to Mali in 2013 after a jihadist insurgency broke out in the country the previous year. But despite their presence, jihadist violence has spread to neighboring Burkina Faso and Niger. Thousands of soldiers and civilians have been killed in the conflict, and hundreds of thousands more have had to flee their homes.

Anger at the seemingly endless insurgency in Mali also fuelled protests against president Ibrahim Boubacar Keita, culminating in his ouster in a military coup on August 18.

At the base in the city of Gao, about a dozen French and Estonian soldiers from Takuba sit under an awning, surrounded by storage containers and light military vehicles. They discuss their first mission: A sweep operation conducted in the lawless Mali-Burkina Faso border region last month, alongside local troops and French regulars. Takuba troops are tasked with supporting elite Malian soldiers, who use motor-bikes and pick-up trucks to zip into territory lost to jihadists at high speed.

"Malian armed forces arrived alone in the villages, so that the population could see them," said the commander of the

Franco-Estonian unit, who gave his name as Aurelien, while the Europeans worked "discreetly". Despite their different backgrounds, the polyglot force had little trouble working together.

"For our unit, it's the first time we work with the French," said an Estonian soldier. "So far there is no problem of interoperability". Belgium, the Czech Republic, Denmark, Estonia, Germany, the Netherlands, Norway, Portugal, Sweden and the United Kingdom all made a political commitment to send special forces to Mali in March. French special forces will also participate. But Takuba is still in its initial stages, and it is not yet clear when the different countries will deploy their troops—with many countries requiring prior parliamentary approval.

'Other Europeans will join us'

France currently has 5,100 soldiers spread across the Sahel as part of its Operation Barkhane—and has lost some 45 soldiers since first intervening in Mali in 2013. At a French forward base in Menaka, a town about an hour's drive east from Gao, engineers are preparing for the arrival of more European special-forces units. A French commander who gave his name as Cedric said he expected Czech counterparts to arrive soon. The Czech parliament approved their deployment last month.

A successful beginning for Takuba is considered crucial to its long-term success. And for France, which is hoping to eventually drawn down its own military commitment in the region, the stakes are high.

A 150-strong Swedish unit is also scheduled to deploy early next year, along with three Blackhawk helicopters. This unit—unlike other European contingents in Takuba—will carry out rapid-response missions instead of shadowing local troops. Italy too has authorized the deployment of up to 200 soldiers, but it is not yet clear when they will arrive. "We hope that other Europeans will join us," said Commander Aurelien, pointing to the need for extra support in securing the lawless border region in Mali and Burkina Faso. —AFP

International

Macron says France is fighting Islamist extremism, not Islam

France condemns Erdogan's 'declarations of violence'

PARIS: French President Emmanuel Macron has said his country is fighting "Islamist separatism, never Islam", responding to a Financial Times article that he claimed misquoted him and has since been removed from the newspaper's website. In a letter to the editor published Wednesday, Macron said the British paper had accused him of "stigmatizing French Muslims for electoral purposes and of fostering a climate of fear and suspicion towards them".

"I will not allow anybody to claim that France, or its government, is fostering racism against Muslims," he said. An opinion article written by a Financial Times correspondent published Tuesday alleged that Macron's condemnation of "Islamic separatism" risked fostering a "hostile environment" for French Muslims. The article was later removed from the paper's website, replaced with a notice saying it had "contained

factual errors".

The French president sparked protests across the Muslim world after last month's murder of teacher Samuel Pat by saying France would never renounce its laws permitting blasphemous caricatures. Following the protests and boycotts of French goods across the world, Macron told the Al-Jazeera network over the weekend that he understood the caricatures could be shocking for some. But recounting a wave of Islamist attacks in France since 2015, Macron warned in his letter this week that there were still "breeding grounds" for extremism in France.

"In certain districts and on the internet, groups linked to radical Islam are teaching hatred of the republic to our children, calling on them to disregard its laws," he wrote. "This is what France is fighting against... hatred and death that threaten its children-never against

Islam. We oppose deception, fanaticism, violent extremism. Not a religion."

France yesterday condemned "declarations of violence" by Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan, and raised the possibility of new sanctions against Ankara. Erdogan has been feuding bitterly with Emmanuel Macron on a number of geopolitical flashpoints and recently also France's fight against radical Islam.

"There are now declarations of violence, even hatred, which are regularly posted by president Erdogan which are unacceptable," French Foreign Minister Jean-Yves Le Drian told Europe 1 radio.

Turkey vowed Wednesday to "respond in the firmest way possible" to France's ban of the Turkish ultra-nationalist Grey Wolves group linked to a top ally of Erdogan.

"It is not only France that is targeted, there is

a total European solidarity on the subject-we want Turkey to renounce this logic," Le Drian said. The European Council, he added, has already decided to take measures against the Turkish authorities, and "now it is important for the Turks to take the necessary measures to avoid this. "There are means of pressure, there is an agenda of possible sanctions."

Turkey and France have been at loggerheads on the conflicts in Syria and Libya as well as a scramble for natural gas in the Mediterranean and more recently on Macron's vow to uphold secular values, including the right to mock Islam and other religions, as part of a battle against extremism.

Erdogan has recently called for a boycott of French products, accusing Macron of islamophobia and advising the French leader to get "mental checks". — AFP

Bolivia president's foes call strike in key region

LA PAZ, Bolivia: Conservative opponents of Bolivia's leftist president-elect Luis Arce have announced a two-day strike from yesterday protesting alleged electoral fraud. The strike will take place across the eastern department of Santa Cruz, the South American country's economic hub as well as home to its biggest city. Powerful governor Ruben Costas said it was "essential to demand that the Supreme Electoral Tribunal carry out an audit of the electoral process, and particularly the result of the vote, in order to give certainty and confidence to the Bolivian people as a whole."

TSE president Salvador Romero dismissed the demand for an audit, saying the result was validated by several international bodies, including the Organization of American States. Last week, several hundred right-wing protesters in Santa Cruz called on the armed forces to mobilize to prevent Arce's Movement for Socialism (MAS) party from assuming power.

Arce, successor to exiled ex-president Evo Morales, is to be inaugurated on Sunday after triumphing in last month's presidential election. Santa Cruz is the stronghold of right-wing civic leader Luis Fernando Camacho, who led protests against Morales last year and finished third in the recent election with 14 percent. Sporadic anti-Arce protests have also broken out in the Cochabamba region. Bolivia's outgoing parliament last week approved a motion recommending that outgoing interim president Jeanine Anez and her ministers be prosecuted over last year's unrest which left around 30 people dead. — AFP

Austria admits security flaws over Vienna gunman

VIENNA: Austria acknowledged Wednesday there had been security failings leading up to the deadly gun rampage in Vienna by a convicted Islamic State sympathizer. Interior Minister Karl Nehammer said intelligence services had received a warning from neighboring Slovakia that the assailant had tried to buy ammunition, but that "a failure of communication" had followed.

The gunman, identified as 20-year-old dual Austrian-Macedonian national Kujtim Fejzulai, was killed by police after going on a shooting spree in Vienna on Monday evening that left four people dead. Police detained 14 people in the wake of the shooting, the first major attack in Austria for decades and the first blamed on a jihadist. They were "aged 18 to 28, from minority communities and some aren't Austrian citizens," Nehammer said. Police say "it's possible they supported" the gunman but their exact role remains unclear. The authorities now say Fejzulai acted alone after initial fears more assailants could be at large.

Fejzulai had been convicted and sentenced to 22 months in prison in April last year for trying to travel to Syria and join the Islamic State (IS) group. But he was released on probation in December and had been referred to organizations specializing in de-radicalization programs. IS—which has claimed numerous attacks in Europe—said Tuesday a "soldier of the caliphate" was responsible for the shooting.

'Unsafe situation'

The gunman opened fire indiscriminately in



VIENNA: Representatives of Austria's religious communities take part in a march to commemorate the victims of a terror attack yesterday in Vienna. —AFP

the historic center of the city just hours before Austria imposed a coronavirus lockdown, when people were out in bars and restaurants enjoying a final night of relative freedom. Security has been tightened in the city. Flowers and candles were laid out at the scene of the attack, where chalk circles drawn on the ground by investigators to mark out shell casings were still visible. But life was returning to normal-albeit under the new virus restrictions.

"We were scared by this terrorist act of course, but the city remains safe," said Peter Mensdorff Pouilly, an architect. "We are not going to be brought down by terrorism."

Nehammer told reporters that the BVT do-

mestic intelligence agency had been warned by Slovakia that Fejzulai was attempting to buy ammunition. "In the next steps there was clearly a failure of communication," Nehammer said. He accused his far-right predecessor Herbert Kickl of being responsible for failings in the way the BVT operates during his one-and-a-half years in office until May 2019. Nehammer said he wanted a commission set up to look at the functioning of the intelligence agencies. Chancellor Sebastian Kurz has described the decision to release Fejzulai as "definitely wrong". "If he had not been released then the terror attack would not have been possible," Kurz told public broadcaster ORF on Tuesday. — AFP

International

India-made COVID vaccine could be launched as early as February

Bangladesh signs deal with India for 30m doses of vaccine

NEW DELHI: An Indian government-backed COVID-19 vaccine could be launched as early as February – months earlier than expected – as last-stage trials begin this month and studies have so far showed it is safe and effective, a senior government scientist told Reuters. Bharat Biotech, a private company that is developing COVAXIN with the government-run Indian Council of Medical Research (ICMR), had earlier hoped to launch it only in the second quarter of next year.

“The vaccine has shown good efficacy,” senior ICMR scientist Rajni Kant, who is also a member of its COVID-19 task-force, said at the research body’s New Delhi headquarters yesterday. “It is expected that by the beginning of next year, February or March, something would be available.”

Bharat Biotech could not immediately be contacted. A launch in February would make COVAXIN the first India-made vaccine to be rolled out. India’s cases of coronavirus infections rose by 50,201 cases on Thursday to 8.36 million, second only to the United States. Deaths rose by 704, with the total now at 124,315. The daily rise in infections and deaths has slowed since a peak in mid-September.

Kant, who is the head of ICMR’s research management, policy, planning and coordination cell, said it was up to the health ministry to decide if COVAXIN shots can be given to people even before the third-stage trials are over. “It has shown safety

and efficacy in the phase 1 and 2 trials and in the animal studies – so it is safe but you can’t be 100 percent sure unless the phase 3 trials are over,” Kant said.

“There may be some risk, if you are ready to take the risk, you can take the vaccine. If necessary, the government can think of giving the vaccine in an emergency situation.”

Health Minister Harsh Vardhan said in September the government was considering granting an emergency authorization for a COVID-19 vaccine, particularly for the elderly and people in high-risk workplaces. Several leading vaccine candidates are already in final-stage testing. An experimental vaccine developed by Britain’s AstraZeneca is among the most advanced ones, and Britain expects to roll it out in late December or early 2021.

AstraZeneca has signed several supply and manufacturing deals with companies and governments around the world, including with the Serum Institute of India. Other late-stage vaccines are developed by Moderna Inc, Pfizer Inc with partner BioNTech SE, and Johnson & Johnson.

Meanwhile, Bangladesh signed a deal with the Serum Institute of India yesterday to buy 30 million doses of potential coronavirus vaccine being developed by British drugmaker AstraZeneca. AstraZeneca’s experimental COVID-19 vaccine is seen as one of the most advanced candidates in the race against the novel coronavirus. “Whenever the vaccine is ready, the



PUNE: A research scientist works inside a laboratory of India’s Serum Institute, the world’s largest maker of vaccines, which is working on vaccines against the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) in Pune. — Reuters

Serum Institute will give us 30 million doses in the first phase,” health minister Zahid Maleque told reporters after the deal was signed in Dhaka. — Reuters

Garment workers on front line of Sri Lanka virus outbreak

COLOMBO: When women at a Sri Lankan garment factory started to develop coughs and fevers, few took it seriously – the South Asian island had few cases of the coronavirus and the onset of the rainy season meant colds were to be expected. Staff who fell ill saw the company doctor, but many went back to the production line having being told that the factory’s owner Brandix, which makes clothes for brands including Gap, Victoria’s Secret and Marks & Spencer, had orders to fulfil.

Now, the district of Gampaha, where the factory is located, is at the center of Sri Lanka’s biggest coronavirus outbreak, with more than 7,000 cases – over half the national total. More than 1,000 of the factory’s 1,400 workers have tested positive for COVID-19, putting Brandix – one of Sri Lanka’s largest apparel companies – in the spotlight. Sri Lanka’s attorney general has ordered an investigation into whether the apparent spread of the disease from the factory could have been prevented, saying it “endangered human life”.

A progress report is expected by Nov. 13 on whether there was “negligence on the part of Brandix resulting in the spread of the virus”, said Nishara Jayaratne, the coordinating officer to the attorney general.

Brandix, which employs about 35,000 workers at plants across the country and is owned by the private Sri Lankan company Phoenix Ventures Ltd, has launched its own investigation. Finance chief Hasitha Premaratne said its initial findings were that staff with a fever were sent home or taken to hospital, and it would take “appropriate action” if this was found to be wrong.

But workers and trade union officials who spoke to the Thomson Reuters Foundation said some of those who fell sick were asked to carry on working and others said they were given proper



COLOMBO: The garment industry – Sri Lanka’s biggest exporter, accounting for about 7 percent of the \$84 billion economy – was allowed to restart operations in April. — Reuters

protective health (PPE) equipment.

“Some even fainted, but the company doctor gave basic medicines. All these sick women worked again, though they had some difficulties,” said one worker who asked not to be named, fearing repercussions for speaking out. “We never suspected it was corona because everybody was complacent and employees shared their meals and did not wear masks inside the plant.”

Ashila Dandeniya, who heads the local trade union group Standup Movement, said Brandix workers reported temperature checks were not carried out consistently and said the company did not take their health condition seriously. Brandix said it had health and safety measures in place including screening of staff, social distancing, mask wearing and temperature checks.

