



2 Amir accepts Sisi's invitation to visit Egypt



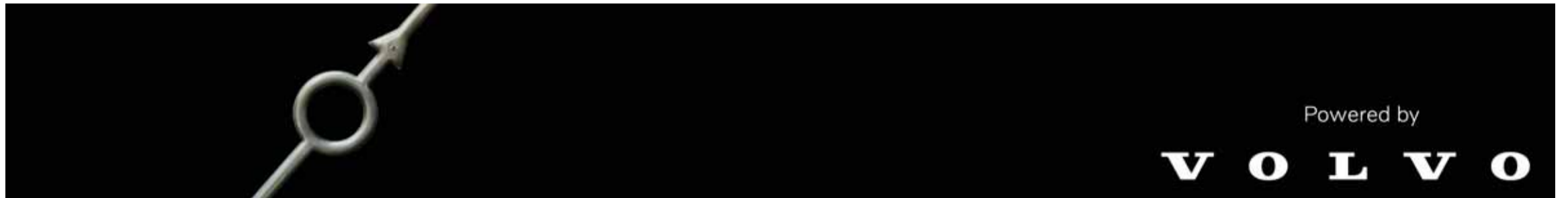
8 Questions arise as lab execs sell shares worth millions



13 Egypt fortress renovation boosts hopes for ecotourism

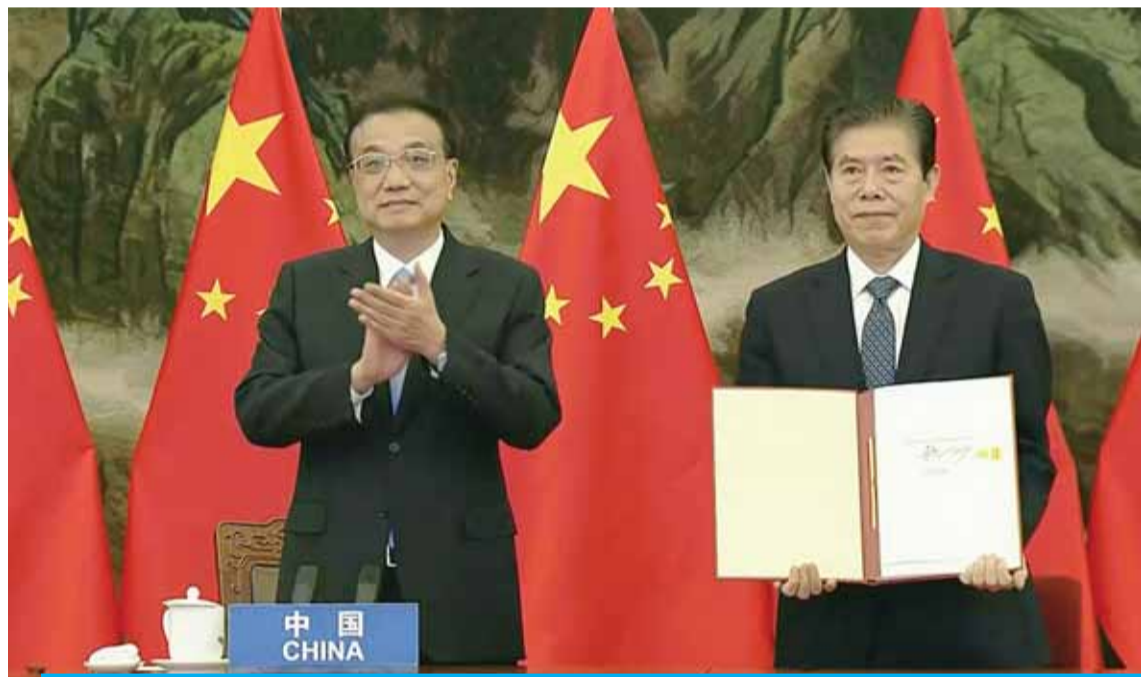


16 Hamilton wins seventh F1 world title, equals record



Asia-Pacific nations form world's largest trade bloc

RCEP a major coup for China • Deal does not include US • Door open for India



A screen grab shows China's Premier Li Keqiang (left) clapping as Chinese Minister of Commerce Zhong Shan holds up the agreement during the signing ceremony for the Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership (RCEP) trade pact at the ASEAN summit that is being held online in Hanoi. — AFP

HANOI: Fifteen Asia-Pacific countries yesterday signed the world's biggest free trade deal, seen as a huge coup for China in extending its influence. The Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership (RCEP) includes 10 Southeast Asian economies along with China, Japan, South Korea, New Zealand and Australia, with members accounting for around 30 percent of global GDP.

First proposed in 2012, the deal was finally sealed at the end of a Southeast Asian summit as leaders push to get their pandemic-hit economies back on track. In an unusual ceremony, held virtually because of the coronavirus pandemic, leaders of RCEP countries took turns standing behind their trade ministers who, one by one, signed copies of the agreement, which they then showed triumphantly to the cameras.

"Under the current global circumstances, the fact the RCEP has been signed after eight years of negotiations brings a ray of light and hope amid the clouds," said Chinese Premier Li Keqiang after the virtual signing. "It clearly shows that multilateralism is the right way, and represents the right direction of the global economy and humanity's progress."

The agreement to lower tariffs and open up the services trade within the bloc does not include the United States and is viewed as a Chinese-led alternative to a now-defunct Washington trade initiative.

The RCEP "solidifies China's broader regional geopolitical ambitions around the Belt and Road initiative", said Alexander Capri, a trade expert at the National University of Singapore Business School, referring to Beijing's signature investment project that envisions Chinese infrastructure and influence spanning the globe. "It's sort of a complementary element."

But many of the signatories are battling severe coronavirus outbreaks and they are also hoping the RCEP will help mitigate the crippling economic cost of the pandemic. Indonesia recently tumbled into its first recession for two decades while the Philippine economy shrunk by 11.5 percent on-year in the latest quarter. "COVID has reminded the region of why trade matters and governments are more eager than ever to have positive economic growth," said Deborah Elms, executive director of the Asian Trade Centre, a Singapore-based consultancy.

India pulled out of the agreement last year over concerns about cheap Chinese goods entering the country and was a notable absentee during yesterday's virtual signing. Signatories to the agreement said they hoped New Delhi would rejoin in the future, acknowledging its "strategic importance" to the deal which already covers more than two billion people.

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Plans to allow domestic workers to return directly

KUWAIT: President of the Directorate General of Civil Aviation Sheikh Salman Sabah Al-Salem Al-Hmoud Al-Sabah met Kuwait Airways Chairman Ali Mohammad Al-Dakhan and Jazeera Airways Chairman Marwan Boodai to prepare a detailed schedule to restart flights from some countries from where passengers are banned from directly flying into Kuwait. They also discussed the institutional health quarantine requirement in Kuwait as instructed by Health Minister Sheikh Dr Basel Al-Sabah, Al-Anbaa Arabic daily reported yesterday, quoting informed sources.

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Court hearing cases of barred candidates

By B Izzak

KUWAIT: The lower court yesterday heard the first case of a candidate disqualified from running in next month's elections and set more cases to be

UAE widens 'golden' visa eligibility

DUBAI: The United Arab Emirates will extend its "golden" visa system - which grants 10-year residency in the Gulf state - to certain professionals, specialized degree-holders and others, the UAE's vice president said yesterday. Foreigners in the UAE usually have renewable visas valid for only a few years tied to employment. The government in the past couple of years has made its visa policy more flexible, offering longer residencies for certain types of investors, students

and professionals.

All holders of doctorate degrees, medical doctors and also computer, electronics, programming, electrical and biotechnology engineers are eligible, UAE Vice President and the ruler of Dubai Sheikh Mohammed bin Rashid Al-Maktoum said in a statement. Also eligible are those with specialized degrees in artificial intelligence, big data and epidemiology, as well as high school students living in the UAE who rank top in the country and students from certain universities with a GPA of 3.8 or higher.

After first announcing a long-term visa plan in 2018, the UAE in 2019 started granting 5- and 10-year renewable visas to certain foreign investors, entrepreneurs, chief

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Trump: Biden 'won because election rigged'

WASHINGTON: US President Donald Trump appeared accidentally to admit his election defeat in a tweet yesterday morning - before reversing course to claim he won, and once again push unsubstantiated claims of mass fraud in the vote. Trump has refused to concede the Nov 3 US election to challenger Joe Biden, and repeatedly said he intends to overturn the result through legal cases.

His aides say he is preparing for a second term in office despite the vote count confirming Biden's clear victory. "He won because the Election was Rigged," Trump tweeted early yesterday. The phrasing - coming two days after a slip in which he said "time will tell" if he remains president - was immediately seized upon as one more step towards admitting defeat. But the president soon followed up with a sharp U-turn, tweeting "He only won in the eyes of the FAKE NEWS MEDIA. I concede NOTHING! We have a long way to go."

Thousands of Trump supporters rallied in Washington on Saturday, backing his claims of fraud, with clashes erupting in the evening with

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Biden makes diplomacy dull again

WASHINGTON: After Donald Trump in his first week as president spoke to Australia's prime minister, leaks of the call left many dumbfounded, with the new US leader haranguing and hanging up on the close ally. When Joe Biden spoke by phone Thursday with Prime Minister Scott Morrison, the president-elect's office said Biden hoped to work with him on "many common challenges" and the Australian leader said he would forward a study on how his country fought COVID-19 through contact tracing.

Following four years of presidential pique and chronic chaos in dealing with foreign leaders, Biden has already signaled a reversal - he is making US diplomacy predictable, even dull, again. His transition office - which is not receiving customary assistance from the State Department as Trump refuses to concede the election - is putting out the sort of soporific readouts that until the 2016 election were the primary means of US presidential communication.

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court decision as historic. The court later set Nov 11 as the date to issue its verdict.

Two more candidates - Tareq Al-Madasi from the fifth constituency and Ibrahim Dashti from the third - said they have challenged the decision to disqualify them and the court set today's date to hear their arguments. The court's decision can be appealed at the court of appeals and the final verdict must be issued before election day on Dec 5.

Meanwhile, the Anti-Corruption Authority (Nazaha) said it will look into allegations and reports on social media regarding the election if

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DUBAI: The Ain Dubai (Dubai Eye) Ferris wheel is seen after the installation of all 48 pods on Nov 12, 2020. — AFP



WASHINGTON: Members of Antifa and Proud Boys clash in the middle of the street following the "Million MAGA March" on Saturday. — AFP

Local

Kuwait Amir accepts Sisi's invitation to visit Egypt

Sheikh Nawaf receives visiting Egyptian Foreign Minister



KUWAIT: His Highness the Amir Sheikh Nawaf Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah reads a letter from Egyptian President Abdel Fattah Al-Sisi, as he meets Egyptian Minister of Foreign Affairs Sameh Shoukry. — Amiri Diwan and KUNA photos



His Highness the Crown Prince Sheikh Mishal Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah meets Egyptian Minister of Foreign Affairs Sameh Shoukry.



His Highness the Prime Minister Sheikh Sabah Al-Khaled Al-Hamad Al-Sabah meets Egyptian Minister of Foreign Affairs Sameh Shoukry.



Kuwaiti Foreign Minister Sheikh Dr Ahmad Nasser Al-Mohammad Al-Sabah meets his Egyptian counterpart Sameh Shoukry.

KUWAIT: His Highness the Amir Sheikh Nawaf Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah received yesterday at Bayan Palace Egyptian Minister of Foreign Affairs Sameh Shoukry, who handed him a letter from Egyptian President Abdel Fattah Al-Sisi on the strong bilateral relations between the two countries, and ways to improve them in all arenas. Sisi also extended an invitation in the letter to His Highness the Amir to visit Egypt, which His Highness has

accepted. Kuwaiti Foreign Minister and Acting Minister of Information Sheikh Dr Ahmad Nasser Al-Mohammad Al-Sabah attended the meeting. His Highness the Crown Prince Sheikh Mishal Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah and His Highness the Prime Minister Sheikh Sabah Al-Khaled Al-Hamad Al-Sabah also received the visiting Egyptian official at Bayan Palace yesterday, in presence of Kuwait's foreign minister.

Meanwhile, Sheikh Dr Ahmad Nasser Al-Mohammad held a meeting with his Egyptian counterpart on the occasion of his official visit to the country. During the meeting, the two sides discussed the bilateral ties between the two countries and the two brotherly peoples, as well as the most prominent current regional and global developments. Deputy Foreign Minister Ambassador Khaled Al-Jarallah and other senior officials attend-

ed the meeting. Shoukry had arrived in Kuwait on Saturday, and was received at Kuwait International Airport by Sheikh Dr Ahmad Nasser Al-Mohammad, Assistant Foreign Minister for Protocols Dhari Al-Ajran, Assistant Foreign Minister for Arab Affairs Fahad Al-Awadhi, Egyptian Ambassador to Kuwait Tariq Al-Qouni and other senior officials from Kuwait's Foreign ministry and the Egyptian Embassy. — KUNA

Plans to allow domestic workers...

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The plan to resume air links with some banned countries will be for the return of domestic helpers to meet Kuwaiti families' needs, according to the unnamed sources. They added Kuwait Airways and Jazeera will present a detailed plan for the return of all domestic helpers from some banned countries and the cost of local PCR tests and the 14-day insti-

tutional quarantine.

They added that expenses related to the return of domestic helpers will be borne by the employers, as the government is ready to allow the return of domestic helpers provided that sponsors bear the cost. The sources said employers should register and pay on a platform that will be set up. The advance payment includes the cost of airline tickets, PCR tests and the 14-day institutional quarantine.

The sources said the two carriers previously told the government they are ready to bring back all domestic helpers provided that the institutional quarantine should be in Kuwait. The airlines will propose a quarantine plan.

other issues and "praised her leadership".

The lack of drama in Biden's approach is, well, no surprise. Biden, with nearly 50 years of experience in Washington, ran on promises to return to normalcy, bringing back the time-honored decision-making process involving expert consultations rather than impulsive tweets. In a campaign speech on foreign policy, Biden pointed to the sharp decline in global respect of the United States under Trump and promised to turn the page on "the chest-thumping, the self-inflicted setbacks and the manufactured crises of this administration."

Biden's return to a more traditional diplomacy is about more than a less brash personal style. He is also signaling that he places a greater value on working with the world, said Monica Duffy Toft, a professor of international politics at The Fletcher School of Law and Diplomacy at Tufts University. "Trump likes to do things bilaterally and unilaterally. — AFP

the country. He said that dealing with the issue requires a decisive decision and "we can expel as many as two million expats within one year" if the decisions are implemented. Zalzalah said he believes the country does not require the current 3.3 million expats and should do with a much smaller number, who along with citizens can enjoy improved services.

Islamist candidate Fahad Al-Masaud, running from the second constituency, insisted that the key to resolving most of the country's problems is by combating corruption. Candidate Hamad Matar, also contesting from the second constituency, said corruption is present in the National Assembly itself and the key to reforms is through establishing a fair election system.

Trump: Biden 'won because...

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rival protesters. At least 20 people were arrested, reports said, including four for firearm violations and one for assault on a police officer. Trump himself made a drive-past of the rally in his armored motorcade, on his way to play golf, smiling through his limousine window to wild cheers and signs saying "Best prez ever" and "Trump 2020: Keep America Great."

Many of Trump's tweets over the weekend alleg-

ing the election was rigged against him have been tagged by Twitter as containing "disputed" information. John Bolton, Trump's former national security advisor, told CNN's "State of the Union" show yesterday that "as every day goes by, it's clearer there isn't any evidence" of fraud. "Donald Trump lost... by a free and valid election," Bolton said, adding "I don't expect him to go graciously. I do expect him to go."

On Saturday, at least 10,000 people - few wearing masks - massed in Washington's Freedom Plaza before marching to the Supreme Court in a raucous atmosphere reminiscent of a Trump campaign rally. After dark, groups of Trump supporters and counter-protesters clashed on the streets, scuffling and throwing punches.

Biden makes diplomacy...

Continued from Page 1

With Canadian Prime Minister Justin Trudeau, whom Trump derided over Twitter following a summit as "very dishonest & weak," a Biden statement after a congratulatory phone call said the pair "reaffirmed the close bonds between the United States and Canada" and pledged cooperation against COVID-19 and future biological threats. After his conversation with German Chancellor Angela Merkel, whom Trump had openly criticized for her welcome to migrants, Biden "noted his interest in working closely" to address the pandemic, climate change and

UAE widens 'golden' visa...

Continued from Page 1

executives, scientists and outstanding students. The emirate of Dubai, a Middle East trade and tourism hub, in September said it would grant visas renewable every five years to wealthy foreign retirees. An oil and gas producer, the UAE's economy has been hit by the coronavirus pandemic and low oil prices, prompting many expatriates to leave.

The scheme last year drew in some 6,800 investors, in a windfall worth \$27 billion for the

economy. Foreigners account for 90 percent of the population of some 10 million in the oil-rich UAE, the Arab world's second-largest economy. The "golden visa" was the first such scheme in the Gulf, which keeps tight control on residency. Similar programs have been launched in other countries that seek to diversify their economies such as Saudi Arabia and Qatar.

Riyadh said in June 2019 that it will offer permanent residency for 800,000 riyals (\$213,000) and a one-year renewable residency costing 100,000 riyals (\$27,000), allowing expats to do business and buy property without a Saudi sponsor. Meanwhile, Doha has recently flung open its property market to foreigners, with a scheme giving those purchasing homes or stores the right to longer-term or permanent residency permits. — Agencies

Court hearing cases of barred...

Continued from Page 1

they are serious enough to investigate. Candidates are continuing their campaigns through social media and television interviews, highlighting problems they will focus on if they win seats in the 50-member Assembly.

Former minister, MP and candidate from the first constituency Yousef Zalzalah criticized the government for not being serious enough on implementing decisions aimed at reducing the number of expats in

Asia-Pacific nations form world's...

Continued from Page 1

The pact should help shrink costs and make life easier for companies by letting them export products anywhere within the bloc without meeting separate requirements for each country.

The agreement touches on intellectual property, but environmental protections and labor rights are not part of the pact. The deal is also seen as a way for China to draft the rules of trade in the region, after years of US retreat under President Donald Trump which have seen Washington pull out of a

trade pact of its own, the Trans-Pacific Partnership (TPP). Though US multinationals will be able to benefit from RCEP through subsidiaries within member countries, analysts said the deal may cause President-elect Joe Biden to rethink Washington's engagement in the region.

This could see the US eye the potential benefits of joining the TPP's successor deal, the Comprehensive and Progressive Agreement for Trans-Pacific Partnership (CPTPP), said Rajiv Biswas, APAC chief economist at IHS Markit. "However, this is not expected to be an immediate priority issue... given the considerable negative response to the TPP negotiations from many segments of the US electorate due to concerns about US job losses to Asian countries," he added. — Agencies

Amir, Crown Prince meet senior state officials

Cyprus President congratulates Sheikh Nawaf



KUWAIT: His Highness the Amir Sheikh Nawaf Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah meets His Highness the Crown Prince Sheikh Mishal Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah. — Amiri Diwan and KUNA photos



His Highness the Amir Sheikh Nawaf Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah meets National Assembly Speaker Marzouq Al-Ghanem.



His Highness the Amir Sheikh Nawaf Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah meets His Highness the Prime Minister Sheikh Sabah Al-Khaled Al-Hamad Al-Sabah.



His Highness the Amir Sheikh Nawaf Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah meets Deputy Prime Minister and Defense Minister Sheikh Ahmad Mansour Al-Ahmad Al-Sabah.



His Highness the Amir Sheikh Nawaf Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah meets Deputy Prime Minister, Minister of Interior and Minister of State for Cabinet Affairs Anas Al-Saleh.

KUWAIT: His Highness the Amir Sheikh Nawaf Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah received yesterday at Bayan Palace His Highness the Crown Prince Sheikh Mishal Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah. His Highness the Amir also received National Assembly Speaker Marzouq Al-Ghanem. Furthermore, His Highness the Amir received His Highness the Prime Minister Sheikh Sabah Al-Khaled Al-Hamad Al-Sabah. Moreover, His Highness hosted Deputy Prime Minister and Defense Minister Sheikh Ahmad Mansour Al-Ahmad Al-Sabah. In addition, he received Deputy Prime Minister, Minister of Interior and Minister of State for Cabinet Affairs Anas Al-Saleh. In the meantime, His Highness the Crown Prince received Speaker Ghanem, His Highness Sheikh Sabah Al-Khaled, Sheikh Ahmad Mansour Al-Ahmad, and Saleh at Bayan Palace.



His Highness the Crown Prince Sheikh Mishal Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah meets National Assembly Speaker Marzouq Al-Ghanem.



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In other news, His Highness the Amir Sheikh Nawaf Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah received yesterday a cable from Cyprus President Nicos Anastasiades, in which he congratulated him on assuming power, wishing His Highness the Amir a continued success. In turn, His Highness the Amir sent a cable to President Anastasiades in which he thanked him and expressed appreciation for the positive message, embracing the close ties between Kuwait and Cyprus, and wishing him good health and happiness. —KUNA

Kuwait reports 499 new COVID cases, three deaths



KUWAIT: Kuwait registered 499 new coronavirus (COVID-19) infections in the past 24 hours, raising the total to 136,840, the Ministry of Health announced yesterday. Deaths reached 838 with the addition of three fatalities, it added. Official spokesperson of the Ministry of Health Dr Abdullah Al-Sanad said that there were 109 patients receiving treatment in intensive care units. Those still receiving treatment amounted to 8,417. Health workers conducted 4,854 swab tests in the past 24 hours, raising the whole count to 1,011,566. Earlier, the ministry announced 683 COVID-19 patients have recovered in the last 24 hours, bringing the total to 127,585. — KUNA

Stay safe. Stay home. Stay informed.



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Diabetes in Gulf extremely high: Endocrinologist

KUWAIT: Endocrinologist and President of Kuwait Diabetes Society Dr Waleed Al-Dhahi said the prevalence of diabetes in the Gulf is extremely high, and could be the highest in the world. He said the best medicine for a diabetic patient is to exercise and reduce the amount of food intake.



Dr Waleed Al-Dhahi

Dhahi, who spoke on the occasion of World Diabetes Day, said there is a link between diabetes and the severity of viral infections due to a defect in the immune system of diabetics, pointing to a recommendation by the American Diabetes Association which considers diabetes part of the factors of viral infections, including coronavirus.

Dhahi said diabetics who are more likely to suffer severe infections are those who are overweight, with a body mass index of 40 and above, those with renal problems, heart disease and weak heart muscles, those whose Hemoglobin A1C (HbA1C) level is over 8, pregnant women, those over 50 years old, those on insulin and patients with transplanted organs.