It reopened its factories in April when Sri Lanka’s government eased restrictions. “We have appointed a high-level three-member independent committee to investigate into allegations levelled in the media,” said Premaratne, referring to reports of safety failings at the plant. “Upon completion of the investigation, we will take appropriate action as per its findings.” — Reuters

Businessman’s son charged in maid case

SINGAPORE: A top Singapore businessman’s son was charged yesterday with giving false evidence against an Indonesian maid who was cleared of stealing from their family, in a case that sparked widespread anger. The controversy raised questions about how the justice system treated one of the city state’s best-known businessmen Liew Mun Leong and his family, compared with a low-paid domestic helper, Parti Liyani.

The affluent financial hub is home to about 260,000 domestic helpers, who mostly come from poorer Asian countries and earn salaries far below the average Singaporean’s. The family of Liew, chairman of Singapore’s airport operator until he quit in September, fired Liyani in 2016 and she was charged with stealing items from them including watches, clothes, and a DVD player. She was initially found guilty and sentenced to more than two years in jail but was acquitted on appeal, with a judge raising concerns about how the case had been conducted. The judge said there was reason to believe the family’s filing of theft charges was aimed at preventing her from lodging a complaint against them with authorities.

Liyani had been sent to clean the home and office of the businessman’s son, Karl, which is illegal. The judge also cast doubt on the younger Liew’s credibility as a witness. Authorities launched a probe into the handling of the case and yesterday, Karl Liew was charged in court with “furnishing false information” to police. The charge related to the 43-year-old’s statement he had found 119 pieces of clothing belonging to him inside a box packed by the Indonesian maid. He was also charged with lying under oath in court when he said that a T-shirt and a red blouse allegedly stolen by the maid belonged to him. He faces up to three years in jail for the first count, and seven for the second. — AFP

International

As Suu Kyi denies genocide, foes ramp up anti-Rohingya rhetoric

Myanmar holds election Sunday as Suu Kyi faces image crisis

NAYPYIDAW, Myanmar: As Aung San Suu Kyi is vilified internationally for denying genocide against the Rohingya, her opponents in Sunday's Myanmar election are ramping up the rhetoric against the Muslim minority.

There was global revulsion at military-backed operations in 2017 that saw hundreds of thousands of people flee burning villages into the squalor of refugee camps in neighboring Bangladesh. The horrifying violence—including widespread reports of murder and rape—has left Suu Kyi's international reputation in tatters and sees Myanmar facing genocide charges at the UN's top court.

But Than Htay, leader of the military-aligned Union Solidarity and Development Party (USDP), insists Myanmar has nothing to be sorry for. "I cannot accept useless people in our country," Than Htay told AFP of the stateless Rohingya.

The USDP is the main opposition group standing against Suu Kyi's ruling National League for Democracy (NLD) party in this week's polls, Myanmar's second after emerging from outright military rule in 2011. USDP supporters even created a parody of an NLD anthem, claiming Suu Kyi's party had welcomed "Bengali Muslims as if they were gods". Stripped of citizenship and rights over decades, the Rohingya are widely referred to in Myanmar by the pejorative term "Bengali", implying they are illegal immigrants.

'Picnic' or genocide?

The uncompromising campaign rhetoric shows that anti-Muslim rhetoric in mainly Buddhist Myanmar remains "fair game",

Yangon-based analyst Khin Zaw Win told AFP. "There is no danger for political parties to speak out against either the Rohingya or Muslims in general," he said. Just four percent of Myanmar's 55-million population are Muslim. They have no mainstream political representation and are often discriminated against in schools or when applying for ID cards or jobs.

The brutal ejection of the Rohingya in 2017 was seen very differently inside the country, where the government maintains the military was simply rooting out Rohingya insurgents and did not force the community to flee. "They left happily," Than Htay told AFP in an interview late August at the USDP's opulent headquarters in the capital, Naypyidaw.

"If they'd been running from the military, they wouldn't have prepared their bags as if going on a picnic."

Rebrand 'failure'

Suu Kyi's NLD party-born out of the pro-democracy movement under the former junta—is widely expected to be returned to office in Sunday's polls. The nation only emerged from outright military rule a decade ago and the armed forces still wield enormous power, retaining control of a quarter of parliamentary seats and three key ministries. Stacked with former army officers, the USDP is now trying to downplay its links to the military in a country still deeply suspicious of the institution.

Than Htay, who attained the rank of Major General before retiring, insisted: "I'm a civilian now," although conceded army chief Min Aung Hlaing was an old childhood friend.



YANGON: Supporters of the Union Solidarity and Development Party (USDP) attend an election campaign event in Yangon on Wednesday, ahead of the November 8 general election. — AFP

"We were commanders at the same military command. Our families are close. But that's all. We have boundaries between us." The USDP ruled Myanmar after a hugely flawed election in 2010, boycotted by the NLD and other parties. — AFP

Afghan violence soars despite talks: Watchdog

KABUL: Violent attacks in Afghanistan surged by 50 percent over recent months even as the Kabul government and the Taliban launched unprecedented peace talks in September, a US watchdog warned yesterday. Despite brief lulls during two temporary ceasefires over the summer, fighting has raged across the country as the Taliban launched devastating attacks on provincial capitals and security installations, with fears the violence may jeopardize negotiations.

Attacks against Afghan forces and civilians were 50 percent higher in the three months to the end of September when compared to the previous quarter, the US Special Inspector General for Afghanistan Reconstruction (SIGAR) said. "Overall enemy-initiated attacks this quarter were also characterized as 'above seasonal norms,'" SIGAR's quarterly report to the US Congress added.

The watchdog reported 2,561 civilian casualties this quarter including 876 deaths, up 43 percent from the April to June period. The report's publication comes as scattered calls to boycott the ongoing peace talks have been raised following back-to-back attacks on education centers in Kabul claimed by the Islamic State group, but which some government officials insist were carried out by the Taliban.

Little progress has been made in meetings between Afghan government negotiators and the Taliban since the talks started on September 12, with negotiations stalled over the basic framework of talks and an agenda still undecided. Both sides have rou-



KABUL: School girls shop for pens and booklets at a book store in Kabul yesterday. — AFP

tinely accused each other of upping hostilities and killing civilians. Zalmay Khalilzad, the US envoy who negotiated a separate deal with the Taliban in February, has repeatedly warned that "continued high levels of violence can threaten the peace process and the agreement and the core understanding that there is no military solution" to the Afghan conflict. US influence over Afghanistan's battlegrounds is on the wane, however, with the Pentagon looking to withdraw all its remaining troops by next May.

Confusion over the ongoing US election vote count has raised further questions over whether Washington's insistence that its withdrawal from Afghanistan after 19 years of war will continue on schedule or accelerate if Trump clinches another term in the White House. — AFP

Virus worries rise as India's capital suffers toxic air

NEW DELHI: New Delhi, the capital city with the worst air quality worldwide, suffered its most toxic day in a year yesterday, recording the concentration of poisonous PM2.5 particles at 14 times over the World Health Organization safe limit. A raging coronavirus epidemic, with more than 400,000 confirmed cases in the city of 20 million, has heightened alarm over the health hazard posed by the choking smog, with doctors warning of a sharp increase in respiratory illnesses.

"At this time in Delhi, coronavirus and pollution are causing a major havoc," Arvind Kejriwal, Delhi's chief minister said in a recorded video on Twitter. "We are seeing all round the sky is covered with smoke, and because of this the situation from coronavirus is worsening."

The deadly PM2.5 particles are less than 2.5 microns in diameter, can penetrate the lung barrier and enter the blood system, potentially causing cardiovascular and respiratory diseases including lung cancer, according to WHO. "Woke up with a feeling that poisonous garbage is stuck in my windpipe," said Rahul Ojha, a resident who tagged government authorities in a tweet, blaming them for inaction. Delhi's air pollution typically worsens in October and November due to farmers burning off stubble in surrounding states, traffic fumes and windless days. Yesterday Thursday, the federal air quality and weather monitoring agency recorded 4,135 incidents of farm fires - the highest of the season. Firecrackers ignited for a Hindu festival on Wednesday added to the problem, some people said. — Reuters

International

Beijing bars arrivals from Belgium, UK due to second COVID-19 waves

Philippines confirms 1,594 new cases, 42 more deaths

BEIJING: China yesterday defended a ban on non-Chinese arrivals from Britain, Belgium and the Philippines as “reasonable and fair” as it guards against a resurgence of the coronavirus. COVID-19 first emerged in central China late last year, but Beijing has largely brought its own outbreak under control through tight travel restrictions and stringent health measures for anyone entering the country.

In March, as the virus ripped across the world, China shut its borders to all foreign nationals. It gradually eased restrictions to allow those stranded overseas to return with special permission from its embassies, negative COVID-19 tests and a two-week quarantine on arrival.

But in a sharp reversal as the outbreak once more billows out across Europe, the Chinese embassy in the UK on Wednesday said Beijing had “decided to temporarily suspend entry” from Britain by non-Chinese nationals. Embassies in Belgium and the Philippines have put out similar notices.

The Chinese foreign ministry said Thursday it was a “reasonable and fair” measure to tackle the pandemic. “China is drawing on the practices of many countries and adjusting its handling of the

entry of the relevant people into China based on the changing pandemic situation,” said ministry spokesman Wang Wenbin.

The UK—one of the world’s hardest-hit countries with nearly 48,000 deaths linked to the virus and more than one million cases—has entered a new nationwide lockdown to curb the contagion’s spread. Belgium, which has the most Covid-19 cases per capita in the world, has been in lockdown since last week, while large parts of the Philippines went back into lockdown in October.

Beijing has recently tightened requirements for travellers from several other countries, making entry much more difficult. They include the presentation of a health certificate from the local Chinese embassy showing the results of a nucleic acid test and an antibody test—within 48 hours of travel.

The new rules apply to travellers from countries including France, India, Singapore, Canada, Germany, Pakistan, South Africa and the US. The strict two-test entry requirement and short time frame have sparked complaints. The European Chamber of Commerce in China said the measures were “a de facto ban on anyone trying to get back to their lives, work and families in China”.

Meanwhile, mainland China reported 28 new



SHANGHAI: People are seen on a ferry while crossing the Huangpu River heading to The Bund in Shanghai yesterday. — AFP

confirmed coronavirus cases on Nov 4, compared to 17 a day earlier, the country’s health authority said yesterday. Of the total, 20 were imported infections, the National Health Commission said. There were 24 new asymptomatic cases discovered on Wednesday, down from 128 a daily earlier. Total confirmed cases in mainland China have now reached 86,115, with the number of deaths un-

changed at 4,634.

Meanwhile, the Philippine health ministry yesterday reported 1,594 novel coronavirus infections and 42 additional deaths. The ministry said total confirmed cases increased to 389,725 while deaths reached 7,409. The Philippines has Southeast Asia’s second highest number of COVID-19 cases and deaths after Indonesia. — Agencies

Kashmir bike sellers outpaced by pandemic demand for pedal power

SRINAGAR: Bicycle sellers in Srinagar, the summer capital of Indian-administered Kashmir, have struggled to keep pace with demand as the COVID-19 pandemic has driven surging interest in pedal power to get around the city and keep fit. Jamsheed Jeelani, who runs a bike shop in Lal Chowk, the city’s commercial hub, said his customers had been asked to pre-order and wait for three months for deliveries of some brands.

“It was because of corona (virus) - and people have also become health conscious now,” Jeelani said. “A lot of people are also buying bicycles for travel, especially labourers and skilled workers.” The trend echoes a shift towards cycling in other cities worldwide, as authorities try to cut traffic congestion and air pollution and residents seek healthier ways to travel.

Jeelani noted that demand had already risen in the past two to three years, but during the COVID-19 lockdown imposed from March to mid-August, there was a huge increase in customers. “This year, the demand was too high,” he said. His monthly sales have doubled on average this year and would have been even higher if enough bicycles had been available, he added. “Because of the lockdown in most of the world, the production suffered, and we had to settle for limited supplies,” he said.

Hubaib Rasool, a high-school student getting his bicycle fixed at a repair shop in Ganderbal district, said cycling had helped him and his friends

stay active during lockdown. One of Rasool’s classmates at Ganderbal Public School - which like other educational institutions has yet to reopen since March - had managed to lose a lot of weight after taking up cycling, he said.

Shop owner Sameer Ahmad said he had never had as much work. “It means a lot of people are now using bicycles,” he said. Rameez Ahmad, another Srinagar bicycle seller, said the closure of the city’s gyms had pushed residents to find new ways



SRINAGAR: Bicycle sellers in Srinagar, the summer capital of Indian-administered Kashmir, have struggled to keep pace with demand as the COVID-19 pandemic has driven surging interest in pedal power to get around the city and keep fit.—Reuters

to stay fit. “Many turned to cycling,” he said, adding that his sales had risen by more than 150 percent through the end of September.

Showkat Parra, the owner of one of several new bicycle shops in Sumbal Bandipora, a town 22 km (14 miles) north of Srinagar, said he had sold more than 40 bicycles each week since June, though sales were tailing off as winter was around the corner. “The demand was too high during corona lockdown as people had no transport, and kids were staying home - their parents thought ‘let them do exercise,’” he said.

In response to growing interest in cycling for transport and fitness, city authorities are developing Srinagar’s first network of cycling tracks. They are also introducing other measures for the safety and convenience of cyclists, such as new lighting, trees for shade and bike parking areas. The work is part of the Srinagar Master Plan 2035, which identifies cycling as an important “non-energy consuming and non-polluting mode of transport for short and medium trip lengths” in a city notorious for traffic congestion. Rizwan Khurshid, coordinator of the Srinagar Smart City Mission, which aims to make the city “green and clean” with a full set of civic amenities and technology, welcomed the trend. “People are getting aware about the benefits of cycling like never before thanks to the growing use of information technology,” including the internet and social media, he said.—Reuters

HK police launch national security crime hotline

HONG KONG: Hong Kong police unveiled a dedicated hotline yesterday for residents to report national security threats, sparking criticism that the measure will deepen swirling distrust in the already polarized city. China imposed a sweeping new national security law in June after last year’s huge and often violent pro-democracy protests in the financial hub. Despite assurances that the law would only target a “tiny minority”, its wording has outlawed a host of peaceful political views and helped to stamp out mass dissent in the financial hub. The hotline allows residents to send “national security intelligence” via text message, email and the Chinese messaging app WeChat.

Hong Kong residents can also use the line to send pictures, audio and video files, police said in a Facebook post yesterday. Rights groups have voiced concerns that the hotline will deliver another blow to free speech at a time when Beijing is ramping up control over the city. “Informants may use this hotline against people who they dislike or are in a different political camp,” Human Rights Watch senior researcher Maya Wang said. Opponents have drawn parallels with the Cultural Revolution in mainland China, a turbulent period in the 1960s and 70s when millions were punished and purged by authorities—often after denunciation by family, friends and neighbors. —AFP

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A tourist posing for a photograph on a larger-than-life sized figure of a gorilla made of rice straw in an amusement park on the shores of Huay Tueng Thao lake outside Chiang Mai. — AFP

Must be love: The Tokyo
'clinic' treating stuffed toys

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Must be love: The Tokyo ‘clinic’ treating stuffed toys



This photo shows client Yui Kato's stuffed toy sheep Yuki-chan (center) alongside other stuffed toys at Natsumi Clinic in Tokyo. —AFP photos



Yui Kato (left) greeting her stuffed toy sheep Yuki-chan.



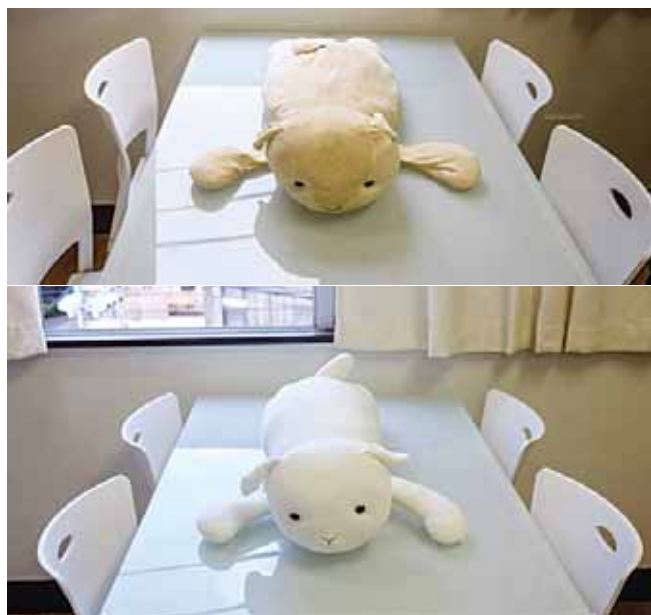
An employee bathing the skin of client Yui Kato's stuffed toy sheep Yuki-chan during a restoration “surgery”.



Photo shows stuffed toy sea otter Rac-chan receiving treatment after a body wash and before a hair transplant.



Photo shows the skin and stuffing of client Yui Kato's stuffed toy sheep Yuki-chan on a table.



This combination of pictures created shows client Yui Kato's stuffed toy sheep Yuki-chan on a table before (top) and after (bottom) a restoration “surgery” at Natsumi Clinic.

At a Tokyo clinic, a woman in a white coat carefully records the particulars of the newest patient: a sheep-shaped stuffed toy. The Natsumi Clinic specializes in restoring much-loved teddies and other cuddly toys to their original glory, delighting deeply attached owners like Yui Kato, who brought in the sheep, Yuki-chan. “I thought I had no choice but to throw her away as she’s absolutely worn out, but then I heard there’s a hospital that deals with this sort of thing,” the 24-year-old told AFP. “Maybe she won’t be exactly how she once was, but I came here hoping to see her healthy again.” The clinic offers treatments ranging from “eye surgery” and hair transplants to stitching up injuries, explained founder Natsumi Hakozaiki.

She began treating stuffed toys four years ago in her hometown, northern Sendai city, after working at a clothes alteration shop where customers often asked if she could repair their treasured toys. “Customers saw stuffed toys as family members, partners or best friends, not mere objects. After their stuffed toys were fixed, many of them hugged (the toys), or burst into tears,” Hakozaiki said. The experience inspired her to open a shop offering specialised treatment, and every animal is prescribed its own course. For Yuki-chan the sheep, Hakozaiki first removed the stuffing then bathed her with a special soap, which she described as a “spa” treatment. The clinic carefully documents each stage of the treatment, posting images online so owners can keep tabs. Hakozaiki is conscious of how attached people can become to their stuffed animals, and considers it key

to treat the toys as if they were alive.

Transferring a ‘soul’

“It looks like she was very tired. Please relax and enjoy!” the clinic captioned a photo of Yuki-chan soaking in a foamy bath. Yuki-chan was in such bad shape that she needed to be virtually reconstituted from scratch. The bath returned her tattered skin to its original shape, allowing Hakozaiki to use it to pattern new fabric. Once sewn together, the fabric was filled with fresh stuffing, effectively creating an entirely new Yuki-chan, except for the “heart”-fashioned from pink cloth and filled with a bit of original stuffing. Hakozaiki sees it as a way of transferring the toy’s “soul” into the new body. The 34-year-old moved her business to Tokyo two years ago, and now repairs 100 stuffed toys a month with five other “doctors”.

Clients have sent toys from Hong Kong, Taiwan, France and Britain for treatment, and customers have had to wait up to a year for a spot. Repairs take about 10 days, and the clinic’s website features pictures of recovered “patients” photographed together at “a party to celebrate being discharged”. There is only one other “clinic” for repairing stuffed toys in Japan, in Osaka, and the demand comes despite prices that range from 10,000 to 500,000 yen (\$95-\$4,800) depending on the injuries. Yuki-chan’s makeover cost Kato 100,000 yen, but for her it was money well spent. “My memories (with her) are more important than money, so I don’t regret it,” she said, recalling the “tough times” the stuffed sheep helped her get through. “I talked to her

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An employee working on client Yui Kato's stuffed toy sheep Yuki-chan.



Employees working on stuffed toys at Natsumi Clinic in Tokyo.



Founder Natsumi Hakozaiki treating the eye of client Yui Kato's stuffed toy sheep Yuki-chan at Natsumi Clinic in Tokyo.

when I went to sleep to sort out my feelings and I used to cry in front of her," she said.

'Beyond just a thing'

She said she cried again, but this time tears of joy, when she saw photos of Yuki-chan's transformation, and was delighted when she came to pick up her old friend. "I'm genuinely surprised!... She's back to like she was when I got her for the first time," she said. "She has a 'heart' of stuffing inside, so she has a new look but a part of the memory is still in her," Kato added. "I'm so happy I can keep the memories with me." Other clients also express deep emotional attachments to their stuffed animals, including Kota Sano, who describes his 40-year-old sea otter toy "Racchan" as "an indispensable family member".

"She saved me when I was under pressure at work... she forgives me and accepts me," he told AFP, adding that his wife and son also adore the otter. Sano admitted he sometimes feels embarrassed about his affection for the toy, but noted that traditional Japanese folklore says objects can acquire their own spirit. They "can go beyond just being a thing and possess personality," he said. And Hakozaiki understands the feelings owners have towards their toys. "We don't just replace a father because he got sick. It's the same thing" for stuffed toys, she said, describing the attachment as something "universal". "There are people who consider their stuffed toys as family members not only in Japan but also around the world." —AFP



This photo shows stuffed toy sea otter Rac-chan (center) alongside other stuffed toys after receiving a hair transplant at Natsumi Clinic in Tokyo.



Stuffed toy sea otter Rac-chan after receiving a hair transplant.



Founder Natsumi Hakozaiki doing a quick repair for a stuffed toy bear at Natsumi Clinic in Tokyo.



Founder Natsumi Hakozaiki showing a heart shaped from old stuffing from client Yui Kato's stuffed toy sheep Yuki-chan.



Photo shows client Yui Kato posing for a photo with her stuffed toy sheep Yuki-chan at Natsumi Clinic in Tokyo.



A Syrian jeweler displays a pearl necklace at a trade fair dedicated to war-hit businesses from Aleppo looking to make a revival, in the capital Damascus' Tekkiye Sulimaniyah complex. — AFP photos



A merchant writes 'Made in Aleppo' on a stand in a trade fair dedicated to war-hit businesses from Aleppo.



Joseph Tobjian, a 61-year-old Syrian soap maker arranges Aleppo soap products he hopes to sell in a trade fair.

Damascus fair offers hope for exports-starved Aleppo artisans

Under the elegant arches and domes of an Ottoman-era compound, Joseph Tobjian displays his aromatic Aleppo soap at a trade fair designed to revive Syria's exports-starved arts and crafts. The soap maker is among more than 130 merchants taking part in the state-sponsored fair in Damascus for small businesses from Aleppo, northern Syria. "I've spent my entire life around laurel oil and soap. Their scent does not leave my lungs," Tobjian told AFP. "We're in Damascus looking for an alternative to foreign markets, after exports stopped," he said, soap bottles and natural cosmetics lining the table in front of him. The 61-year-old said he was surprised by the high number of visitors at the fair, including Damascus traders interested in his beauty products.

Aleppo, Syria's pre-war economic hub, is famed for its ancient crafts, hit hard by the conflict that broke out in 2011. Goods ranging from traditional soaps, furniture and garments to made-in-Syria marshmallows are on show in the capital's Tekkiye al-Sulaymaniyah complex. The Tobjian family fled to Canada from Aleppo in 2012, leaving behind a soap workshop that employed about 40 workers in its heyday. Unhappy with life in exile, the Syrian Armenian family returned in 2018 to find both their workshop and city in ruins. They relocated to a modest workshop and employed two workers to resume production of Aleppo soap, once a top export also popular among tourists. "We inherited this craft from our fathers and grandfathers," said Tobjian, wearing a

T-shirt bearing the image of Syrian President Bashar al-Assad. "We must do everything we can to revive our workshops and factories."

A touch of Aleppo

Aleppo's centuries-old covered bazaar, situated in its Old City, a UNESCO World Heritage Site, once teemed with thousands of stalls. The Old City saw some of the heaviest battles of Syria's war, before Russian-backed regime forces recaptured rebel-held districts of Aleppo in December 2016. A gradual government-led restoration program has revived parts of Aleppo's bazaar but the scars of war remain.

In Aleppo's industrial zone, the largest in Syria, most factories and workshops were also ravaged by fighting. With state support, some 70 small workshops have reopened but business is slow amid an economic crisis compounded by Western sanctions and the collapse of the Syrian pound against the dollar. "The war destroyed the infrastructure of industries in Aleppo," said Alaa Hilal, director of the week-long Damascus fair. Western sanctions, which hinder fuel imports, have also made it tough for factories to operate. This is why Aleppo craftsmen are looking "for opportunities to make sales, sign contracts and market their products in Damascus", Hilal said. Western sanctions have pushed Syrian businesses to find alternatives. At the fair, Sonali Ghazal shows off marshmallows scented with rose water or pistachios from Aleppo.

"We managed to make marshmallow in Syria, and we gave them an Aleppo touch," the 42-year-old teacher said. Sonali said she used to buy them for her students before marshmallows vanished from the market because of the war and sanctions. She came up with a home-grown alternative, "but this time, with the flavor of Aleppo pistachios". — AFP



A merchant from Aleppo displays goods in a trade fair.



Sonali Ghazal, displays Aleppo-made marshmallows scented with rose water or pistachios.



A jeweler from Aleppo displays his goods.



Visitors tour a trade fair dedicated to war-hit businesses.

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A woman's place? Out hunting with spears, study finds

A new study says a woman's place might never have been at home to begin with. Scientists said Wednesday they had discovered the 9,000-year-old remains of a young woman in the Peruvian Andes alongside a well-stocked big game hunting toolkit. Based on a fur-

ther analysis of 27 individuals at burial sites with similar tools, a team led by Randall Haas at the University of California, Davis concluded that between 30 to 50 percent of hunters in the Americas during this period may have been women. The paper, published in the journal *Science Advances*, contradicts the prevalent notion that in hunter-gatherer societies, the hunters were mainly men and the gatherers were mainly women. "I think it tells us that for at least some portion of human prehistory, that assumption was inaccurate," Haas told AFP.

He added that the results "highlight the disparities in labor practice today, in terms of things like gender pay gaps, titles, and rank. The results really underscore that there may be nothing 'natural' about those disparities." The skeletal remains of six people including two hunters were discovered in 2018 by Haas and members of the local Mulla Fasiri community at Wilamaya Patjxa, an important archaeological site in highland Peru. Analyses of the hunters' bone structure as well as biological molecules called peptides in their tooth enamel allowed scientists to identify one as a 17- to 19-year-old female, and the second as a 25- to 30-year-old male.

Excavating the teen's burial site was particularly "interesting and exciting" for the team, said Haas. As they dug, they uncovered an array of hunting and animal processing tools that provided strong evidence for her hunter status. These included stone projectile points for felling large animals, a knife and flakes of rock for removing internal organs, and tools for scraping and tanning hides. The artifacts were likely placed together in a perishable container like a leather bag. According to the paper, the teen, dubbed "WMP6" by the scientists, would have



In this undated photo provided by UC Davis to AFP, archeologists conduct excavations at Wilamaya Patjxa in Peru. — AFP photos

used a weapon called an "atlatl," a spear throwing lever that allowed our ancient ancestors to throw spears much further. Her main prey at the time would have been species like the vicuña, a wild ancestor of the alpaca, and Andean deer.

Not an anomaly

To find out whether the female hunter was an outlier, or one of many from her time, the researchers conducted a review of 429 individuals buried across 107 sites in the Americas from around 130,000 years ago to 8,000 years ago. Of those, they found 27 individuals whose sex had reliably been determined and who were buried alongside big game hunting tools—finding that 16 were male and 11 were female. "The sample is sufficient to warrant the conclusion that female participation in early big-game hunting was likely nontrivial," the team wrote, using a statistical model to estimate between 30-50 percent of hunters in these societies were women. — AFP



In this undated photo provided by UC Davis to AFP, archeologists conduct excavations at Wilamaya Patjxa in Peru.