He said these patients must be extra careful, maintain social distancing, frequently wash their hands, stay away from gatherings, and not leave home unless it is absolutely necessary, along with wearing masks when outside. He said diabetic patients must change their lifestyles, increase mobility, reduce intake of starchy food and regularly test their blood sugar level, besides following up their blood pressure and organ health. He said the International Diabetes Federation (IDF) selected the slogan 'Nurses make the difference', to celebrate World Diabetes Day this year, which shows that a diabetes educator has a major role in treating patients.

Bahrain embassy receives condolences



KUWAIT: Bahrain's embassy in Kuwait opened a book of condolences yesterday for the late prime minister of the Kingdom of Bahrain Sheikh Khalifa bin Salman Al Khalifa. — Photos by Fouad Al-Shaikh

Students' return to class pending health authorities' approval

Ministry official says return could be at start of second term

KUWAIT: Kuwait hopes to have a return of students to schools by the start of the second semester if health officials approve of that scenario, a senior Education Ministry official hinted yesterday. Acting Education Ministry Undersecretary Faisal Al-Maqseed held a meeting with Assistant Undersecretary for Public Education Usama Al-Sultan, directors of all education zones and supervisors of all school subjects to discuss various issues. Maqseed said the meeting concentrated on the importance of having a strategic plan to return to school, which coincides with the fifth stage of

returning to normal life and is linked to the health situation, adding that this will depend on the approval of health authorities.

Maqseed asked Sultan to form a committee chaired by him to prepare a full plan and present it next week so that it can be reviewed, adding that the return to school could be with the start of the second term. Meanwhile, the education ministry said the meeting that was held yesterday was to discuss the return of students to schools whenever the Cabinet decides, after the availability of a COVID-19 vaccine, and in line with the fifth stage of

return to normal life. The meeting did not discuss paper tests, which some recent reports had suggested that the ministry was trying to get approval to have them held in-class.

The education ministry said it is committed to what was mentioned in a health ministry letter dated Nov 10 and implementation of health protocols to control the spread of the coronavirus. The ministry said any decision concerning examinations for all school stages will only be in coordination with health authorities for the safety of all students and employees.

CONDOLENCES

Kuwait Times Editor-in-Chief,

Management and Staff convey
their deepest condolences to
Our colleague

Yousef Ahmad Mefleh

and his family members
on the sad demise of his

Wife

May Allah Almighty bestow His mercy on her

Foreign Minister pays tribute to late Palestinian official

KUWAIT: Kuwait's Foreign Minister and Acting Minister of Information Sheikh Dr Ahmad Nasser Al-Mohammad Al-Sabah offered condolences on the passing of chief Palestinian negotiator Saeb Erekat, at the Palestinian embassy yesterday. —KUNA



KUWAIT: Minister of Services Affairs Mubarak Al-Harees yesterday inaugurated a new post office in the Sabah Al-Ahmad residential area. — Photos by Fouad Al-Shaikh



Harris leads wave of women changing face of US politics

Judge rejects Trump limits on 'Dreamer' program



KASALA, Sudan: Ethiopians who fled intense fighting in their homeland of Tigray gather at the border reception center of Hamdiyet in this eastern Sudanese state on Saturday. — AFP

Tigray fighters strike Eritrea airport

Gunmen kill 34 in attack on bus in west Ethiopia

ADDIS ABABA: The leader of the Tigray region of Ethiopia yesterday claimed responsibility for rocket strikes on the airport in neighboring Eritrea's capital, a move that ratcheted up fears of a wider conflict in the Horn of Africa region. Diplomats told AFP Saturday night that multiple rockets had struck the capital, Asmara, landing near the airport, though communications restrictions in Tigray and Eritrea made the reports difficult to verify.

Ethiopian Prime Minister Abiy Ahmed announced Nov 4 he had ordered military operations in Tigray in a dramatic escalation of a long-running feud with the region's ruling party, the Tigray People's Liberation Front (TPLF). "Ethiopian forces are also using the airport of Asmara," TPLF leader Debretsion Gebremichael told AFP yesterday, saying this made the airport a "legitimate target" for the strikes. He added that his forces had also been fighting "16 divisions" of Eritrean forces in recent days "in several fronts."

The TPLF has previously accused Abiy's government of enlisting military support from Eritrea, something Ethiopia denies. There was no immediate response from the Eritrean or Ethiopian governments yesterday. It was not clear how many rockets were fired on Saturday night, where in Tigray they were fired from, whether they hit their targets or what damage they inflicted. The United States embassy in Asmara posted an advisory to its website yesterday about "a series of loud noises" at around 7:50 pm Saturday night.

"Unconfirmed reports indicate they may have been explosive devices believed to be in the vicinity of the Asmara International Airport. There are no indications

the airport was struck," the advisory said. The TPLF dominated Ethiopian politics for nearly three decades and fought a brutal 1998-2000 border war with Eritrea that left tens of thousands dead. Abiy came to power in 2018 and won the Nobel Peace Prize the following year in large part for his effort to initiate a rapprochement with Eritrea.

Meanwhile, gunmen killed at least 34 people in a "gruesome" attack on a passenger bus in west Ethiopia, a part of the country that has recently seen a spate of deadly assaults on civilians, the national human rights body said yesterday. The Ethiopian Human Rights Commission (EHRC) said in a statement that "the estimated number of casualties, currently at 34, is likely to rise" from the attack which occurred Saturday night in the Benishangul-Gumuz region.

A spokesman for the commission, an independent government body, confirmed that the casualties were all deaths. The EHRC statement said the bus attack occurred in the Debate administrative area, and that "there are reports of similar attacks" in three other areas, as well as "of persons who have fled to seek shelter".

Fleeing refugees

Hundreds of people are reported to have been killed so far in the conflict in Africa's second most populous country, some in a gruesome massacre documented last week by Amnesty International. Nearly 25,000 Ethiopians have fled as refugees into Sudan, a figure that continues to rise, Sudanese officials say. Among them are Ethiopians returning to camps where they and

their families sought refuge from devastating famine decades ago.

To cross the river at the two countries' border, they climb into small boats crammed with other exhausted and terrified Ethiopians seeking safety. "I am filled with immeasurable sadness, because when I left, 20 years ago, I never thought that I would come back as a miserable refugee," said Gabriel, a 40-year-old farmer who arrived in eastern Sudan this week, asking to be identified by his first name because he feared for his safety.

Back in Ethiopia, the UN is pushing for full humanitarian access to Tigray, where Debretsion says hundreds of thousands have been displaced internally by fighting that has featured multiple rounds of government air strikes.

Conflicting narratives

Ever since Abiy took power in 2018 on the back of anti-government protests, the TPLF has complained of being sidelined and scapegoated for Ethiopia's woes. The feud grew more intense after Tigray went ahead with its own elections in September - defying a nationwide ban on all polls imposed because of the coronavirus pandemic - and tried to brand him an illegitimate ruler. The immediate catalyst for the military operations in Tigray, Abiy has said, was a TPLF attack on federal military camps.

The TPLF has denied the attack ever occurred, though Abiy's office has seized on a recent interview with Tigrayan media in which a senior TPLF official, Sekutire Getachew, said "it was imperative to take a thunder-like strike". "Had it not been for the mission

maybe Abiy had a chance to command dictatorially for a short term," Sekutire said in the interview, adding that the TPLF now controlled most of the firepower of the Ethiopian military's Northern Command. Other TPLF leaders have not commented on the interview.

Ethiopian lawmakers have backed a plan to install a caretaker administration in Tigray, and officials have issued arrest warrants for Debretsion and other TPLF leaders. Abiy's government has said the TPLF needs to be disarmed before negotiations can begin, frustrating world leaders who are calling for an immediate cessation of hostilities. Meanwhile there continue to be fears the conflict could draw in other regions of Ethiopia. On Saturday the TPLF claimed responsibility for rocket attacks on two airports in Amhara region, which borders Tigray to the south. — Agencies

News in brief

Pullout deadline extended

BAKU: Azerbaijan yesterday agreed to extend the deadline for Armenians to withdraw from the Kalbajar district as part of a Russian-brokered peace accord to end weeks of fighting over disputed Nagorno-Karabakh. "Azerbaijan agreed to prolong the deadline for the withdrawal from Kalbajar of Armenian armed forces and of illegal Armenian settlers until November 25," said President Ilham Aliyev's foreign policy adviser, Hikmet Hajiyev. He said Aliyev had agreed on humanitarian grounds to grant an Armenian request for the delay following mediation by Russian President Vladimir Putin. — AFP

Israel advances settlement

JERUSALEM: Israel has pushed on with plans to build a new Jewish settler neighborhood in east Jerusalem, a watchdog group said yesterday, warning such efforts were being stepped up before US President Donald Trump leaves office. The latest move saw the Israel Land Authority issue construction tenders in Givat Hamatos, next to the mainly Palestinian neighborhood of Beit Safafa. In February, Israel's rightwing Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu announced the approval of 3,000 homes in the area. He said 2,000 would be allocated for Jews, and 1,000 for Arab residents of Beit Safafa. — AFP

Indian actor Chatterjee dies

KOLKATA: Veteran Indian actor Soumitra Chatterjee breathed his last at 12.15 pm at Belle Vue Clinic in Kolkata yesterday. He was 85. The octogenarian actor's health condition deteriorated extremely over the past two days. Chatterjee's prolonged stay at the hospital since Oct 6 had taken a toll on his health. The 85-year-old Dadasaheb Phalke awardee and one of the most celebrated actors in Bengali cinema was admitted in the intensive care unit of Kolkata's Belle Vue Hospital for almost 40 days. The legendary actor's condition was "very critical and grim" and last efforts to revive him were being made by the teams of doctors treating him at a private hospital in Kolkata. — Agencies



Soumitra Chatterjee

Conservatives flock to 'alt' social media in election dispute

WASHINGTON: Conservatives backing President Donald Trump's claims of election malfeasance have sparked a migration to alternative social media sites which have refrained from filtering unverified claims. The shift has boosted right-wing favorites like Parler, Newsmax and Rumble which have rejected the approach of Facebook and Twitter in labeling and limiting the reach of conspiracy theories. Parler, founded in 2018, saw more than 3.3 million downloads from Apple and Google marketplaces since Nov 3 to reach 7.3 million installs globally, according to market tracker Sensor Tower. Large gains were also seen for other conservative-friendly services such as Newsmax - which Trump himself endorsed - as well as MeWe and Rumble. These sites have left up Trump's claims of manipulation of election results in states he lost.

While alternative social networks have seen ephemeral gains in the past, the post-election trend "has reached more mainstream conservatives" who are frustrated with the large internet platforms, according to Bret Schafer, a disinformation specialist at the nonprofit Alliance for Securing Democracy. "It's not unprecedented to see migrations like these after a crackdown" by the social media giants, according to Schafer. "But this does feel a bit different."

Sites like Parler have attracted Republican lawmakers as well as the Trump campaign, which has used the app for some of its recent statements. Fox Business TV host Maria Bartiromo in recent days announced she would be leaving Twitter, with a tweet saying, "I'll be posting on Parler bc as you know I won't tolerate censorship." Bartiromo and others called on their Twitter followers to migrate to Parler. "We don't know if this is a symbolic protest against Twitter and Facebook or whether this is going to be more real and lasting," said Daniel Kreiss, a professor specializing in politics and social media at the University of North Carolina's Center for Information, Technology, and Public Life. "But the dynamic is clear - conservatives are upset at content moderation, particularly against the president." Kreiss added that because the dominant platforms had been unevenly enforcing their policies and only recently began aggressive moderation, "there is a fair conservative complaint about why they doing this now." —AFP



Residents are carried on a forklift truck to dry land through floodwaters brought by heavy rain from Typhoon Vamco after it made landfall in Thua Thien Hue province yesterday. — AFP

Vamco hits Vietnam as Philippines death toll rises to 67

HANOI: Storm Vamco barreled into Vietnam yesterday, damaging buildings and injuring at least five people, as the death toll in the Philippines climbed to 67. The storm made landfall on Sunday morning with reported winds of up to 90 km per hour, uprooting trees and blowing the roofs off houses and schools. Vamco is the latest in a series of storms that have pummeled Vietnam over the past six weeks, causing flooding and landslides that have killed at least 159 people and left 70 others missing.