Five-eyed fossil shrimp is evolutionary 'missing link'

The discovery of a five-eyed shrimp-like creature that lived about 520 million years ago may end a long-running debate about the evolution of Earth's most common animals. Arthropods, ranging from lobsters and crabs to spiders and millipedes, make up around 80 percent of all animal species alive today and are characterized by their hard exoskeleton. But their evolution has long remained something of a mystery, because their ancient ancestors carry a variety of features that their modern counterparts do not. Enter *Kylinxia zhangii*, a shrimp-like creature preserved in fossils found in China's Yunnan province—a discovery that researchers now say could be a key "missing link" in arthropod evolution. Like today's arthropods, *Kylinxia* had a hard shell, a segmented body and legs with joints.

But the ancient creature also had characteristics in common with even older animals, leading researchers to name it after the "Kylin", a creature in traditional Chinese mythology with attributes from a variety of animals. First there are those eyes—three smaller ones in a row on its head, with two larger ones directly behind. It might sound bizarre, but it's a feature scientists have seen before, in an ancient creature called *Opabinia*, known informally as a "weird wonder". And the *Kylinxia*'s two spiky front appendages, researchers say, are reminiscent of another creature thought to be an



This handout photograph released by The Nanjing Institute of Geology and Palaeontology CAS shows a fossil specimen of *Kylinxia zhangii* taken in 2019 in Yunnan, China. — AFP

arthropod ancestor: the *Anomalocaris*.

While both have been theorized as precursors to modern arthropods, an evolutionary gap in the fossil record made that difficult to prove—until this week. "*Kylinxia* represents a crucial transitional fossil predicted by Darwin's evolutionary theory," said Han Zeng, first author of a study published in the journal *Nature* on Wednesday. "It bridges the evolutionary gap from *Anomalocaris* to true arthropods and forms a key 'missing link' in the origin of arthropods," added Zeng, a researcher at the Nanjing Institute of Geology and Palaeontology (NIGPAS), in a press release. — AFP

Radio burst from within Milky Way may help solve cosmic mystery

Astrophysicists have detected a burst of cosmic radio waves within our galaxy for the first time and identified its source, according to research published Wednesday that sheds new light on one of the mysteries of the Universe. The origin of powerful fast radio bursts (FRBs) — intense flashes of radio emission that only last a few milliseconds—have puzzled scientists since they were first detected a little over a decade ago. They are typically extragalactic, meaning they originate outside our galaxy, but on April 28 this year, multiple telescopes detected a bright FRB from the same area within our Milky Way. Importantly, they were also able to pin down the source: Galactic magnetar SGR 1935+2154.

Magnetars, young neutron stars that are the most magnetic objects in the universe, have long been prime suspects in the hunt for the source of these radio bursts. But this discovery marks the first time that astronomers

have been able to directly trace the signal back to a magnetar. Christopher Bochenek, whose Survey for Transient Astronomical Radio Emission 2 (STARE2) in the US was one of the teams to spot the burst, said that in approximately a millisecond the magnetar emitted as much energy as the Sun's radio waves do in 30 seconds. He said the burst was "so bright" that theoretically if you had a recording of the raw data from your mobile phone's 4G LTE receiver and knew what to look for, "you might have found this signal that came about halfway across the galaxy" in the phone data.

This energy was comparable to FRBs from outside the galaxy, he said, strengthening the case for magnetars to be the source of most extragalactic bursts. As many as 10,000 FRBs may occur every day, but these high-energy surges were only discovered in 2007.

They have been the topic of heated debate ever since, with even small steps towards identifying their origin stirring major excitement for astronomers. One problem is that the momentary flashes are difficult to pinpoint without knowing where to look. Theories of their origins have ranged from catastrophic events like supernovas, to neutron stars, which are super-dense stellar fragments formed after the gravitational collapse of a star. There are even more exotic explanation—discounted by astronomers—of extra-terrestrial signals. — AFP

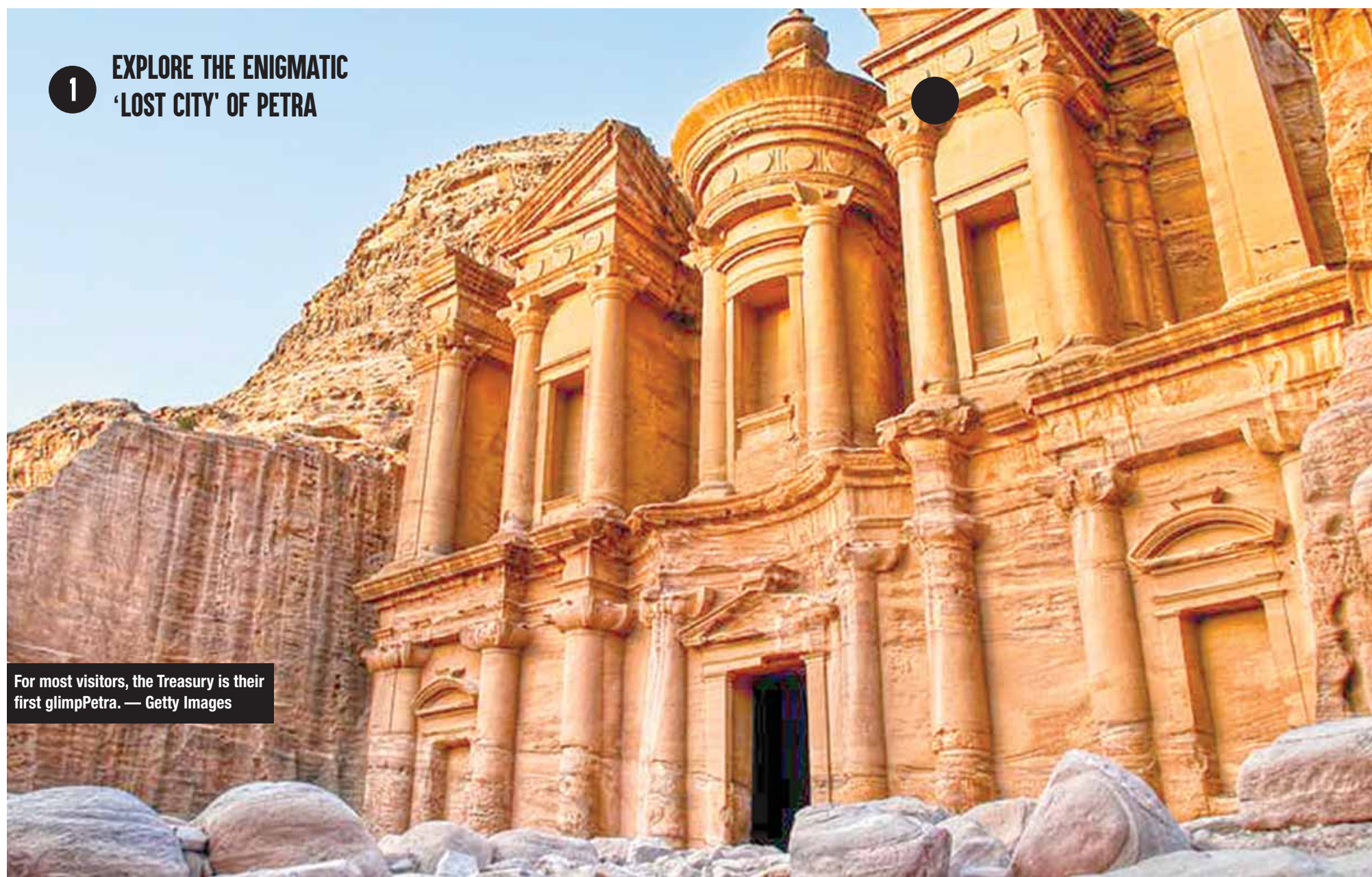
Introducing **Lonely Planet's** Ultimate Travel List

We've all got a list of places that we want to see for ourselves: places friends have enthused about, places we've read about, dreamed about. This is our list. It's the 500 most thrilling, memorable, downright interesting places on this planet ranked in order of their brilliance. COVID-19 has resulted in travel restrictions that may have clipped your wings through 2020, but now is the perfect time to plan ahead so you're ready for your next adventure when it's safe to hit the road again. These are the places we think you should experience; there are sights that will humble you, amaze you and surprise you. They'll provoke thoughts, emotions or just an urgent need to tell someone about them. Here are the top 10 travel experiences from Lonely Planet's Ultimate Travel List. We hope this will inspire many more travel wish lists of your own.

1

EXPLORE THE ENIGMATIC 'LOST CITY' OF PETRA

For most visitors, the Treasury is their first glimpse of Petra. — Getty Images



The treasured Unesco Heritage Site of Petra is the must-see ultimate experience on our list. Once nearly lost to the outside world, the sandstone city is now one of the most loved places on the planet, voted in as one of the New Seven Wonders of the World by popular ballot in 2007. Spread over some 102 sq miles (264 sq km), Petra was constructed by the ancient Nabataeans, a civilization of crafters and merchants, and made for a grand trade route stop-off between Arabian

oases. But generations later, after the city was abandoned, it was known only to the Bedouin who made the caves their home. The iconic Treasury, looming 128ft (39m) high is most visitors' first sight of the city, reached after a winding journey through a narrow water-etched slot canyon. Rediscover the city's eternal air of mystery in the early morning or the hours before closing when it's at its most atmospheric.

Lifestyle | Travel

Friday, November 6, 2020

2

SEE THE ISLANDS THAT CHANGED
THE COURSE OF SCIENCE – THE GALAPAGOS

A thousand kilometers from mainland South America, life on the Galapagos follows different rules. Cormorants can't fly. Iguanas can swim. Tortoises live nearly 200 years. The islands are famed, of course, as the place where Charles Darwin developed his ideas on evolution by natural selection. The process is more obvious here than elsewhere on Earth, since animals that otherwise look alike diverge subtly from island to island, depending on their environment. You'll find blue-footed boobies performing cartoonish mating dances, creeping

colonies of iguanas, penguins zooming underwater, and fur seals lounging on volcanic rocks. Even 200 years after Darwin's journey on the HMS Beagle, visitors continue to be astonished by the archipelago's stunning diversity. Ecotourism is central to everything on the 17 islands of the Galapagos National Park - the airport is made from mostly recycled materials and runs on wind and solar power, and each municipality has a strict sustainability plan.

ECUADOR



Look for iguanas creeping through the spiky brush. — Shutterstock



AUSTRALIA

Uluru is home to the spirit ancestors of the Anangu. — Shutterstock

3

TAKE SOME LIFE LESSONS FROM THE
ANANGU AT ULURU-KATA TJUTA NATIONAL PARK

At sunset, when its wavy walls blaze gold, Uluru looks like a ship on fire in a desert sea. Rising to 1142ft (348m), the sandstone monolith seizes your eyes from miles away. It's easy to see why it's a sacred site. The Anangu people, the area's original inhabitants, believe it's still home to spirit ancestors like the python woman Kuniya and the hare-wallaby people, the Mala. But it's become an icon to all Australians, a symbolic heart beating in the country's Red Centre. Until 2017, visitors

were allowed to summit Uluru, which went against the wishes of the Anangu, who worried about degradation and climber injuries. There are dozens of far more rewarding things to do - join a ranger-guided walk past sacred waterholes; spot kangaroos hopping through the spinifex; and learn about the Anangu at the cultural center, where there is a fantastic display on tjukurpa, the creation period.

4

EXPERIENCE LIFE IN THE SLOW
LANE ON THE OKAVANGO DELTA

This beautiful wilderness is one of Africa's most compelling safari destinations. Each year, the floodwaters of the Okavango River arrive from the Angolan highlands and expand this unique ecosystem to almost 7722 sq miles (20,000 sq km), sustaining vast quantities of wildlife. Along with 4WD safaris, visitors can explore by powerboat and traditional mokoro (dugout canoe). As the mokoro is poled silently through the shallow reed-lined channels you are immersed in the environment, hearing every bird and animal call, witnessing the mightiest of elephants crossing your path and the smallest of frogs clinging to the grass. With development and visitor numbers in the delta strictly regulated to protect the environment, the Okavango is one of the most exclusive destinations on the planet. But for adventurous souls who can handle a 4WD and don't mind camping, there are affordable options within the delta's Moremi Game Reserve.



BOTSWANA

The Okavango Delta expands with floodwaters, and attracts famed African species. — Shutterstock



Grand Prismatic is one of the most photographed features at the park. — Getty Images

5 SNIFF OUT GEYSERS AND GRIZZLIES AT YELLOWSTONE NATIONAL PARK

Yellowstone stinks. And it has no manners at all. The rotten-egg whiff taunts your nostrils; your ears are assaulted by a vulgarity of belches, burps and farts. But then, what do you expect when you're exploring the largest geothermal area in the world? More than 500 active geysers spout in Yellowstone's enormous, steaming landscape - Old Faithful being the most famous. And there are hot springs to visit - from the bloodshot eyeball of Grand Prismatic to the travertine shelves at Mammoth. The wildlife

is perhaps an even bigger draw. This is like North America's answer to an African safari, although here the Big Five creatures are bison, bighorn sheep, elk, bear and wolf. Watching shaggy bison warming up by a thermal pool, catching sight of a grizzly bear across a meadow, or visiting in winter to glimpse wolf prints in the snow - all are quintessential Yellowstone experiences.

6 MARVEL AT THE ASTOUNDING POWER OF IGUAZU FALLS

Marking the boundary between Argentina and Brazil, the Rio Iguazu flows languidly through the jungle before plunging over a basalt ledge with such sudden, furious force that the planet's most awe-inspiring waterfalls are the result. On the Argentinian side, a boardwalk leads through jungle vegetation replete with butterflies and squawking parrots, passing a series of increasingly impressive falls until finally the Garganta del Diablo (Devil's Throat) comes into view. A visit is a jaw-drop-

ping, visceral experience, and the power and noise of the cascades - a chain of hundreds of waterfalls nearly 2 miles (3km) in extension - live forever in the memory. Sunlight shines through the spray, creating multiple rainbows as the falling water ricochets up off the river below. The exhilarating cool mist, the high decibel roar and the thundering vibrations of crashing water remind you in no uncertain terms of the power and splendor of nature.



The stunning chain of waterfalls that make up Iguazu Falls.—Shutterstock



Lake Bled's beauty has attracted travelers for over a thousand years. — Lonely Planet

7 EMULATE A PILGRIM'S JOURNEY TO ASTONISHING LAKE BLEĐ

It started with the pilgrims from afar who came to worship at the photogenic island church, it continued with the lakeside sojourns of 19th-century royalty and then of former Yugoslav President Tito who had a villa on the shores - and today, tourism to

Slovenia's Lake Bled shows no signs of slowing. This blue-green body of water with a white church on a green island, abutted by a terracotta-roofed castle and backed by snow-daubed Julian Alps, is Slovenia's premier crowd-puller. The lake measures just

1.2 by 0.9 miles (2km by 1.4km), so walking or cycling around it is an easy 4 miles (6km). Hire a pletna (gondola), dive beneath the glass-like surface and stay over in one of many beautiful shoreside properties. Slovenia has won praise for eco-

initiatives like ecologically designed Garden Village Bled, where a stream snakes through a collection of tree houses and glamping tents.



Prayer flags along the Annapurna Circuit. — Shutterstock

8 TAKE A CLASSIC TEAHOUSE TREK AROUND NEPAL'S ANNAPURNA CIRCUIT

Nepal offers golden temples, charming hill villages, jungle wildlife watching, and the incredible walk around Nepal's Annapurna massif, which has long been considered one of the world's great treks. The scenery is mesmerizing and the sense

of journey is psychologically satisfying, starting in rice paddies and climbing through yak pastures before crossing the mighty snow-bound Thorung La pass. It's everything a good trek should be - challenging, majestic and inspirational. And at the end of

the day some of Nepal's best lodges offer hot meals, apple pie and pots of milky tea. However, it's the side trips that make this a truly great trek, notably up to high-altitude Tilicho Lake or to the village of Ngawal, where terraces offer views of snowcapped

peaks just across the valley. Build in a couple of extra days, shake off the crowds, and take your time - this is not scenery to rush through.



Buddhist monks enter the Bayon temple at Angkor Wat.— Shutterstock

9 FIND HINDU HEAVEN AT THE TEMPLES OF ANGKOR

A monument to human ingenuity and devotion, the temples of Angkor have an ability to inspire awe that rivals many of nature's contributions to this list's top 10. And so they should - Angkor Wat, the most famous of Angkor's sites, is a representation of Mt Meru, center of the universe and abode of Hindu gods. Imagine the wonderment of the ancient Khmer as they entered Angkor Wat for the first time: crossing the vast moat, peering up at the 180ft (55m)

central tower, gazing at intricately carved bas-reliefs. Beyond Angkor Wat are more than 1000 temples and shrines, including Ta Prohm, its towers gripped by the jungle, and Bayon with its giant stone faces. The temples are the perfect fusion of creative ambition and spiritual devotion, and a point of pilgrimage for all Cambodians. Avoid the crowds with a visit in the wet season for (hopefully) that perfect Angkor sunrise.

10 STRIKE OUT ON THE SALT OF THE EARTH AT SALAR DE UYUNI


Imagine this: you're standing in the middle of the sky. Clouds above. Clouds below. Blue all around. That's what it's like at Salar de Uyuni, the world's biggest salt lake, after rain. The thin layer of water turns the utterly flat salt surface into a vast mirror. The horizon disappears and you seem to float. That's only one of the brain-bending experiences you'll have visiting these 4085 sq miles (10,582 sq km) of salt, high in the Bolivian altiplano. When the lake's dry, the white cracked immensity feels like a desolate, sun-

scorched post-apocalyptic landscape. In the dry season you can visit the lake's two islands - Isla Incahuasi and Isla del Pescado - craggy husks of land sprouting with cacti. See too the geyser fields with boiling mud and sulfur steam. Several of the eerie high-altitude lakes, turned aquamarine from high mineral content, are home to flocks of flamingos. — www.lonelyplanet.com




The world's biggest salt lake transforms into a vast mirror after rain. — Getty Images


Word Search



Granita



Cannoli



Panna Cotta

Italian Desserts

Word Search

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

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

Biscotti

Bombolone

Ciambella

Gelato


Nutella

Panna Cotta

Pignolata

Pizzelle

Semifreddo




Panna Cotta


Struffoli

Tiramisu

Torta Caprese



Panna Cotta




Panna Cotta

Sfinge

Sfogliatella

Spumoni



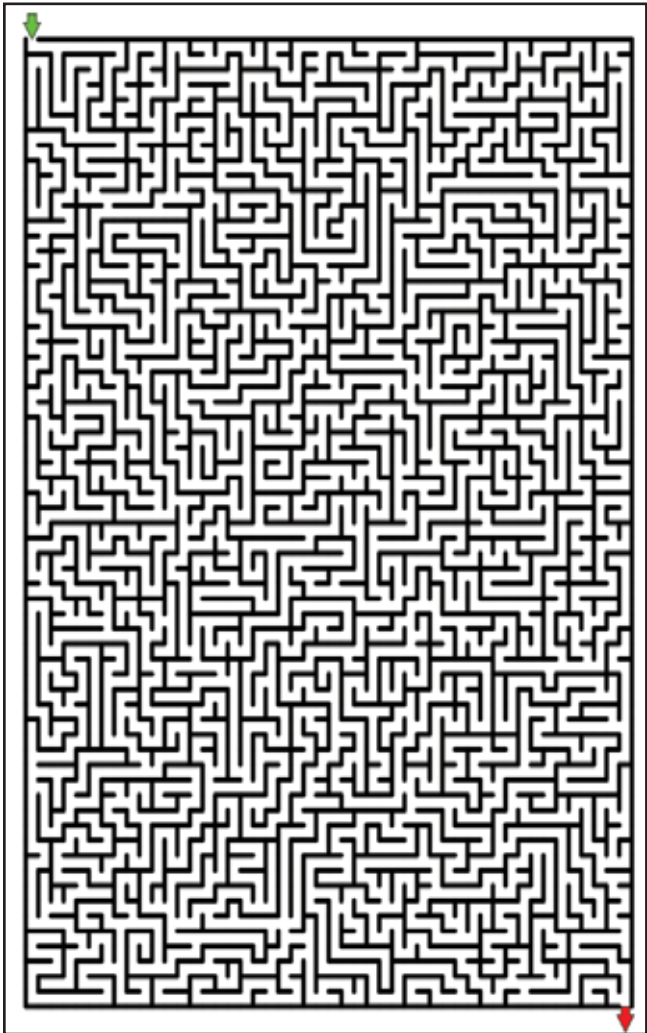
Panna Cotta

Tortone

Zabaglione

Zuppa Inglese

Kids Mazes



Color It



Kids Page

Friday, November 6, 2020

Join the dots



Word Scramble

Name: _____



NAME THE SHAPE

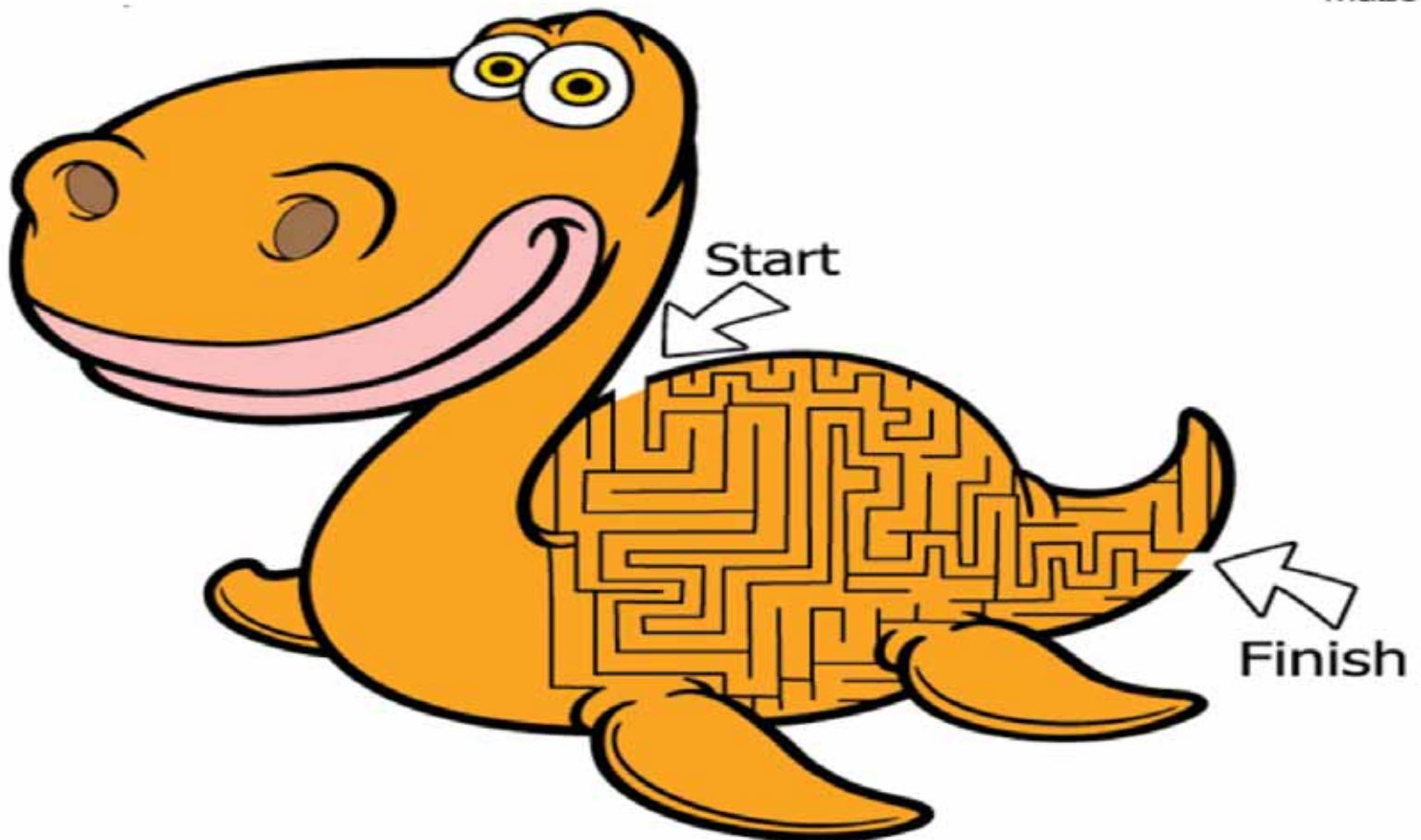
Word Scrambles

DIRECTIONS: Write the name for each shape on the dotted line using the scrambled letters.

 rcgeenatl	 pengtano	 brumohs
 ecricl	 sreuga	 airtnle
 hnoaexg	 piumeartz	 gcotano

Find the way

Maze #8



CLINIC PAGE



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- ◆ Laryngology Fellowship, McGill University- Canada.
- ◆ Fellow of the European Board of Otolaryngology – Head & Neck surgery.
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Mr. John Alwyn Fernandes, son of Mr. Mark Marian Fernandes, resident of 2-117, Kedar, Udyavara Post, Udipi, Pin:574118, Karnataka and Ms. Joslin John Sequeira, daughter of Mr. John Sequeira, resident of H.No.4-109C, Twins Villa, Anagalli Po_s,t, Kundapura, Udipi, Pin 576211, Karnataka, both Indian nationals presently residing in Kuwait, have given notice of intended marriage between them under the Foreign Marriage Act, 1969. If anyone has any objection to the proposed marriage, he/she may file the same with the undersigned according to the procedure laid down under the Act/Ru le within thirty days from the date of publication of this notice. Communications in this regard can be made by Email (cw2.kuwait@mea.gov.in) / letters / telephonic calls (00965 - 22550171, 00965 - 22533125).

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(Ranveer Bharti)
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Expected Weather for the Next 24 Hours

BY DAY: Rather hot and Relatively humid over coastal areas with light variable wind to light to moderate south easterly wind with speed of 08 - 35 km/h and some scattered clouds will appear.

BY NIGHT: Fair and Relatively humid specially over coastal areas with light to moderate south easterly wind to light variable wind with speed of 08 - 35 km/h with a chance for light fog forming over some areas and some

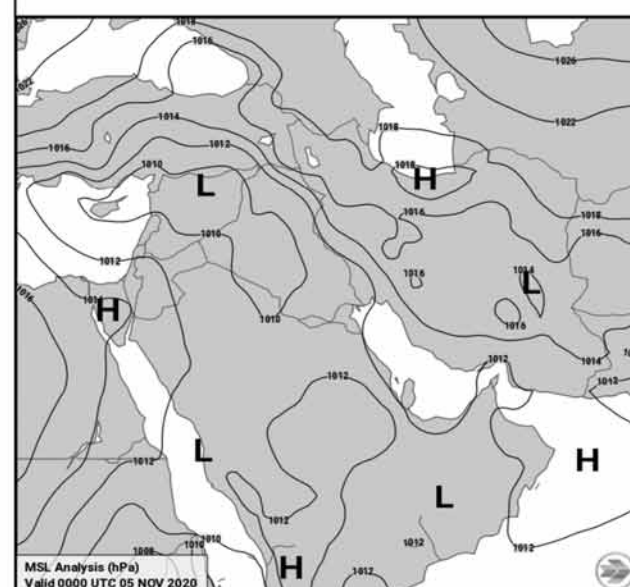
WEATHER WARNING

No Current Warnings

STATION	MAX. EXP.	MIN. REC.
KUWAIT CITY	33 °C	21 °C
KUWAIT AIRPORT	34 °C	15 °C
ABDALY	35 °C	18 °C
BUBYAN	- °C	- °C
JAHRA	35 °C	18 °C
FAILAKA ISLAND	- °C	- °C
SALMIYAH	28 °C	23 °C
AHMADI	- °C	- °C
NUWAISIB	33 °C	17 °C
WAFRA	35 °C	18 °C
SALMY	36 °C	17 °C

SFC. CHART

05/11/2020 0000 UTC



4 DAYS FORECAST

DAY	DATE	WEATHER	Temperatures		Wind Direction	Wind Speed
			MAX.	MIN.		
Friday	11/06	Rather hot and Partly cloudy to cloudy and Relatively humid over coastal areas	35 °C	15 °C	SE	12 - 40 km/h
Saturday	11/07	Rather hot and Partly cloudy to cloudy and Relatively humid over coastal areas with a	34 °C	17 °C	SE	12 - 40 km/h
Sunday	11/08	Rather hot and Partly cloudy to cloudy and Relatively humid over coastal areas with a	34 °C	19 °C	SE	12 - 38 km/h
Monday	11/09	Rather hot and Cloudy and Relatively humid over coastal areas with a chance for rain that	34 °C	20 °C	SE-SW	15 - 40 km/h

PRAYER TIMES

Fajr	04:43
Sunrise	06:04
Zuhr	11:32
Asr	14:37
Sunset	16:59
Isha	18:18

RECORDED YESTERDAY AT KUWAIT AIRPORT

MAX. Temp.	35 °C
MIN. Temp.	15 °C
MAX. RH	86 %
MIN. RH	14 %
MAX. Wind	S 21 km/h
TOTAL RAINFALL IN 24 HR.	0 mm

All times are local time unless otherwise stated.