Initial reports from the Disaster Management Authority yesterday said that five people were injured while they were trying to secure their houses. Vamco has weakened since hitting the Philippines as a typhoon with winds of up to 155 kph, but state media said it had still caused significant damage. Pictures showed seafront restaurants in the tourist hotspot of Hoi An - a UNESCO world heritage site - ripped apart by the storm, and huge trees uprooted in the old imperial city of Hue.

Authorities evacuated nearly 650,000 people from seven coastal provinces to higher and safer ground before the storm hit, but on Sunday warned of the danger of landslides triggered by the heavy rains. Vamco was the deadliest storm to hit the Philippines this year, killing at least 67 people across the main island of Luzon in recent days and affecting some 1.7 million around the country.

The storm triggered some of the worst flooding in years, swamping villages, destroying crops and leaving hundreds of thousands without power. Rescue teams and emergency supplies including food were dispatched to the northeast Philippines on Saturday where swathes of the region were inundated. The situation was made worse by the release of water from a dam.

Vice President Leni Robredo said yesterday that the waters were now receding after visiting Cagayan province, giving hope that the worst may be over for the storm-battered country. "Situation is so much better. Many areas still flooded but water receded already," Robredo tweeted. In Vietnam, weeks of severe weather have damaged or destroyed more than 400,000 homes, according to the International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies. Roads and bridges have been washed away, power supplies disrupted, and crucial food crops destroyed, leaving at least 150,000 people at immediate risk of food shortages. — Reuters

International

Trump mulls a future outside the White House as 2020 options fade

Trump could start a new television news channel to rival Fox News

WASHINGTON: With his long-shot efforts to hang on for a second term dwindling, US President Donald Trump is discussing with advisers several media ventures and appearances that would keep him in the spotlight ahead of a potential 2024 White House bid.

In the near term, Trump is expected to campaign on behalf of Republican US Senate candidates in Georgia ahead of Jan. 5 runoff elections that will determine whether Republicans hang on to control of the chamber, the president's aides said. He also is considering starting a new television channel or social media company to compete with those he felt betrayed him and stifled his ability to communicate directly with Americans, according to several advisers.

"I think every option is on the table, for a social media to a media company to him announcing he's running for president the day he leaves," said a Republican official who has taken part in meetings with Trump campaign advisers. Trump has not conceded the election to Democratic rival Joe Biden, who on Nov 7 cleared the 270 Electoral College vote threshold to win the presidency and be sworn into office on Jan 20. Trump has claimed without evidence that the voting was beset by widespread fraud, but election officials report no serious irregularities or security issues.

Trump advisers said once it is clear that his legal challenges to the 2020 results are concluded, Trump has discussed announcing plans, possibly by the end of the year, to run for president again in four years. "He feels like he was cheated, and he wants to run," said an adviser familiar with his thinking.

Such a move would not ensure an open runway for Trump to the Republican nomination, according to a party strategist who asked not to be named. A long list of Republicans are expected to line up for White House bids in 2024, including Vice President Mike Pence, former US ambassador to the United Nations Nikki Haley, current Secretary of State Mike Pompeo, Senators Ted Cruz and Tom Cotton, and a pair of governors, Ron DeSantis of Florida and Kristi Noem of South Dakota, among others.

"It isn't going to freeze the rest of the field," the strategist said. "Everybody respects Trump, but they think it's time for a new chapter."

Back to business

Trump has been considering whether to start a new



ATLANTA, GA: Signs supporting President-elect Joe Biden are seen on a fence outside the Georgia State Capitol on Saturday in Atlanta, Georgia. President-elect Joe Biden has been declared the winner in Georgia, becoming the first Democratic nominee to win the state since 1992. — AFP

television news channel to rival Fox News after the president became disenchanted with the conservative network. Trump has complained its programming lacked a universal pro-Trump perspective. He was described by aides as upset at Fox over its decision to call the election in Arizona for Biden last week when the result was far from clear.

Christopher Ruddy, a Trump friend who is CEO of Newsmax, a conservative TV news channel and website, said launching a rival news channel or streaming service would be difficult.

"I'm not sure the people around him appreciate the challenge that might involve," Ruddy said, adding his company was open to talking to Trump about a show on Newsmax. "The president is an incredible draw," Ruddy said. "He has a huge fan base unlike any other political figure in American history."

Trump has repeatedly discussed with his advisers a

plan to start a social media company to compete with Twitter, whose policies have led to content warnings posted on some of his tweets.

At a meeting with his campaign advisers a couple of months ago, Trump talked about the technology that would be needed for a conservative version of Twitter, and how the actual platform behind Twitter would be easy to mimic, a Republican official at the meeting said. Trump prefers platforms that allow him to present an unfiltered message. He previously mused about broadcasting a daily radio program from the White House, and the idea advanced to the point where officials were talking about how to pull it off, according to an official familiar with the discussions. Ultimately, the idea was set aside because of logistical concerns, the official said, such as the difficulty of blocking off an hour of the president's schedule every day for the program. — Reuters

SpaceX launches 4 astronauts to ISS

WASHINGTON: Four astronauts were poised to launch on the SpaceX Crew Dragon "Resilience" to the International Space Station yesterday, the first of what the US hopes will be many routine missions following a successful test flight in late spring.

Three Americans—Michael Hopkins, Victor Glover and Shannon Walker—and Japan's Soichi Noguchi will blast off at 7:27 pm Sunday (0027 GMT today) from the Kennedy Space Center in Florida. In May, SpaceX completed a demonstration mission showing it could take astronauts to the ISS and bring them back safely, thus ending almost a decade of reliance on Russia for rides on its Soyuz rockets.

"The history being made this time is we're launching what we call an operational flight to the International Space Station," NASA administrator Jim Bridenstine

told reporters Friday. The launch will be attended by Vice President Mike Pence and second lady Karen Pence. The crew will dock at their destination at around 11 pm tonight (0400 GMT Tuesday), joining two Russians and one American onboard the station, and stay for six months. The Crew Dragon earlier this week became the first spacecraft to be certified by NASA since the Space Shuttle nearly 40 years ago.

It is a capsule, similar in shape to the spacecraft which preceded Space Shuttle, and its launch vehicle is a reusable SpaceX Falcon 9 rocket. At the end of its missions, the Crew Dragon deploys parachutes then splashes down in water, just as in the Apollo era.

NASA turned to SpaceX and Boeing after shuttering the checkered Space Shuttle program in 2011, which failed in its main objectives of making space travel affordable and safe.

The agency will have spent more than \$8 billion on the Commercial Crew program by 2024, with the hope that the private sector can take care of NASA's needs in "low Earth orbit" so it is freed up to focus on return missions to the Moon and then on to Mars. — AFP



This handout photo released by NASA shows a SpaceX Falcon 9 rocket with the company's Crew Dragon spacecraft onboard illuminated by spotlights on the launch pad at Launch Complex 39A as preparations continue for the Crew-1 mission, on Saturday at NASA's Kennedy Space Center in Florida. — AFP

Biden heralds shift in US strategy toward Venezuela

WASHINGTON: President Donald Trump's election defeat marks the end of a hardline pressure policy designed to oust Venezuela's leftist president Nicolas Maduro, and the arrival of Joe Biden in the White House in January could pave the way for a political solution to the crisis in that country.

Acute tension marked the Trump administration's ties with Maduro, whose second term as president is not recognized by some 50 countries, led by the US. They consider opposition leader Juan Guaido to be the legitimate leader of oil-rich Venezuela. Trump's strategy of sanctions to strangle the Venezuelan economy included a veiled threat of military force to topple Maduro—he warned often that "all options are on the table." But it failed, and Maduro remains in power in the Miraflores presidential palace in Caracas.

The economy, meanwhile, is a basket case, with

Venezuelans enduring hyperinflation and shortages of food, medicine and just about everything—including such basics as soap and toilet paper.

Once relatively comfortable middle-class people now report going hungry and losing weight. Millions of people have fled the country. With Biden in power, however, a shift in strategy can be expected.

Juan Gonzalez, who has advised Biden on Latin American issues, wrote in Americas Quarterly in July that a Biden administration would take "serious measures" to address Venezuela's humanitarian mess.

It will also apply "intelligent sanctions" as part of a broad international strategy to restore democracy, he wrote. "The overriding goal of the United States in both countries must be to press for a democratic change," Gonzalez wrote. Diego Area, associate director of the Washington-based Atlantic Council, said Biden "now has an historic opportunity to lead an international coalition to promote a political solution for Venezuela."

But this will not be easy and Biden will need bipartisan support in Washington, Area said. "I think it is achievable. It takes time. We won't see a regime change or a democratic transition happening in the short term," Area predicted. Christopher Sabatini, a Latin America researcher at Chatham House, a

Judge rejects Trump limits on 'Dreamer' program

WASHINGTON: A judge on Saturday rejected the White House's limitations on a program protecting 700,000 so-called "Dreamers," undocumented migrants brought to the United States as children.

The federal judge in New York ruled that President Donald Trump's acting Homeland Security Secretary Chad Wolf was not lawfully serving in his role when he issued the new rules for the DACA program in July. The ruling is another victory for proponents of the Barack Obama-era program after the US Supreme Court in June rejected Trump's cancellation of it.

President-elect Joe Biden, who defeated Trump in the November 3 polls, had pledged to reinstate the program when he takes office on January 20. Wolf, who has not been confirmed in his role by the US Senate, issued new restrictions on the program in response to the Supreme Court ruling.

Saturday's court decision said his restrictions "effectively suspended" DACA, or Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals, while the Trump administration reviewed how to proceed.



WASHINGTON, DC: A supporter of US President Donald Trump lying on the floor is kicked as he is attacked by anti-Trump demonstrators in Black Lives Matter Plaza in Washington, DC on Saturday. — AFP

Wolf's rules said new applications would not be accepted and renewals would be limited to one year instead of two. They are now invalid because "the court holds that Mr. Wolf was not lawfully serving as Acting Secretary of Homeland Security under the Homeland Security Act" when he issued them, the ruling said.

Judge Nicholas Garaufis said the correct order of succession had not been followed for the acting secretary appointment. It was not the first time Wolf has seen the legality of his appointment as acting secretary in 2019 drawn into question. Trump entered office promising to halt almost all immigration and to expel the more than 10 million people estimated living in the country, many for decades, without legal immigration documents.

The Obama administration sought to address the issue in 2012, with the DACA policy offering protection at renewable two-year periods, including authorization to work, to people brought into the United States illegally as children and then growing up here. DACA, and the subsequent DAPA program—Deferred Action for Parents of Americans and Lawful Permanent Residents—were executive actions by Obama to eliminate the constant threat of deportation for more than four million undocumented migrants. Trump canceled DAPA just after coming to office and then went after the more established DACA, but immediately faced a series of court battles over it. — AFP

Sigh of relief as global organizations await Biden

GENEVA: After years of US disengagement and confrontation, international organizations in Geneva appeared to breathe a collective sigh of relief at Joe Biden's presidential election win—but the anticipated honeymoon could be short. "I think everyone is basically waiting with open arms for the US government to come back," said Manfred Elsig, an international relations professor at the World Trade Institute of Bern University. Republican President Donald Trump's administration has been a traumatic experience for international organizations that in many cases were created by the United States and accustomed to strong US support and leadership. In Geneva alone, the United States has, under Trump, cut its ties to the UN's top rights body, hamstrung the World Trade Organization and begun withdrawing from the World Health Organization even as the body strives to coordinate the global response to Covid-19.

After the election was called for Democratic Party candidate Biden last weekend, "there was a huge sigh of relief" within the international organizations, a Geneva trade official told AFP, asking not to be named. Observers expect Washington under Biden to re-engage with the international community and its institutions, and to resume discussions on a number of issues blocked by his predecessor.

Celebration time

"I think there will be a bit of a honeymoon," Elsig said, warning though that the blissful period could be "short". The narrative pushed hard for four years that international organizations are taking advantage of the US remains deeply engrained, especially among Republicans, he said.

"Every step that the Biden administration will take towards engaging with the world and international organizations will be critically monitored in the United States." While plenty of stumbling blocks remain, there is optimism in Geneva that discussions within international forums will become more constructive.—AFP

London-based think tank, said US policy will not change with Biden, the goals still being to ensure a peaceful democratic transition and address the humanitarian crisis.

Rather, Sabatini said, "the change will be in using the administration's sanction policy as more of a flexible tool rather than a blunt instrument to promote constructive, effective negotiation for Maduro's exit." "This will also provide an opportunity for international collaboration and collection action, which until now has been lacking," he said.

Another analyst, Michael Camilleri of the Inter-American Dialogue, said, "Biden's policy toward Venezuela will be grounded in reality rather than the wishful thinking that we've seen under the Trump administration." The reality, he said, is that Maduro presides over a dictatorship that systematically violates people's human rights, and the country is mired in a worsening humanitarian crisis.

"But also the reality that the bombast and vague threats of military action that we've seen from Trump will not solve the crisis in Venezuela," said Camilleri. Benjamin Gedan, an adviser to the Latin America program at the Wilson Center in Washington, said it is hard to be optimistic about prospects for change in Venezuela.—AFP

International

Harris leads record wave of elected women changing face of US politics

History to be made when women elected to Congress take office in January

WASHINGTON: With Kamala Harris poised to become the first female vice president of the United States, and with a record number of women elected to Congress—including more Republicans than ever—considerable history will be made when they all take office in January.

The 56-year-old Harris, a senator, former prosecutor and the running mate of President-elect Joe Biden, will notch a slew of firsts when she is sworn in on January 20: as the first US female vice president and the first Black in that position, as well as the first person of South Asian descent.

"Together, we showed little girls across the country what's possible," she said Friday on Twitter. It was the latest echo of a speech Hillary Clinton delivered in 2016 in recognizing her defeat by Donald Trump. "I know we have still not shattered that highest and hardest glass ceiling—that of the White House—but someday someone will, and hopefully sooner than we might think," the defeated Democratic candidate said.

Clinton then directed these words of encouragement to the country's "little girls": "Never doubt that you are valuable and powerful and deserving of every chance and opportunity in the world to pursue and achieve your own dreams." Since Clinton pronounced those words four years ago, women have transformed the face of American politics—both in Congress and, soon, in the White House.

"With Kamala Harris, a lot of glass ceilings were shattered in one day," said Amy Dacey, a former chief executive of the Democratic National Committee now at American University. Ron Klain, whom Biden has named as his chief of staff, has said Harris will play a "significant" role, Dacey noted. "And I think (Biden will) bring in a lot of women at all levels of the administration."

Analysts expect Biden to appoint either progressive senator Elizabeth Warren or Federal Reserve

official Lael Brainard, a former Treasury undersecretary, to head the Treasury—a position never filled by a woman. The United States might also see its first woman secretary of defense. Michele Flournoy, a former Pentagon number three, has been frequently mentioned.

There are only two women in the Trump cabinet: transportation secretary Elaine Chao and education secretary Betsy DeVos. Several women have served Trump as senior advisors or as White House spokesperson. But the Republican billionaire has also frequently sparked controversy with insulting or sexist comments about women. In October, he referred to Harris as a "monster."

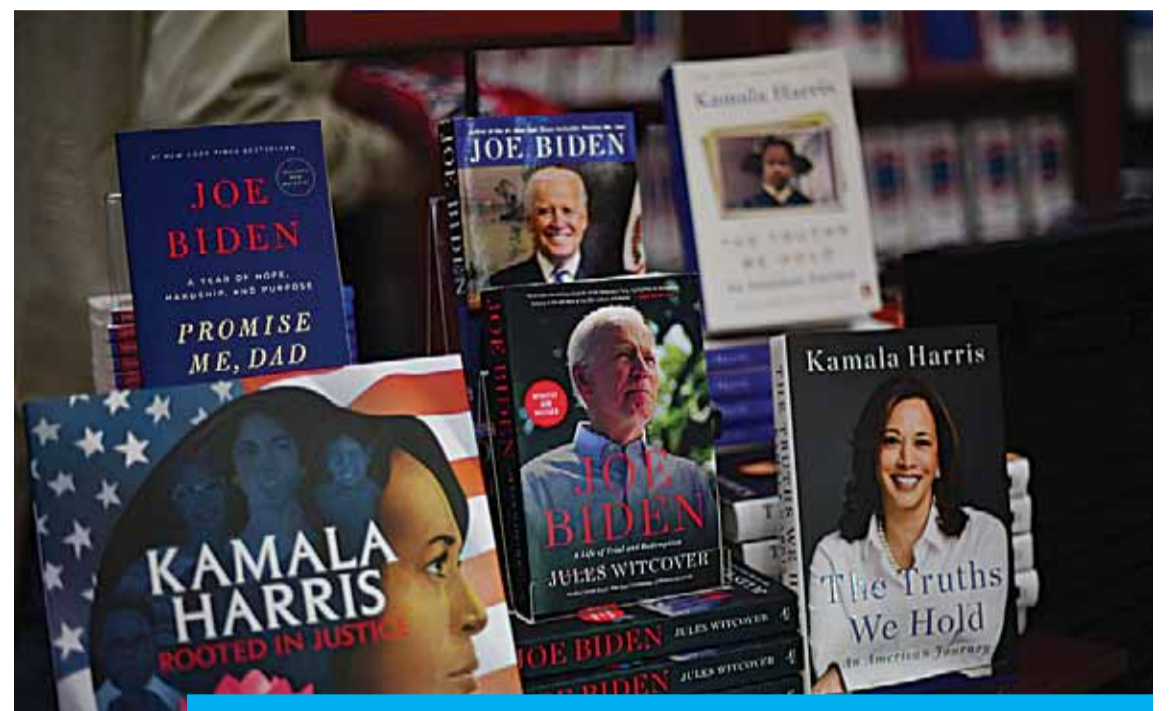
'A substantive impact'

Americans in 2018 had already elected a record number of women. On November 3, they broke that record. "This election shows continued progress for women in America," said Kelly Dittmar, director of Rutgers University's Center for American Women and Politics (CAWP).

"It importantly will have a substantive impact on American politics," she told AFP, "because in addition to literally bringing themselves to government, they bring their lived experiences and distinct perspectives that are still under-represented." While some results of the November 3 election are not yet final, at least 140 women will take seats in Congress when it returns on January 3, according to CAWP.

There are currently 127 women in Congress, or 23.7 percent of the 435 seats in the House of Representatives and the 100 in the Senate. While that percentage will rise to 26 percent in January, women still have far to go—they represent half the US population.

Democratic women will claim 105 seats in Congress (89 in the House and 16 in the Senate). Republican women, for their part, will occupy 35



PHILADELPHIA, PA: A display of books about President-elect Joe Biden and Vice President-elect Kamala Harris is displayed for sale at the University of Pennsylvania book store, where the Biden Center for Diplomacy and Global Engagement was named after him in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania. —AFP

seats (27 in the House and eight in the Senate) — considerably fewer than their Democratic counterparts but still a big increase from the current 22. Women Republican candidates "performed better than expected," Dittmar said.

"They would still be significantly under-represented, but this should send a message about both their electability, and hopefully increase their influence within the party to ensure that more women

get elected in the future." Asked on Friday about the record number of Republican women elected, House speaker Nancy Pelosi—the first woman to occupy that position—said she would "congratulate and welcome each and every one of them."

But then the Democratic speaker, rounding the House total upward, quickly emphasized that her party was still doing better by women, casually adding: "Of course, we have 90." —AFP

Ethiopians fleeing fighting return to Sudan camps

HAMDAYIT, Sudan: Two decades since Burhan Yusef left the Um Raquba camp where he had sought refuge from devastating famine in his homeland of Ethiopia, the 77-year-old is returning.

Yusef this week arrived in eastern Sudan, after fleeing Ethiopia's northern Tigray region for a second time to save his life, joining long columns of thousands of others to escape intense fighting, airstrikes, rocket attacks and artillery barrages. "Returning is not a good feeling," Yusef said.

He trekked out of Ethiopia in plastic sandals and leaning on a stick for support, crossing the river that marks the frontier by squeezing precariously into a small boat, crammed with other exhausted and terrified Ethiopians seeking safety. Yusef is supported by his daughter, who grew up as a refugee in Sudan in the wake of the Ethiopia's 1984-5 famine.

Many recount similar stories of suffering. "The war made me come back," said Gabriel, a 40-year-

old farmer who has also become a refugee again, asking to be identified by his first name because he feared for his safety. He too grew up as a child as a refugee in Sudan, before building a new life at home in Ethiopia. Now he has been forced to flee once again.

"I am filled with immeasurable sadness, because when I left, 20 years ago, I never thought that I would come back as a miserable refugee," Gabriel said, standing dejectedly as he waited for a hand-out portion of kiswa, a Sudanese pancake made from sorghum grain. "I don't know how long I will have to relive the terrible situation that has been mine since I was born."

Refugee numbers grow

Ethiopian Prime Minister Abiy Ahmed, the winner of last year's Nobel Peace Prize, announced last week he had ordered military operations in Tigray, saying the move came in response to attacks on federal military camps by the regional ruling party, the Tigray People's Liberation Front (TPLF). On Saturday, Tigrayan leaders said they had ordered rocket attacks on two airports and threatened to strike neighbouring Eritrea, raising fears that the escalating conflict could spread.

The escalation of violence has sparked deep concerns that a conflict Abiy Ahmed vowed

right Popular Action party as Merino, also demanded the resignation of the president. "I just found out about the third death" in the protests, said the Archbishop of Lima, Carlos Castillo, deploring the police crackdown in a statement to state television.

Police reported two deaths, while the National Human Rights Coordinator indicated it was investigating whether there were four. The Ombudsman's Office said the first fatality, a 25-year-old man, was killed by pellet shots to the head and face. At least 63 protesters were injured, the health ministry said. The police tactics have been criticized by the UN and rights organizations such as Amnesty International since the protests began on Tuesday.

Ministers resign

Seven of the 18 ministers in Merino's cabinet announced their resignation Saturday night after the police crackdown, according to local media. The political crisis appeared to be heading towards the resignation of Merino, whose whereabouts were unknown early Sunday.

"I'm calling him and I can't get through, I have no idea if he has resigned. I'm not a fortune teller," Prime Minister Antero Flores Arozo, the government's number two, told RPP radio.

Lima's international airport said it was closed due to the night curfew. Merino has remained silent

against pro-Russian incumbent Igor Dodon's 33 percent.