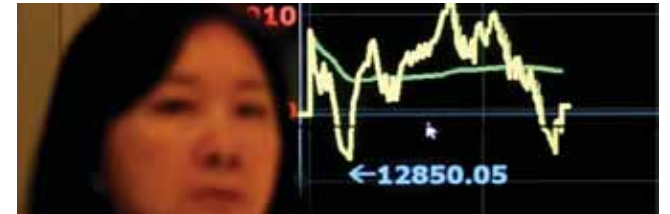
UP:0

Airlines

Kuwait Airways	171
Jazeera Airways	177
Turkish Airlines	1884918
FlyDubai	22414400
Qatar Airways	22423888
KLM	22425747
Royal Jordanian	22418064/5/6
British Airways	22425635
Air France	22430224
Emirates	22921555
Air India	22456700

Business

FRIDAY, NOVEMBER 6, 2020

34 Indonesia tumbles into first recession for two decades**35** 'Liquid window' harnesses light and heat to save energy in buildings**36** World stocks rally, dollar slides awaiting clear US vote outcome

LONDON: A couple sit on a bench as the fog lifts over the skyline of the City of London yesterday as England enters a second novel coronavirus COVID-19 lockdown. — AFP

BoE ramps up stimulus amid virus, Brexit

UK's Sunak extends furlough pay subsidies until end of March

LONDON: The Bank of England increased its already huge bond-buying stimulus by a larger-than-expected 150 billion pounds (\$195 billion) as it braced for more economic damage from new coronavirus lockdowns and damage from Brexit, too. On the day England began a four-week lockdown to curb a second wave of COVID-19, which is killing as many Britons each day as in May, the BoE said it was still looking into the pros and cons of taking interest rates negative, but gave no update on the process.

"If the outlook for inflation weakens, the Committee stands ready to take whatever additional action is necessary to achieve its remit," the BoE said as it cut its growth forecasts. Britain's economy was set to shrink by a record 11 percent in 2020 overall, more than the 9.5 percent it had forecast in March, and it cut its estimate for next year's recovery.

"The outlook for the economy remains unusu-

ally uncertain," the BoE said, pointing to the COVID-19 crisis and the still unresolved trading relationship between Britain and its closest trading partners in the European Union after Jan. 1. Britain's economy has been supported by a surge in debt-fuelled spending by the government, and the BoE is buying up many of those bonds.

Finance minister Rishi Sunak is due to speak in parliament later yesterday. His emergency spending and tax cuts have saddled Britain with its biggest budget deficit since World War Two. The BoE kept its benchmark Bank Rate at 0.1 percent, as expected in a Reuters poll. It made little mention of negative rates while a consultation with banks over the practicalities is underway.

Sterling rose against the dollar and the euro after the announcements and bond yields fell.

The increase in the size of the BoE's asset-purchase program took it to 895 billion pounds, 50 billion pounds more than expected by most

economists. The central bank said that would give it enough firepower to stretch its buying of government bonds through to the end of 2021, but the purchases could be sped up if needed.

Slower recovery, higher unemployment

The central bank now expects Britain's economy to shrink by 2 percent during the fourth quarter and only exceed its size before the COVID-19 pandemic in the first quarter of 2022. Previously, it had predicted the end of next year. Unemployment was set to peak 7.75 percent in the second quarter of next year, much higher than its most recent reading of 4.5 percent.

Gross domestic product was likely to grow by 7.25 percent in 2021, weaker than a previous forecast of 9 percent. But its two-year inflation forecast remained unchanged at 2 percent, the central bank's target. "Our view is that inflation will be closer to 1.5 percent by the end of 2022.

That's why we believe the Bank will still have to increase its policy support," said Ruth Gregory, an economist at Capital Economics. JP Morgan analyst Allan Monks said that the prospect of weak inflation next year would pressure the BoE to do more, and that the likelihood of negative rates in the second half of 2021 was growing. As well as COVID-19, Britain faces the risk of a trade shock when its post-Brexit transition with the EU expires on Dec. 31.

Meanwhile, British finance minister Rishi Sunak yesterday extended the coronavirus furlough scheme, which provides 80 percent of the pay of temporarily laid-off workers, until the end of March and would provide billions of pounds of other support for the economy. "To give people across the UK certainty over the winter, I can announce today that the furlough scheme will not be extended for one month - it will be extended until the end of March," Sunak told parliament. — Agencies

Business

Indonesia tumbles into first recession for two decades

Tourism, construction and trade among the hardest-hit sectors

JAKARTA: Indonesia's virus-hit economy contracted in the third quarter, plunging it into its first recession since the archipelago was mired in the Asian financial crisis more than 20 years ago.

Activity in Southeast Asia's biggest economy slumped 3.49 percent on-year in July-September, the statistics agency said yesterday, with tourism, construction and trade among the hardest-hit sectors. The data marked the second consecutive quarter of contraction after a 5.3 percent decline in April-June.

Indonesia last suffered a recession in 1998 and 1999 during a regional currency crisis that helped force the resignation of its long-term dictator Suharto. However, the depth of the current decline was easing, the agency said, adding it pointed to stronger figures in the last quarter of the year.

The economy "continues showing a contraction year-over-year but the quarter-on-quarter recovery was quite strong", said Anwita Basu, head of Asia Country Risk at Fitch Solutions in Singapore, highlighting a gradual pickup in manufacturing. "Some government efforts to continue with public works is reflected in that," she added.

Indonesia's economy was also in better shape

than two decades ago, with once-troubled commercial banks now stronger and ample foreign currency reserves at the central bank, Basu said.

Governments around the world have been struggling to contain the coronavirus, which has forced the shutdown of vast parts of the global economy. Indonesia's central bank cut interest rates several times this year in a bid to boost the struggling economy, while the government has unveiled more than \$48 billion in stimulus to help offset the impact of the virus, which forced a large-scale shutdown that hammered growth. Several million Indonesians have been laid off or furloughed as the vast country, home to nearly 270 million people, has battled to contain the crisis.

Covid-19 infections have topped 420,000 and there have been more than 14,000 deaths, putting Indonesia among the worst-hit Asian countries.

However, the true scale of the crisis is widely believed to be much bigger in Indonesia, which has one of the world's lowest testing rates. President Joko Widodo has been widely criticised over his government's handling of the pandemic, as it appeared to prioritise the economy.

Boosting annual growth above five percent had been a key priority for Widodo in his second term, which began late last year. On Mon-



JAKARTA: Light traffic moving along a main road in central Jakarta after months of the government's policy implementing work from home. —AFP

day, the president signed into law a package of pro-business bills aimed at cutting red tape and drawing more foreign investment as he pushes an infrastructure-focused policy. But the con-

troversial legislation has sparked mass protests in cities across the nation, as activists warned it would be catastrophic for labor and environmental protections. —AFP

ABK launches limited time offer of 50% discount on American Tourister suitcases



KUWAIT: Al-Ahli Bank of Kuwait (ABK) launched an exclusive offer in collaboration with American Tourister, a world leading, fashionable and youthful international luggage brand. For a limited period of two days, namely (Friday and Saturday) 6th & 7th November 2020, ABK is offering customers a 50 percent discount, redeemable online, for American Tourister Bricklane Spinner suitcases. The set of three suitcases is originally worth KD 49,900 and can now be bought for KD 24,900.

With only 250 sets of Bricklane Spinner suitcases available, the offer will be on a first

come basis. ABK credit and prepaid cardholders can avail the 50 percent discount, capped at 2 sets per customer, by inserting the first six digits of their cards when purchasing online from www.americantourister.com.kw.

ABK credit and prepaid cards are synonymous with convenience and security, providing a secure option to pay for online and in-store transactions. Through this collaboration with American Tourister, ABK reiterates its commitment to provide its customers with rewarding value propositions and convenient online shopping experiences.

New blow for Paris shopkeepers as lockdown bites

PARIS: As late-night shoppers have continued to throng Parisian stores selling takeaway alcohol and food amid a new national lockdown, the city's mayor announced yesterday that some will be forced to close at 10:00 pm to prevent coronavirus-spreading gatherings. Restaurants and bars are already shuttered under stay-at-home orders that entered into force for a month last Friday, but takeaways are allowed and supermarkets, specialist food stores, liquor stores and night shops remain open, along with other businesses offering "essential" services. "Faced with the worrying health situation, to avoid gatherings, I have agreed to a request from the police department to close some places that sell takeaway food and alcohol from 10:00 pm," Mayor Anne Hidalgo said on Twitter.

She told BFM television that several gatherings at such establishments have been reported even as France, and Paris in particular, is dealing with a fast-growing second wave of coronavirus cases.

On Wednesday, the public health agency said there had been more than 40,500 new infections in 24 hours and 385 deaths in hospi-

tal—a figure that excludes deaths at care homes, which are reported sporadically. The overall French death toll now stands at 38,674, with 4,089 people in intensive care, out of 6,400 beds available nationwide.

About a quarter of intensive care cases are in the greater Paris region. The new lockdown allows people to leave home only to go to the office, if working-from-home is not possible; to go to the doctor; exercise outdoors; drop children off at school; or do essential shopping.

A self-signed permission slip is needed for each excursion, or an electronic version on the government's Tous AntiCovid contact tracing app. Hidalgo's announcement came after confusion earlier in the week when government spokesman Gabriel Attal announced a new curfew for Paris, on top of the lockdown, which was quickly denied by the prime minister's office.

The mayor said the new measure did not amount to a curfew, since it did not affect all types of stores.

Health Minister Olivier Veran was due to give an update on the crisis later, and media reports speculate he will unveil even tougher restrictions as hospitals keep filling up. Hidalgo described a "very worrying situation" in the capital and its suburbs, and said she had proposed that extra space be made available for school classes to ensure adequate social distancing for pupils and staff. Libraries, theatres and gymnasiums emptied by the new lockdown could be put to use, she said. — AFP

Business

‘Liquid window’ harnesses light and heat to save energy in buildings

KUALA LUMPUR: A newly developed “liquid window” can block sunlight to keep a building cool but also absorb heat to be gradually released during the day or night to cut energy costs, scientists said.

The window, invented by researchers at Nanyang Technological University, Singapore (NTU), uses a hydrogel-based liquid between glass panels and was found to reduce energy consumption in buildings by up to 45 percent compared to traditional glass windows. It was also about 30 percent more energy-efficient than commercially available energy-efficient glass, as well as cheaper, said the NTU scientists who spent almost a decade on the project.

“Previously people only talked about blocking the sunlight in the summer and letting the sunlight come in in the winter, but nobody talked about heat storage - we’re the first to do this,” said lead researcher Long Yi. The “liquid window” material can be used for small or large pieces of glass.

“It’s just like water,” Yi told the Thomson Reuters Foundation. Energy-guzzling buildings, many of which are heated by fossil fuels, account for 40 percent of global energy usage, and windows are responsible for half of that energy consumption, according to a 2009 United Nations report. The International Energy Agency said direct and indirect planet-warming emissions from electricity and commercial heat used in buildings rose to their highest recorded level in 2019, accounting for 28 percent of global energy-related CO2 emissions. The increase was partly fuelled by growing energy demand for heat-

ing and cooling, with rising air-conditioner ownership and extreme weather, the agency noted in a 2020 report. Conventional energy-saving windows are made with expensive coatings that cut down infra-red light passing in or out of a building, helping reduce demand for heating and cooling. But they do not regulate visible light, a major component of sunlight that causes buildings to heat up.

To overcome the limitations, the NTU researchers mixed micro-hydrogel, water and a stabiliser, finding it can effectively reduce energy consumption in a variety of climates as it automatically responds to changes in temperature.

The liquid mixture in the “smart window” turns opaque or frosted in appearance when exposed to heat, blocking sunlight. When temperatures cool, it returns to its original clear, transparent state, letting in light and heat. NTU scientists conducted simulations using building models and weather data from Shanghai, Las Vegas, Riyadh and Singapore, as well as outdoor tests in Singapore, Guangzhou and Beijing. They hope to start working with businesses soon to spark commercial interest. The windows, most suited to office buildings that are occupied during the day, can be adapted for different locations. But they are most effective in the tropics and places where temperatures rise during the day and fall sharply at night, such as the Middle East, said Long. Tests also suggested the smart liquid window reduces noise 15 percent more effectively than double-glazed windows. —Reuters



Rising demand for cooling and heating in commercial buildings has pushed up their carbon emissions - could temperature-sensitive windows help? —Reuters

Commerzbank swings to loss on coronavirus

FRANKFURT: Germany’s second-largest lender Commerzbank yesterday reported a third quarter net loss of 69 million euros after provisions against a coronavirus hit economy and a restructuring that will close branches and cut jobs. Operating profit dropped nearly two-thirds to 168 million euros, weighed down by risk provisions on its loan portfolio that doubled in a year due to the pandemic.