"Today, you have the power to punish those who robbed you, who reduced you to misery and forced you to leave your home," she said Sunday after voting in the capital Chisinau, in a clear allusion to her rival who was targeted by accusations of corruption during his term.

The appeal has resonance in one of Europe's poorest countries where as many as 40 percent of Moldova's citizens are estimated to have travelled abroad to work. Sandu also called for "maximum vigilance" against possible fraud. Dodon, meanwhile, said he "voted for peace," "social justice" and "Christian values".

"We must maintain good relations with the European Union and with Russia," he said.

Caught off guard by the electoral setback in the first round, Dodon urged his supporters at a rally on Friday to turn out for the vote and take to the streets after Sunday's ballot to "protect our victory". —AFP



Ethiopians fleeing intense fighting in their homeland of Tigray, cook a meal as they gather in the bordering Sudanese village 8, east of the town of Gadaref, on November 13, 2020. Ethiopia's Prime Minister Abiy Ahmed, winner of last year's Nobel Peace Prize, ordered military operations in Tigray last week, shocking the international community which fears the start of a long and bloody civil war.

would be quick and contained could destabilise the broader Horn of Africa region. The United Nations rights chief Michelle Bachelet has warned of possible war crimes in Tigray, while aid workers fear a the region faces a major humanitarian crisis. —AFP



LIMA: A demonstrator, supporter of Peruvian ousted President Martin Vizcarra, falls as he is injured during clashes with riot police following a protest against the government of interim president Manuel Merino in Lima on Saturday. —AFP

since the crackdown on Saturday and the call for his resignation.

At around 2:00 am (0700 GMT) Sunday, the government released a photo of Merino meeting with his cabinet, but doubts arose as to when it was taken because it showed the health minister who had resigned hours earlier. —AFP



CHISINAU: Moldovan President and presidential candidate Igor Dodon and his wife Galina cast their ballots at a polling station during the second round of Moldova's presidential election in Chisinau yesterday amid the ongoing coronavirus disease pandemic. —AFP

Peru president faces calls to resign after 3 protesters killed

LIMA: The head of Peru's Congress has called for the "immediate resignation" of interim president Manuel Merino after a violent crackdown on protests against his new government left at least three dead and more than 60 injured. Thousands have taken to the streets in days of protests against Merino following the ouster of his popular predecessor Martin Vizcarra, who was impeached on corruption allegations on Monday.

"I ask Mr. Merino to evaluate his immediate resignation," Congress head Luis Valdez said in a statement Saturday night to Channel N television. Lawmakers will meet in an emergency session to discuss Merino's resignation, a statement released later on the Congress Twitter account said. The ultimatum came after news of the death of three protesters during a massive and peaceful march in Lima, which was violently repressed by police firing shotgun pellets and tear gas.

Lima mayor Jorge Muñoz, from the same center-

Moldova torn between Russia and West in presidential runoff

CHISINAU, Moldova: Moldova began voting yesterday in the second round of a tightly contested presidential election pitting a pro-European challenger against the country's Moscow-backed incumbent. The tiny ex-Soviet nation votes under the watchful eye of Russia, which wants polarized Moldova to remain in its sphere of influence as several Kremlin-aligned governments are rocked by political unrest.

In the first round vote earlier this month, pro-European Maia Sandu—a 48-year-old center-right politician—won a surprise victory. Sandu, who worked for the World Bank and briefly served as prime minister, won over 36 percent of the vote

News in brief

Revelers defy cracker ban in Delhi

NEW DELHI: Toxic smog blanketed India's capital early yesterday after firecrackers were set off throughout the night to mark the country's biggest annual festival Diwali despite a ban, further worsening the city's air quality levels. India's environmental court had imposed a ban to stop millions of the explosives being lighted up to mark the Hindu Festival of Light, stressing that residents were already reeling from the impact of the coronavirus pandemic and the pollution crisis that arises every winter. But the sound of firecrackers regularly was heard in the city of 20 million people late Saturday, and sporadically on Sunday. —AFP

Mexico surpasses 1m COVID cases

MEXICO CITY: Mexico surpassed one million COVID-19 cases on Saturday, registering 5,860 new infections over the previous day in a country with one of the world's highest death tolls from the virus, the government said. A total of 1,003,253 people have now tested positive for the virus in Mexico, said health ministry official Ricardo Cortes. The death toll meanwhile reached 98,259, including 635 registered over the past day, he added. Mexico has the world's fourth-highest death toll from the virus behind the United States, Brazil and India, according to an AFP tally based on official figures. It also has the 11th highest number of infections. Cases have been spiking in a number of areas of the country. —AFP

Belarus police arrest dozens

MOSCOW: Police in Belarus yesterday arrested dozens of people in Minsk demonstrating against Alexander Lukashenko, leader of the ex-Soviet country, a witness said and several media outlets reported. The witness said police used rubber bullets against the protesters. Interfax news agency said police had used tear gas to disperse the crowd near the Pushkinskaya metro station. Mobile internet has been also down across the city, according to the witness. Belarus is in a political crisis as tens of thousands of Belarusians have taken to the streets each week since an election in August, calling for Lukashenko to resign after 26 years in power. Lukashenko has rejected opposition accusations that the election was rigged in his favor. —Reuters

Greece bans gatherings

ATHENS: Greek police yesterday announced a ban on public gatherings of four or more people as hospitals were overwhelmed with coronavirus cases, ahead of the annual anniversary of a 1973 anti-junta uprising. Greece on Saturday said it would shut primary schools, kindergartens and daycare centers as coronavirus deaths crossed a thousand. The anti-junta demonstration is a treasured anniversary for many Greeks, and more than 30,000 people demonstrated in Athens and other major cities last year under a heavy police presence. At least 24 people were killed in the 1973 crackdown, an event generally considered to have broken the junta's grip on power and helped the restoration of democracy. —AFP

MONDAY, NOVEMBER 16, 2020

Business

Post-Brexit talks enter crunch week

UK, Ireland say breakthrough needed in talks this week

BRUSSELS: The EU and Britain launch the final stretch of trade negotiations today after months of bickering, hoping to dispel fear of failure by agreeing a blueprint for their future. Britain left the European Union in January, but the full economic effect of the bitter divorce will be felt at the end of the year when an 11-month transition period closes.

Britain dramatically shut the door on its 47-year membership of the EU after a 2016 referendum, ending a testy relationship marked by anti-EU euro-skepticism, especially among older voters.

Going forward, relations between Britain and Europe could be governed by a trade deal, but only if negotiations currently under way deliver, which is hardly guaranteed given still wide divergences.

Officials on both sides of the Channel are eyeing an EU leaders video summit on Thursday as the de facto last chance for a breakthrough. This gives negotiators Michel Barnier and David Frost just four days and nights to bridge differences that have remained unchanged since talks began in March.

And this, in turn, might give the European Parliament just enough time to ratify the deal for the end of the year. "Logic and reason would all point to a deal," said one EU diplomat with a close eye on the talks. "But if anything became clear in the past three years, when it comes to Brexit, economic rationale and pure logic are not enough to explain what's happening," the diplomat said.

'Not great'

Failure would see Britain's ties with the European economy governed by WTO rules, slapping high tariffs, quotas and other impediments to cross-Channel trade that flowed unencumbered for decades. Today's British economy, the sixth biggest in the world, was built on EU membership, with the London financial hub and a tapestry of car plants and multinationals enjoying access to the EU's 450 million consumers

and complex supply chains. Given the danger, British big business implored the government to find middle ground and replicate the benefits of membership as closely as possible, even if this came with the condition that the UK align closely with EU rules.

But, when the pro-Brexit Boris Johnson became prime minister last year, London went the other way, asking for a zero-tariff deal on goods and services that must, he insisted, leave the UK sovereign to make its own decisions. With positions starkly apart, the talks, led by EU chief negotiator Barnier and the UK's Frost, became bogged down on three core issues.

Fishing has been the least economically significant but most politically explosive issue, with Europe eager to keep open access to the UK's bountiful waters. Fishermen in France, Belgium, Denmark and the Netherlands have trawled British waters for centuries, but London wants the access rethought to satisfy Britain's coastal communities, which voted strongly for Brexit. Belgian MEP Philippe Lambert said, on fishing, Europeans giving ground was "inevitable".

"If there is no agreement, it will be dramatic; if there is an agreement it won't be great," said the Greens MEP, who sits on the European Parliament's Brexit committee.

'Fall apart'

The other obstacle is the lack of faith from the Europeans that once outside the EU single market Britain will play fair in terms of competition rules, even with a deal. This view sharpened when Johnson's government introduced a bill in parliament that effectively ripped up the terms of the divorce pact, potentially in violation of international law. Under the trade deal, will British companies enjoy easier rules on the environment or food safety only to sell their goods cheaply in the EU, where their rivals must abide by stricter measures?

Seeking to maintain what it calls a "level playing



LONDON: In this file photo taken on January 9, 2020, a video grab from footage broadcast by the UK Parliament's Parliamentary Recording Unit (PRU) shows Britain's Prime Minister Boris Johnson (center) reacting after his government won the vote on the third reading of the European Union (Withdrawal Agreement) Bill, in the House of Commons. —AFP

field", the EU is demanding that Britain make a commitment to not backtracking on standards as well as cooperating on how these evolve in the future. The EU is also worried about how Britain will subsidize companies, afraid that too much taxpayer largesse could prove unfair towards firms in Europe, where state aid oversight is strict.

To solve those problems, the EU is insisting that the deal hold some sort of emergency mechanism, that could swiftly inflict penalties if either side breaks the terms. "Either the British accept and we then move on to difficult negotiations on fisheries, or they refuse, and we will then be out of time and the negotiations fail," a senior European diplomat warned. —AFP

Questions as lab execs sell shares worth millions

NEW YORK: Pfizer, Moderna, Novavax: executives at several American laboratories developing Covid-19 vaccines have recently pocketed millions of dollars by selling shares in their companies—raising questions about the propriety of such a move in the midst of a national health crisis.

On the very day that pharmaceutical giant Pfizer announced preliminary data showing its vaccine was 90 percent effective against the coronavirus, its chief executive Albert Bourla sold shares worth \$5.6 million. There was nothing illegal about this, Pfizer said: the sale took place according to rules allowing company heads to sell shares under predetermined criteria, at a date or for a price set in advance, to avoid any suspicion of insider trading.

Under the same rules, several Moderna officials have sold shares worth more than \$100 million in recent months. That company has not placed a single product on the market since its creation in 2010, but the federal government has committed to paying it up to \$2.5 billion if its vaccine proves effective.

Moderna shares have soared from \$19 at the beginning of the year to a current level of \$90.

The boss of Novavax, for his part, sold \$42 million in shares on August 18, just over a month after the announcement it would receive public financing of \$1.6 billion. Accountable US, a non-partisan taxpayers' advocacy group, has calculated that from the start of the federally coordinated effort to develop vaccines on May 15 until August 31, officials at five pharmaceutical companies made more than \$145 million by selling shares.

'Legally questionable'

Executives at Pfizer and Moderna were operating under a rule put in place by the Securities and Exchange Commission in 2000 to allow company employees to sell shares without facing insider-trading charges. It allows them to set up a plan determining the trades of their shares at a price, amount or dates specified in advance, but only when they are not in possession of privileged information that could affect share prices.

Once such a sale is planned, it cannot be modified at the last minute, even if its timing might ultimately raise questions. Still, this use of the rule by Pfizer and Moderna appears "legally questionable," according to Daniel Taylor, an associate professor at the University of Pennsylvania's Wharton business school, who has been studying the big pharma firms since the beginning of the pandemic.

"The question is, what did the executives know at the time that they pre-scheduled the trade?" he asked. Bourla, according to Pfizer, had merely re-authorized on August 19 a plan for a share sale originally authorized in February, "with the same price and volume terms." —AFP

Post-Brexit borders to divide EU, UK citizens

BRUSSELS: From January 1 British and EU citizens will be confronted with the reality of Brexit as the transition period ends and borders done away with decades ago return. From that date, Britons will be treated by the EU as "third country" nationals, no longer enjoying freedom of movement to work, study or retire across the European Union and associated states.

Britain in turn will process EU nationals at its borders as it does other non-UK passport holders. EU citizens proving residence in Britain, or Britons already living in a European Union country, before the end of this year will theoretically retain their rights under a Withdrawal Agreement struck in late 2019.

Tourists

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

180-day period. They will also need to show travel insurance coverage, sufficient funds and a return ticket on request. Europeans entering Britain can use a national ID card until October, after which only passports will be accepted, for stays of up to six months.

EU passport holders will be able to continue using British e-gates under current guidance. Those with criminal records may be banned and non-European family members of a European may need a visa, depending on nationality. The UK treats Irish citizens separately from other EU nationals under a bilateral arrangement dating back nearly a century that allows continued freedom of movement between Britain and Ireland. Europeans will be able to keep using EU pet passports as long as rabies vaccines are up to date.

Business travellers

Border control for business travellers is one of myriad issues yet to be worked out between the EU and the UK. In the EU, Britons attending conferences or meetings likely will be exempt from visas where they do not receive payment or provide services. However for other UK business travellers, including posted workers and the self-employed, a visa and/or a work permit may be imposed in line with each individual EU country's laws.

There will also be tax and social security considerations. Certain services or company ownership in those countries may be off-limits to non-EU citizens or residents or those lacking national

Japan finds luring business from Hong Kong may be tough

TOKYO: Tokyo is on a charm offensive, hoping to lure firms in Hong Kong spooked by protests and a controversial security law imposed by China. But the city is proving a tough sell. "I want to make Tokyo Asia's number one financial city," Governor Yuriko Koike said in October, as the Japanese capital opened an information center in Hong Kong for international businesses considering a move. Tokyo's courtship comes with some concrete promises, including temporary office space in the city for foreign financial firms that want to try out life in Japan.

There are also a number of more theoretical incentives being floated, including tax breaks, streamlined bureaucracy and even a special economic zone like Shenzhen, China's Silicon Valley. In some ways, Japan might seem an obvious alternative for businesses looking to leave Hong Kong: it is the world's third-largest economy, home to the Tokyo Stock Exchange, and already houses outposts of numerous financial institutions and international firms.

But there are some serious stumbling blocks, and competitors, that experts say

mean Tokyo's hopes for regional financial dominance may be little more than a pipe dream. For a start, Japan's income taxes are sky high, comparatively, topping out at 45 percent against Singapore's 22 percent and Hong Kong's 17 percent.

Low English fluency levels are also a chronic handicap, as is the country's comparatively sluggish adoption of digital technology. Trade on Tokyo's stock markets was halted for an entire day last month because of a "hardware failure"—a glitch seen as unlikely to boost confidence and bring new traders flocking.

Fierce competition

Michael Mroczek, president of the European Business Council in Japan, said there were high hopes for new Prime Minister Yoshihide Suga's digitization and deregulation push.

But "there's also a lot of skepticism because there haven't been a lot of changes" over the years when similar initiatives have been proposed, he added. Japan's particularly strict approach to border control during the pandemic-for months foreign residents were not allowed to return even as Japanese citizens did—has been seen by some as "discrimination" and could also be off-putting for tentative transplants, added Mroczek.

Tokyo is also not the only Asian city seeking to take advantage of a potential



LONDON: In this file picture taken on March 25, 2017 an EU flag and a Union flag held by a demonstrator is seen with Elizabeth Tower (Big Ben) and the Houses of Parliament as marchers taking part in an anti-Brexit, pro-European Union (EU) enter Parliament Square in central London, ahead of the British government's planned triggering of Article 50 this week. —AFP

licences, and customs declarations may be needed for goods carried in.

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

From January, EU students going to

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



TOKYO: While Tokyo is capital of the world's number-three economy and offers attractive incentives such as tax breaks, it also has a number of stumbling blocks Japan is hoping to lure businesses considering relocating from Hong Kong, but it faces some tough obstacles, and competition. —AFP

Hong Kong exodus. Australia has announced new visa opportunities for Hong Kong students and entrepreneurs, and officials have said they will be "very proactive" in encouraging businesses to relocate.

And while Singapore's government officially says only that it seeks a "stable, calm and prosperous" Hong Kong, it is probably the most obvious alternative for firms, said Rajiv Biswas, Asia-Pacific chief economist at consultants IHS Markit. "Most international financial services firms may already have a large

presence in Singapore, and therefore may prefer to expand their existing operations in Singapore rather than finding another new location," he said.

'Wait and see'

There are still questions, though, about whether an exodus from Hong Kong is really on the cards, whichever regional city stands to gain. "I wouldn't expect big firms to announce that they are pulling out of Hong Kong completely," Mark Williams, chief Asia economist at Capital Economics, told AFP. —AFP

Business

Ooredoo Kuwait sets pre-order record for iPhone12 in 2 days

Pre-booking process takes only 5 seconds through Ooredoo Kuwait's website to completion

KUWAIT: Ooredoo Telecom, the first to introduce innovative digital services in Kuwait, has revealed that pre-orders for the iPhone12 devices have reached a record in only 2 days through Ooredoo's eShop which will last until this Thursday, November 19.

Yousef Al-Shallal, Director of Marketing - Ooredoo Kuwait enthused saying: "The pre-orders for the iPhone 12 line have witnessed a massive turnout only a few hours after our announcement on November 13, 2020. "We are pioneers in providing every customer a unique and unparalleled digital experience with every purchasing process they make, and we are beyond pleased to bring the latest products and services that aim to meet the growing and changing demands of the modern customer. At Ooredoo, we are always committed to enriching people's digital lives," Al-Shallal added.

With a beautiful all-new design, iPhone 12 devices feature unparalleled new camera systems, edge-to-edge Super Retina XDR displays for a

more immersive viewing experience, the biggest jump in durability with the Ceramic Shield front cover, and Apple-designed A14 Bionic chip, the fastest chip in a smartphone.

Pre-orders of the all-new iPhone12 mini, iPhone12, iPhone12 Pro and iPhone12 Pro max are still open, noting that the devices will be available for customers on Friday, November 20, 2020 in selected branches and on the company's official website www.ooredoo.com.kw.

For pre-orders, and more details on pricing and availability details, please visit https://www.ooredoo.com.kw/portal/en/ip12_preorder



Yousef Al-Shallal



COVID deepens Cambodia's loan crisis

SIEM REAP, Cambodia: Trapped under a mountain of crippling debt, Cambodian farmer Roern Reth fears she will have to sell her land to repay microfinance loans that have ballooned due to pandemic-spurred job losses in her family. What started as a \$3,000 sum from a loan shark for her son's wedding has now grown to about \$7,000, she says—the result of additional financial needs that have cropped up.

Her sons—who crossed illegally into neighboring Thailand—previously sent money home to help with repayments, but they are now out of work. "Because of COVID, we could not find jobs... and my sons do not have money," she tells AFP tearfully, outside her modest home in northern Siem Reap province.

"Now, I cannot clear my debts," Roern Reth, 50, is among more than 2.6 million Cambodians who have turned to microfinance because of limited access to traditional banking.

But in poor countries with little regulatory oversight, the practice has come under fire for predatory tactics including targeting rural villages where residents have limited financial acumen.

In Cambodia where the average yearly income is a meager \$1,700, borrowers in 2019 racked up a total debt of \$10 billion to microfinance lenders. This puts the kingdom at an average loan of \$3,804 per person—the highest amount in the world,

according to local rights group Licadho.

A lack of enforcement also has illegal lenders offering "throat-slittingly high" interest rates of up to 30 percent over a year, says Licadho's Am Sam Ath. The informal lending industry has long been a complicated issue for the kingdom, he explains, with Cambodians turning to licensed microfinance institutions to repay private lenders only to find themselves trapped in a cycle of debt to more lenders.

"With the COVID pandemic and floods in the rural areas, people face double the trouble, with more difficulties over debts," he says. While Cambodia itself has recorded only around 300 cases, the pandemic has seen tens of thousands of migrant workers return from Thailand as jobs have dried up, putting families living paycheck-to-paycheck under strain. In desperation, Roern Reth and her husband travelled from their sleepy village of Trapeang Veng to the capital Phnom Penh to look for jobs at construction sites, only to be rejected because of their age.

She worries the next time the debtors come they will bully her to sell her house and rice fields which they hold as collateral. "I am so worried every day, I swallow rice bitterly," she says.

'Easy cash'

Surrounded by lush rice fields, the remote Trapeang Veng is only accessible by bumpy roads, 50 kilometers (30 miles) from the tourist hotspot of Angkor Wat. Faded posters advertising "easy cash" are tacked up on coconut trees across the village, touting loans as a simple path to fulfilling aspirations from motorbikes and trac-



Roern Reth, who owes huge microfinancing debts, sitting outside her house at a village in Siem Reap province. —AFP

tors to dream homes.

But many houses have been abandoned by owners who have fled to avoid debt collectors.

These houses are difficult to miss, says village chief Dorm Deam, pointing at a concrete home with ornate wooden carvings on the padlocked front door. "Since the coronavirus pandemic, the situation has gotten worse," he said. "They are strangled by debts." Today, more than three-quarters of Trapeang Veng's 113 families owe a total sum of some \$300,000. Human rights groups have called for the government to put a freeze on repayments and demanded lenders return more than one million land titles held as collateral.

Some 270,000 Cambodians have had their loans restructured in recent months to cope with the economic fallout of the virus, National Bank of Cambodia director Chea Serey says.

Children abroad

With so many working-age Cambodians migrating to neighbouring Thailand for work—up to two million according to rights groups—the remaining residents in Trapeang Veng are mostly the elderly and children. Villager Penh Tay says her daughter and two sons had crossed the border, but lost their jobs after the virus outbreak.

"I hoped my children in Thailand could help, but now they don't have jobs," the 53-year-old tells AFP as she combs her granddaughter's hair. With a combined debt of \$20,000 to a micro-finance group and two informal lenders, Penh Tay says she cries herself to sleep at night. One lender seized her cow last month after she missed a repayment deadline. "I'm scared of losing my house and having no place to live," she says, adding that her neighbor was forced to sell. "I don't know what they will take from me next." — AFP

Public money guarantees 'risky' fossil fuel projects: Experts

PARIS: Energy firms are undertaking financially risky natural gas extraction projects from the Arctic to Africa made feasible by government-backed loans and guarantees, jeopardizing efforts to curb global warming, experts say. As pressure from the public and investors to green their portfolios grows, and the cost of renewable energy continues to fall, oil and gas majors are finding it harder to attract investment on new fossil fuel projects.

They are also increasingly reliant on government-backed funding—in the form of loans or insurance—several industry experts told AFP.

Eight export credit agencies awarded loans to French oil giant Total in July, when the company signed a \$14.9-billion financing agreement for a liquefied natural gas (LNG) project in Mozambique. The province where the sites are located, Cabo Delgado, has been grappling with a jihadist insurgency since 2017 that has killed more than 1,000 people.