“We have a stable customer business and a strong capital position,” finance chief Betina Orlopp said, adding that this “represents a good basis for future impacts arising from the coronavirus crisis”. “We have paved the way for further cost savings,” Orlopp added. Commerzbank, like its crosstown rival Deutsche Bank, is cutting thousands of jobs as it looks to restructure.

It is shutting 200 branches as consumers pivot to contactless spending and online accounts, and cutting as many as 10,000 jobs. This resulted in 201 million euros of charges from restructuring, driving third-quarter earnings into loss. The third quarter net loss of 69 million euros compared with a profit of 297 million for the same period last year. Commerzbank also confirmed that it expects to end the year with a net loss, which would be the first since 2009.

Last year, it posted a net profit of 644 million euros. The task of getting the bank back on track will fall to its new boss from the start of 2021, Manfred Knof, a defector from Deutsche Bank. He will replace Martin Zielke, who resigned in July after being criticized by its second-biggest shareholder, investment house Cerberus. —AFP

Model: Bricklane
Size: 55 cm, 69 cm, 80 cm

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Business

World stocks rally, dollar slides awaiting clear US vote outcome

Election uncertainty turns focus on Fed

LONDON: Stock markets rallied yesterday and the dollar slid against the euro and pound as US election uncertainty reigned ahead of a key Federal Reserve update. The knife-edge US presidential race has tilted toward Joe Biden, with Democrat wins in Michigan and Wisconsin bringing him close to a majority. But President Donald Trump claimed he was being cheated and has gone to court to try and stop vote counting.

"Likely Republican control of the Senate should put paid to increased corporate regulation and taxation while a new administration in the White House may well dial down tensions with other global superpowers on issues like trade," noted AJ Bell investment director Russ Mould.

"This certainly seemed to be the thinking in Asia overnight as Japanese and Chinese equities staged substantial rallies." Europe picked up the baton by extending strong gains won Wednesday that were seen also on Wall Street.

Hopes for a new economic rescue package out of Washington provided support to equities, even though any spending bill will not be as big as previously thought under a Democrat-run Congress. Dealers were also keeping tabs on coronavirus developments with England going into lockdown for a second time, joining France and other key European economies, though observers said they had largely been priced into markets now.

Central bank focus

The Bank of England yesterday unveiled an extra £150 billion (\$195 billion) in cash stimulus as it forecast a deeper recession than previously thought for the coronavirus-wracked UK economy.

The BoE said recovery would depend also on Britain striking a post-Brexit trade deal with the European Union. The EU yesterday warned that Europe's economy would not return to pre-virus normality before 2023. The pound rose nearly one percent against the dollar yesterday, also amid uncertainty over the election outcome and a Federal Reserve rate decision, said Michael Hewson, chief market analyst at CMC Markets UK. "Given the current electoral uncertainty it is quite likely that the Federal Reserve will reiterate its determination to support the US economy over the course of the next few months," he noted.

The Fed was unlikely to offer much in the way of specifics at the end of its two-day policy meeting, besides repeating its commitment to keep the benchmark borrowing rate at zero for the foreseeable future. But Fed Chair Jerome Powell could take the opportunity to signal a willingness to find new tools to help the economy, after the bank earlier this year pumped trillions of dollars of liquidity into the financial system and cut the US lending rate.

With America's knife-edge election yet to be called, and the Covid-19 pandemic surging across the nation, analysts will be watching the Federal Reserve for signs of whether it may step in again to help the US economy survive the coronavirus downturn. The Fed's rate-setting Federal Open Market Committee (FOMC) is unlikely to offer much in the way of specifics in its statement at the end of its two-day policy meeting today besides repeating its commitment to keep the benchmark borrowing rate at zero for the foreseeable future. But Fed Chair Jerome Powell could take the opportunity at his press conference following the meeting to signal a willingness to find new tools to help the economy, after the bank earlier this year pumped trillions of dollars of liquidity into the financial system and cut the lending rate.

The central bank chief has been increasingly vocal in his calls for Washington to spend more to help support the recovery after most provisions of a massive stimulus measure passed in March expired. However Congress failed to reach an agreement on a new



TAIPEI: A woman walks past a monitor showing the stocks' index outside the Taiwan Stocks Exchange in Taipei yesterday. —AFP

spending bill before the election, and poll results thus far show Biden with a better chance of winning the presidency than Trump, while Republicans will likely keep control of the Senate and Democrats the House.

"A split Congress will likely lead to a less-than-robust next round of household and business welfare payments and that, too, could weigh on the recovery," economist Joel Naroff said.

Republican Senate Majority Leader Mitch McConnell, who won reelection, said Wednesday he wants to quickly approve new legislation in the "lame duck" session marking the final weeks of the current Congress, but in the past he has favored only limited spending programs. —AFP

With PlayStation 5 launch, Sony needs a high score

TOKYO: Sony launches its PlayStation 5 console next week angling for a mega-hit, and with the Japanese firm increasingly dependent on the lucrative gaming sector there is little room for error.

The PlayStation 5 will enter a head-to-head battle with rival Microsoft's new Xbox, released two days earlier, with both hoping to capture the market in the run-up to Christmas. But the showdown has significantly higher stakes for Sony. Since the PS1 launched in 1994, gaming has become the biggest segment of Sony's business, generating the lion's share of profit and about a third of sales—more than electronics products or music. By comparison, gaming made up less than 10 percent of Microsoft's sales for the year ending in June 2020.

Sony sold twice as many PS4s as Microsoft did Xbox Ones, and analysts say it has learned lessons from the disappointing roll-out of the PS3. "We have seen in previous generations that at launch there are two major factors that will impact a generation's success—the first to launch and the cheapest," said Morris Garrard, an analyst at Futuresource Consulting.

He cited the "relative failure" of the PS3, which went on sale a year after the Xbox 360 and at a higher price. The PS5 is priced at \$500, like the Xbox Series X, while a version without a disk reader costs \$400.



TOKYO: Sony Playstation console at a computer shop in Tokyo's Akihabara electronic shops district. Sony launches its PlayStation 5 console on November 12, 2020 angling for a mega-hit. —AFP

That's more than the \$300 price tag for Microsoft's less powerful Xbox Series S, which also has no disk reader. Sony's margin on the consoles will be slim—possibly even loss-making—analysts say, and the firm is counting on sales of games, services and online subscriptions to turn a profit. —AFP

Nintendo net profit rockets 243.6% in H1

TOKYO: Japanese gaming giant Nintendo said yesterday its first-half net profit soared 243.6 percent on-year as it upgraded its full-year sales and profit forecasts, with coronavirus lockdowns driving extraordinary demand. The gaming industry has been one of the few sectors to thrive during the pandemic, with people forced to stay at home often turning to games for some escapism and to pass time.

That has translated into soaring sales and demand, with Nintendo saying its bottom line profit jumped to 213.1 billion yen (\$2.0 billion) for the six months to September. Sales climbed 73.3 percent to 769.5 billion yen, with demand for its popular Switch console showing no sign of dying down as the device enters the crucial fourth year since its launch. Nintendo's new console sales have tended to peak in the third year after release, and then taper off. With the holiday season approaching, and a new wave of infections forcing governments in Europe and elsewhere to reinstate lockdowns, Nintendo upgraded its net profit forecast to 300 billion yen for the fiscal year to March 2021 from an earlier estimate of 200 billion yen.

Full-year sales now are projected at 1.4 trillion yen, compared with 1.2 trillion yen forecast earlier. Nintendo is seeing "another blow-out quarter," said Amir Anvarzadeh, a strategist at Asymmetric Advisors, calling the results "a major pandemic-led positive distortion." "We will have three Christmas quarters in one term," he added, because of the unusually high demand associated with the pandemic. The brisk results come on the back of runaway success of the Switch and Nintendo's hit "Animal Crossing" game. —AFP

Sports

Friday, November 6, 2020

‘Great achievement’: Nadal claims 1,000th win of career

PARIS: Rafael Nadal said he was proud of a “great achievement” after securing the 1,000th Tour-level victory of his illustrious career on Wednesday, becoming the fourth man to reach that mark with a comeback win over Feliciano Lopez in the Paris Masters second round. The 20-time Grand Slam champion, back in the French capital less than a month after winning his 13th Roland Garros title, edged out his fellow Spaniard 4-6, 7-6 (7/5), 6-4.

“I am proud about a lot of things, but I faced some challenges in my career in terms of body injuries,” said Nadal. “But I always had the passion to keep going and the humility to keep going when things are going in a way you don’t expect. It’s a great achievement for me.”

Nadal, whose first match win on the ATP Tour came in April 2002 when he was just 15, is fourth on the all-time list, with Jimmy Connors leading the way on 1,274 victories, 32 more than second-placed Roger Federer. “One negative thing about getting to 1,000 — is that you’re very old as it means you have to have had a very long career,” added Nadal. “But I’m very happy.”

Ivan Lendl also passed the 1,000-win barrier. Nadal was given a special presentation to celebrate his achievement after the

match in a near-empty Bercy Arena, with the event being played behind closed doors after France entered its second coronavirus lockdown last week. The 34-year-old Nadal, bidding for a first Paris Masters title, will face Jordan Thompson in the third round after the Australian beat Croatia’s Borna Coric 2-6, 6-4, 6-2.

Taking the trophy in Paris this week would see Nadal equal Novak Djokovic’s record of 36 Masters titles. He struggled to find his rhythm for much of the match as 39-year-old Lopez served excellently, saving the first six break points he faced, but Nadal stepped it up in the second-set tie-break.

The top seed grabbed the crucial break in the first game of the decider and then eased to victory after saving two break points himself in the next game. “It was a very tough match,” said Nadal. “I started in the worst way possible with a break. Against him, that’s difficult because you’re under pressure for the whole match.” The world number two is playing the tournament for the eighth time in his career, but he pulled out midway through his last two appearances due to injury. His best run at Bercy was when he lost in the 2007 final to Argentinian David Nalbandian. — AFP



PARIS: Spain’s Rafael Nadal celebrates as he receives the trophy of his one thousandth victory of the ATP at the end of his men’s singles second round tennis match against Spain’s Feliciano Lopez on day 3 at the ATP World Tour Masters 1000 - Paris Masters (Paris Bercy) - indoor tennis tournament at The AccorHotels Arena in Paris on Wednesday. — AFP

49ers shut facilities after COVID-19 case

SAN FRANCISCO: The San Francisco 49ers shuttered the team’s facilities on Wednesday after a player tested positive for COVID-19, the NFL club said in a statement. US media reported that 49ers receiver Kendrick Bourne had returned a positive test for the coronavirus on the eve of their team’s clash with the Green Bay Packers at Levi’s Stadium.

“The San Francisco 49ers were informed today that a player has tested positive for COVID-19 and the individual immediately went into self-quarantine,” the Niners statement said. “Our organization has entered the NFL’s intensive protocol and we are working with the league on contact tracing to identify high risk individuals. All team functions will be conducted virtually today. The health and safety of our players, staff and community are the organization’s highest priority. We will continue to

work closely with the NFL and medical professionals and will follow their direction.”

Later Wednesday, the club announced that left tackle Trent Williams and wideouts Brandon Aiyuk and Deebo Samuel also were going on the COVID-19 list, and they ruled Aiyuk and Williams out for Thursday’s game. Samuel is already out with a hamstring injury. Williams, Aiyuk and Samuel were all deemed close contacts of Bourne, ESPN reported. The loss of the players is another blow to the 49ers, whose season has been disrupted by a slew of injuries. Quarterback Jimmy Garoppolo (ankle) and tight end George Kittle (foot) both face lengthy spells on the sidelines after being injured in Sunday’s defeat to the Seattle Seahawks.

The Packers, meanwhile, head to California dealing with a coronavirus scare of their own. Running back AJ Dillon tested positive for the virus on Monday, leading to running back Jamaal Williams and linebacker Kamal Martin being withdrawn from Thursday’s game in Santa Clara after they were deemed to have been in close contact with Dillon. — AFP

NBA close to Dec 22 start date for 2020-21

NEW YORK: The National Basketball Players Association is close to a deal that would start the 2020-21 NBA season on Dec 22 with a reduced schedule of 72 games per team, according to ESPN. The Athletic previously reported the possibility of a 72-game season that would start just before Christmas. According to ESPN, the NBA’s board of governors and the NBPA were holding separate meetings on the matter yesterday with the expectation that the start date would be approved.

The upcoming regular season, if agreed upon, would be 10 games shy of a typical NBA regular-season schedule. The players association is expected to take a vote among team player representatives at some point Thursday, according to the ESPN report. A salary escrow in the vicinity of 18 percent was expected to be agreed upon for the next two years.

The NBA draft is scheduled for Nov 18, with training camps likely to open Dec 1. The projected start date would leave the possibility that the regular season would finish before the start of the 2021 Summer Olympics, which are set to begin on July 23 in Tokyo.

There is no indication when or if games in the 2020-21 season would be played in front of fans. The NBA lost \$800 million in ticket sales during the just-concluded season because of the ongoing pandemic, ESPN reported on Oct 28.

The league also reportedly lost \$400 million in sponsorship and merchandise plus \$200 million in “net negative impact” from China due to fallout from then-Houston Rockets general manager Daryl Morey expressing support for Hong Kong protestors against the Beijing government.

If agreed upon, the Dec 22 start date would leave just seven weeks before the opening of the new season. The deal being decided upon would override the original promise from the league to give players an eight-week notice before the start of the season.

The NBA became the first pro league to suspend play amid the COVID-19 pandemic, doing so on March 11. The league moved into a bubble in late July at the ESPN Wide World of Sports Complex near Orlando to finished out an abbreviated regular season.

The Los Angeles Lakers won the title during the most peculiar of seasons, defeating the Miami Heat in a six-game NBA Finals that was played only in front of the players’ family and close friends. The Lakers earned their deciding 106-93 victory over the Heat on Oct. 11, just 11 days shy of making it a full year from when they started their regular-season schedule with a loss to the Los Angeles Clippers. — Reuters

Maradona recovering well after brain surgery, doctor says

OLIVOS, Argentina: Doctors treating Argentine football legend Diego Maradona, who had successful brain surgery to remove a blood clot, are “amazed” at the rate of his recovery, his physician said Wednesday. Surgeons at a private clinic in Buenos Aires spent 80 minutes removing the clot on Tuesday night.

“I just saw him, he’s switched on, in a very good mood. We are amazed at how he’s healing,” said the doctor, Leopoldo Luque, who provided an update on the 60-year-old’s condition. “But we have to be careful because we are still in the post-operative period,” he cautioned.

“It is clear that he has no neurological complications,” said Luque, speaking to reporters through a mask. “There are other parameters that we are waiting to evaluate, because it is still very early. But the recovery is excellent.”

The comments sparked loud cheering and chanting from fans of Maradona who have hung banners depicting his glory day outside the clinic. “Once more his health has played a trick on him but he has antibodies to recover with the help of the people,” fan Oscar Medina told AFP.

World Cup winner Maradona had been taken to hospital in La Plata — where he is the coach of top-flight side Gimnasia y Esgrima — on Monday for

a series of tests after feeling unwell. A scan revealed the blood clot, and on Tuesday he was transferred to the clinic in a northern neighborhood of the capital. “We managed to successfully remove the clot. Diego coped well with the surgery,” Luque said in an earlier update.

Maradona, who turned 60 last week, has suffered ill health before. He has survived two heart attacks, and also contracted hepatitis and underwent gastric bypass surgery. Following this surgery, fellow Argentina football star Lionel Messi sent him a message of support. “Diego, all the strength in the world. My family and I want to see you well as soon as possible,” said the Barcelona forward, who like Maradona in his pomp wears the No 10 jersey.

‘Behaving strangely’

Due to his age and previous health issues, Maradona is considered high risk in relation to the coronavirus pandemic, which has hit Argentina hard. Several times in the last eight months he has been in isolation and was forced to stay at home last week after a bodyguard showed coronavirus symptoms, although he later tested negative. Prior to falling ill, Maradona had been depressed, his lawyer Matias Morla said on Wednesday.

The famously fast-living icon had only been able to spend half an hour at



OLIVOS, Argentina: A supporter of Argentine former football star and coach of Gimnasia y Esgrima La Plata, Diego Maradona, holds a doll depicting him as he remains outside the private clinic where he underwent a brain surgery for a blood clot, in Olivos, Buenos Aires province, Argentina, on Wednesday. — AFP

his own birthday celebration at his team’s training ground on Friday, when he had difficulty walking. “He was behaving strangely. He was very depressed and spoke about dead relatives that he missed,” said Morla.

He said Maradona was “very worried” about the surgery and praised Luque, adding that “if he hadn’t detected the clot, Maradona’s fate would have been different.” Luque insisted on Tuesday that the procedure was “a

routine operation.”

“The operation consists of a small incision to drain the blood. In 24 or 48 hours the patient can leave the hospital,” neurosurgeon Raul Matera told TyC Sports channel. Maradona’s daughter Dalma said she had visited her father after his surgery but did not give further details of his condition. “I just want to thank everyone for the constant displays of love for my dad, for my sister and for me, thanks to

everyone who prayed for him,” she tweeted on Wednesday morning.

Anemic

Maradona was transferred from the hospital in La Plata, 60 kilometers (37 miles) south of Buenos Aires, to the capital at 6:00 pm (21:00 GMT) on Tuesday accompanied by another daughter, Giannina. Dozens of Gimnasia fans outside the La Plata hospital chanted his name as he left.

Earlier in the day, Luque claimed Maradona was suffering from anemia — a lack of iron in his system — and dehydration. He also suggested Maradona’s lifestyle had contributed to his condition. “He’s an elderly patient with many pressures in his life. It’s a time when we must help him. It’s very difficult to be Maradona,” Luque said of the star.

He said it was a condition that also affected Vice President Cristina Kirchner when she was president. “It breaks my heart to see him like this,” Giannina tweeted the next day. Maradona has difficulty retaining iron due to gastric bypass surgery he underwent in 2005 to lose 50 kilograms (110 pounds), leaving him prone to anemia, Luque said. Though he has recovered from a well-documented addiction to hard drugs, Maradona takes medication in the form of tranquilizers and anxiolytics. — AFP

Late goals take Zamalek into final against arch rivals Ahly

JOHANNESBURG: Zamalek scored two late goals to beat Raja Casablanca 3-1 in Cairo Wednesday and set up an all-Egyptian CAF Champions League final against arch rivals Al-Ahly. Mostafa Mohamed netted twice to help complete a 4-1 semi-final triumph on aggregate and create the first title decider between clubs from the same country.

Raja cancelled the 1-0 lead Zamalek brought into the second leg of the semi-final when a deflected shot from Congolese Ben Malango found the net on 47 minutes behind closed doors due to the coronavirus.

Tunisian Ferjani Sassi levelled on the night and put Zamalek back in front on aggregate after 61 minutes with a superb curved shot after his first attempt had been blocked. Had Raja scored again they would have squeezed into the final on away goals, but the Moroccan outfit fell apart in the closing stages at the Cairo

International Stadium.

Mohamed gave Zamalek a 2-1 second leg lead with an unstoppable header past goalkeeper Mohamed Bouamira off a superb Ahmed ‘Zizo’ Sayed cross. The 22-year-old struck again three minutes later. Moroccan Achraf Bencharki, whose goal won the first leg in Casablanca, had a stoppage-time goal ruled out for offside.

The other semi-final, which was concluded last month and also pitted Cairo and Casablanca clubs against each other, saw Ahly beat Wydad at home and away. Ahly have won the elite African club competition a record eight times and five-time champions Zamalek share second place with TP Mazembe from the Democratic Republic of Congo. The single-match final will be played on November 27 at the Borg el Arab Stadium on the outskirts of ancient Egyptian Mediterranean city Alexandria. — AFP

Players concerned over Qatar trip for Asian Champions League

HONG KONG: Global footballers union FIFPRO has accused the Asian Football Confederation of failing to consult players before moving Champions League games to Qatar, saying some had voiced concerns over making the trip during the pandemic.

FIFPRO said it was “disappointed and concerned” about the lack of consultation, adding that players had complained about the risks of travelling and about quarantine periods that will interfere with family life, games and training.

The delayed AFC Champions League East competition, featuring clubs from Australia, China, Japan, Malaysia, South Korea and Thailand, will run from November 18 to December 4 in a bio-secure “bubble” in Qatar, followed by knockout games leading up to the final in Doha on December 19.

“FIFPRO is disappointed and concerned by the lack of consultation of professional footballers in the scheduling of the AFC Champions League in Qatar and the planning of COVID-19

protocols,” a statement said. “These matters have implications for their mental and physical health as well as their participation in domestic leagues.”

The global players union and affiliated associations in Australia, Japan, Malaysia, South Korea and Thailand, which represent 12 of the 16 clubs involved, were not consulted about the arrangements, FIFPRO said. “Furthermore, we have not received any information about the outbreak of COVID-19 in the tournament’s so-called ‘medical bubble’ during the western AFC region competition in September,” it added.

Saudi giants Al-Hilal were kicked out of the Champions League West competition in Qatar after 30 players and staff tested positive, leaving them unable to name the minimum 13-player match-day squad. The AFC defended the bio-security arrangements in Qatar at the time, saying there had been “no transmission of Covid-19 between two competing teams throughout the matches.” — AFP

Barca, Juve win in Champions League as woeful Man Utd beaten



BUDAPEST: Juventus' Portuguese forward Cristiano Ronaldo (C) passes the ball to Juventus' Spanish forward Alvaro Morata (2ndR) who scores the opening goal during the UEFA Champions League Group G football match Ferencváros TC v Juventus at the Puskas Arena in Budapest, Hungary, on Wednesday. — AFP

PARIS: Lionel Messi scored as Barcelona overcame a depleted Dynamo Kiev 2-1 in the Champions League on Wednesday, while Juventus eased Ferencváros aside and Manchester United slumped to an unexpected defeat in Turkey. Nine-man Paris Saint-Germain lost to RB Leipzig in a repeat of last season's semi-final and Chelsea proved too strong for Rennes, with Timo Werner twice converting from the penalty spot.

Making his 150th appearance in European competition, Messi dispatched an early penalty at Camp Nou after he was fouled in the area and Gerard Piqué headed in Ansu Fati's cross on the hour. Viktor Tsygankov grabbed a consolation for coronavirus-hit Dynamo as Barca, winless in four games in La Liga, recorded their third successive Group G victory to stay three points clear of Juventus. "We are happy because we won," said Barca coach Ronald Koeman. "But we have to play better than we did today. We have to improve, above all without the ball, where we haven't played well."

Cristiano Ronaldo made his first start for the

Italian champions since September after testing positive for Covid-19 in a 4-1 win at Hungarian side Ferencváros. However, the Portuguese star was outshone in Budapest by Alvaro Morata, whose two goals put Andrea Pirlo's team in control. Paulo Dybala added a third before an own goal from Lasha Dvali, with Franck Boli netting for the hosts in the final minute.

United produced a shambolic first-half defensive display as Ole Gunnar Solskjær's side lost 2-1 against Istanbul Basaksehir. Demba Ba collected the ball just inside his own half and raced through to beat goalkeeper Dean Henderson on 13 minutes, with Edin Visca smashing in a second after Juan Mata was stripped of possession.

Anthony Martial's header cut the deficit before half-time but United saw their momentum in Group H halted after wins over PSG and RB Leipzig last month. "You don't just turn up and get three points in the Champions League. We weren't good enough, that's it. It's not easy to be positive when you've lost the way we did," Solskjær told BT Sport.

PSG capitulate in Leipzig

Emil Forsberg's penalty earned Leipzig a 2-1 victory as they came from behind to beat a weakened Paris Saint-Germain, dealing a major blow to the Champions League aspirations of last season's runners-up.

Angel di Maria had given PSG an early lead in Germany but he then crucially missed a penalty for the French champions, who were missing both Neymar and Kylian Mbappé due to injury and ended the contest with nine men.

Christopher Nkunku levelled before half-time for Leipzig and Forsberg converted from the spot in the 57th minute before the visitors had both Idrissa Gueye and Presnel Kimpembe sent off. "It's difficult. It's maybe our fault because we didn't get the second goal and then made a mistake on the penalty," PSG boss Thomas Tuchel told RMC Sport. "There was a red card, it's then hard, 10 against 11. There were too many things going against us."

Chelsea strolled to a 3-0 win at home against Rennes who saw defender Dalbert sent off after conceding two penalties in the first half. Werner

took over spot-kick duties from Jorginho and confidently tucked both away before Tammy Abraham turned in a third for the Blues on 50 minutes. Frank Lampard's men have yet to concede in Group E and are level on seven points with Sevilla, who rallied to defeat Krasnodar 3-2 despite the dismissal of captain Jesus Navas late in the first half.

Goals from Magomed Suleymanov and Marcus Berg, the second a penalty, put Krasnodar ahead in Spain but Ivan Rakitic pulled one back for Sevilla before the break. Morocco striker Youssef En-Nesyri struck twice in four second-half minutes to floor Krasnodar and leave the Russians alongside Rennes on just one point.

Erling Braut Haaland notched a brace to lead Borussia Dortmund to a 3-0 win at Club Brugge and send the Germans top of Group F. Thorgan Hazard had opened the scoring in his native Belgium. Felipe Caicedo's late equaliser earned Lazio a 1-1 draw at Zenit Saint Petersburg after Aleksandr Erokhin had struck in the first half in front of some 17,000 fans in Russia. — AFP

Sassuolo target Serie A top spot after flying start

MILAN: Surprise package Sassuolo host lowly Udinese today looking to claim top spot in Serie A before their rivals return to domestic duties after a heavy week of European action. Roberto De Zerbi's side are second in Italy's top-flight, two points behind leaders AC Milan after beating Napoli 2-0 last time out for their first ever win at the Stadio San Paolo.

It was an impressive result for Sassuolo, in particular given that they were playing without their talismanic striker Francesco Caputo, who remains a doubt with a muscle problem. Sassuolo and 18th-placed Udinese open the seventh round of league action with their rivals playing at the weekend before the international break.

In addition to Caputo's possible absence, Sassuolo are also dealing with a COVID-19 outbreak with players Filip Djuricic, Lukas Haraslin and Federico Ricci and two staff members testing positive. But their performances have given their rivals reason to worry.

"A few years ago no-one thought Leicester City could win the Premier League," said Roma coach Paulo Fonseca who host Sassuolo on December 6. "I have a lot of admiration for the job Roberto De Zerbi is doing. He's a coach with a lot of courage and his side are playing some really good football."

De Zerbi led Sassuolo to eighth last season, with Caputo scoring 21 goals, for their second-best ever finish after sixth in the 2015-2016 season. Caputo has scored five in five games with his unbeaten team the top scorers in Serie A with 18 goals so far this term. "I hope this (win over Napoli) is yet more proof that convinces the players of the quality they have," said former Napoli midfielder De Zerbi, 41.

Juve travel to Lazio

Milan host Hellas Verona on Sunday, looking to extend

their own unbeaten start to the season. Coach Stefano Pioli's young side have been reborn since Zlatan Ibrahimovic's return in January as they target a first title since 2011, when the 39-year-old Swede was also on the team. "We are only at the beginning," warned Pioli. "We're a young side but are already mature on the pitch."

Third-placed Juventus travel to Lazio with Cristiano Ronaldo back after recovering from coronavirus. Juventus eased to a 4-1 Champions League win over Hungarian minnows Ferencváros midweek, and now look to reduce the four-point gap separating them from Milan at Lazio, who are six points off top spot in 10th.

The Roman club are in the eye of a storm after the Italian Football Federation launched a probe over possible breaches in coronavirus regulations with star striker Ciro Immobile missing their 1-1 Champions League draw at Zenit Saint Petersburg. Atalanta, in fourth, host sixth-placed Inter Milan, with both teams still reeling from their Champions League defeats. The Bergamo side fell 5-0 at home to Liverpool with Antonio Conte's Inter losing 3-2 at Real Madrid. — AFP

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