Certain energy projects have become "very risky in general, let alone in regions with unstable politics", said Dylan Tanner from Influence Map, which monitors the energy sector. Beyond security issues, the think tank highlighted in a report last year the risk of "asset stranding" due to increasingly competitive renewable energy and tighter climate regulations. Credit export agencies use government-backed funds to shore up projects.

If the projects go sideways due to geopolitics or become obsolete as

technology and environmental policy evolves, they end up costing the state, not private investors.

"If there is a problem, taxpayers will pay for the damages, not the companies," Cecile Marchand, from Friends of the Earth France, told AFP. "Commercial banks would not take the risk of lending so much money on the long term without any insurance."

'Aware of climate concerns'

As well as the risk of financial loss and stranded assets, experts say projects such as Total's in Mozambique also call into question states' commitment to combat climate change.

The 2015 Paris treaty enjoins nations to limit global temperature rises to "well below" two degrees Celsius (3.6 Fahrenheit) above pre-industrial levels through sweeping emissions cuts.

In order to meet a more ambitious cap of 1.5C of warming, the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) — the world's leading body on the issue—says fossil gas use must decline from 132.95 Exajoules in 2020 to 112.51 Exajoules in 2030. "Such a decline cannot happen if the global gas industry continues to expand," Ted Nace from Global Energy Monitor told AFP.

Mozambique has already been battered by extreme weather events, a consequence of climate change.

Cyclone Idai—the strongest storm on record to hit southern Africa—struck in March 2019, leaving around 700 people dead and displacing 1.5 million others. A little over a month



after Idai, northern Mozambique was hit by another devastating storm, Cyclone Kenneth. Scientists also warn of the consequences of methane leaks, inherent to LNG projects. "Total is fully aware of climate concerns, has publicly recognized them for a long time, takes them into account in its strategies and develops concrete actions," a company spokesperson said.

'Not fair'

France put an end to hydrocarbon extraction in 2017, but has left the door open to continuing to finance projects overseas until 2035. Analysts say this puts it on a collision course with the goals of a deal it midwived—the Paris accord requires each signatory to report only domestic emissions, not those it finances elsewhere. "This is clearly not fair, since in many cases (such as the Mozambique LNG project), the gas will not be used domestically," Nace said.

"It would make more sense for

responsibility for such projects to rest with the wealthy countries that will use the gas." France's credit export agency Bpifrance is considering giving a guarantee of 700 million euros (\$827 million) to Total for a project in the Russian Arctic, an amount confirmed by the company. Total has a 10 percent stake in the Arctic LNG 2 project, which aims to export the equivalent of seven billion barrels of oil — 12 times France's annual consumption.

In a document obtained by AFP, Total said the "continued support" provided by the French treasury and Bpifrance has been "paramount to the success of Yamal LNG", the other major extraction projects in the Arctic. Global Energy Monitor warned last year that new gas exploration—no matter where it occurred—"threatens to lock in massive amounts of greenhouse gas emissions and negate any chance of limiting global warming to the 1.5C tipping point." — AFP

ECB's optimism on vaccine supports euro debt markets

LONDON: Eurozone government bond yields nudged down on Friday, as central bank comments that the economic outlook remains unclear even with hopes for a coronavirus vaccine comforted debt markets that more monetary policy stimulus is on its way. The heads of the Federal Reserve and the European Central Bank on Thursday welcomed the encouraging results in trials of a vaccine candidate for the novel coronavirus but stressed that the economic outlook will remain uncertain.

"They all shared similar concerns that a potential Covid-19 vaccine would not end the economic challenges of the pandemic," said Deutsche Bank strategist Jim Reid.

Monday's upbeat news from Pfizer about a COVID-19 vaccine sparked a heavy selloff in US and European bond markets as investors jumped to price in a brighter outlook, although that optimism faded as the week progressed. The French government said late on Thursday that there would be no easing for at least two weeks of the country's second COVID-19 lockdown, with the number of people in hospital with coronavirus now higher than at the peak of the first wave.

In early trade, Germany's benchmark 10-year Bund yield was down 1.5 basis points on the day at -0.54 percent and moving further away from 2-month highs hit on Wednesday.

The sharp selloff in bonds at the start of the week still left Bund yields up 7 bps on the week and set for their biggest weekly jump since August. With the eurozone likely heading back into recession this quarter, the ECB has already said it would provide more stimulus in December. This week's comments from ECB officials have only reinforced the expectation of more stimulus ahead.

Bond yields across the euro area nudged lower, with Italian 10-year debt yields a touch lower on the day at 0.64 percent, keeping record lows hit around 0.57 percent in sight. Chris Bailey, European Strategist at Raymond James, said that the talk of more stimulus at a central bank forum hosted by the ECB this week was best summed up by ECB policymaker Francois Villeroi de Galhau remarks on the "need to do more". "An unobvious hint ahead of the ECB's December meeting," said Bailey. — Reuters

Stock investors cast wary eye on yield rally

NEW YORK: As Treasury yields rally to multi-month highs, some investors are gauging how a more sustained rise could impact equity markets. Yields on the 10-year Treasury, which move inversely to bond prices, rose to a seven-month high of 0.97 percent in the past week on hopes that breakthroughs in the search for a COVID-19 vaccine would eventually translate to a boost in economic growth.

That's still low, by historical standards: yields are a full point below their levels at the start of January and below their 5-year average of 2.05 percent, according to Refinitiv data. The Federal Reserve has pledged to keep interest rates near historic lows for years to come in its bid to support growth, and past rallies in yields have faded in recent years.

Expectations that a vaccine against the coronavirus could fuel a broad economic revival, however, have also spurred bets that yields could continue edging higher. That could potentially weaken the case for holding shares that have become expensive during the S&P 500's 58 percent rally from its lows of the year. "If growth turns out better than anybody thought, the bad news is that the Fed might not have as much control over the extended curve," said Ralph Segall, chief investment officer at firm Segall, Bryant & Hamill. "That would probably cause stocks to pause."

Analysts at Goldman Sachs this week forecast Treasury yields will hit 1.3 percent by the end of next year and 1.7 percent by 2022. They also raised their forecast for the S&P to 4,100 by the middle of next year, a roughly 16 percent gain from recent levels. For now, analysts believe yields have some way to go before they become an obstacle to further stock gains.

The benchmark S&P 500 has climbed by an average of 1.37 percent a month during rising rate environments when the yield 10-year Treasury remained at 3 percent or below, according to Sam Stovall, chief investment strategist at research firm CFRA. The S&P 500 gained an average of 0.53 percent a month with yields above 3 percent, he said. How quickly yields rise also matters, said Stephanie Link, chief investment strategist at HighTower Advisors.

A gradual increase as the economy improves allows companies time to roll over or refinance debt, while a sharp jump higher is more likely to shock the market, she said. — Reuters

Business

Canon ME extends partnership with Al-Bahar Group in Kuwait

Partnership to provide an ecosystem of innovative B2B imaging solutions in Kuwait

KUWAIT: Canon Middle East (CME), a provider of imaging technologies and services, has expanded its partnership with Mohamed Abdulrahman Al-Bahar Group, one of the pioneering trading houses in the Gulf, to provide an ecosystem of innovative business-to-business imaging products and solutions in Kuwait.

The extended partnership, which was announced during a virtual roundtable held in the presence of Anurag Agrawal, Managing Director, Canon Middle East and Canon Turkey, Abdullateef Hamad M A Al-Bahar, Bahar Kuwait Group Holding Family Representative, Shadi Bakhour, B2B Business Unit Director, Canon Middle East, and Ihab Al-Khatib, Group General Manager, Bahar Kuwait Group Holding, addressed the rapidly changing business environment and the accelerated shift toward digital transformation across many public and private entities in Kuwait.

More specifically, the partnership will answer the growing market need for seamless Managed Print Services (MPS), digitization, as well as printing and archiving solutions for public, private, small and medium enterprises across multiple sectors including education, oil and gas, banking, health-care, manufacturing, telecom and the government.

Anurag Agrawal, Managing Director, Canon Middle East and Canon Turkey, said: "Kuwait is an important market for us, and our expanded partnership with Al-Bahar Group brings us closer to our customers in Kuwait and allows us to deliver on their evolving business objectives. As long-term partners, Canon is supporting the New Kuwait 2035 vision and development goals by providing the necessary digital-first, tech infrastructure for businesses to enhance their operations, provide

better services and sustain the evolution of a healthy and competitive market on par with global standards. This partnership underlines our commitment to our corporate philosophy, 'Kyosei' which means living and working together for the common good."

Ihab Al-Khatib, Group General Manager for Bahar Kuwait Group Holding, said "We are very proud to be further associated with Canon Middle East and the Canon respected products here in Kuwait, as this expanded relationship shall bring to our dear customers additional access to a wide variety of print, document and imaging solutions. We are confident that the new technologies and solutions from Canon will enable businesses in Kuwait to be more versatile, efficient, and profitable." Al-Khatib added, "The Canon brand and products enjoy vast demand and admiration in the Kuwaiti market, and expanding our partnership with Canon is a great achievement and a true reflection on the hard work that the Al-Bahar team has done in the past, alongside the team at Canon Middle East to serve our customers in Kuwait. All of us here at Mohamed Abdulrahman Al-Bahar are delighted with the expanded partnership and we are looking forward to continuing to develop this corporation further with Canon Middle East".

Canon and Mohamed Abdulrahman Al-Bahar Group partnership already existed for the wide



Ihab Al-Khatib



format print solutions, and with the extended partnership for Canon B2B products, the Al-Bahar Group will offer now Canon's best-in-class enterprise solutions in Kuwait, that will help us with cost optimisation, seamless operations and the transition toward digital tools and services for our customers in this market.

The Group's highly energized and efficient workforce will support Canon's customers with its core business expertise in the printing industry, with a strong emphasis on after-sales operations, and increased customer satisfaction.

Kuwait is one of the world's top 10 improvers amongst 190 economies in the World Bank Group's Doing Business 2020 study. Its ranking jumped from 97 in 2019 to 83 this year, as the Kuwaiti government has ensured implementation of business-friendly rules, regulations, and policies. Canon Middle East firmly believes it can make a positive difference across various industries in Kuwait by supporting the development of Kuwait's business landscape and economic growth objectives, that with our new extended partnership with Mohamed Abdulrahman Al-Bahar.

Mezzan Holding reports financial results for 9 months

KUWAIT: Mezzan Holding KSC, one of the largest manufacturers and distributors of food, beverage, FMCG and healthcare products in the Gulf, announced the company's financial results for the 9-month period ending 30 September 2020.

YTD 2020 Highlights

- Revenue: KD194.4 million, up 14.5%
- EBITDA: KD 21.4 million, up 21%
- Net profit to shareholders of parent company: KD 10.3 million, up 12%

The group's strong revenue growth was accompanied by enhanced operating profitability margins and leverage driving an increase in gross profit and EBITDA margins. Net profits were further supported by a lower financing cost in Q3 2020 driven by a lower size of borrowing and a lower interest rate environment.

Mezzan Holding Executive Vice Chairman Mohammad Jassim Al-Wazzan said: "Mezzan achieved healthy revenue growth driven by food and non-food FMCG and healthcare segments activity. We continue to report enhanced financial results despite the current challenging operating environment driven by improved results of our operations in the defensive sector. The improved operating results and financial strength of the group reinforces our strategy to focus on our consumer-driven and healthcare businesses."

Mezzan Holding CEO Garrett Walsh said: "We are glad to see our financial results improve our topline and operating results as well as net profits. The group has recently implemented an expansion-driven strategy which has started yielding results. The enhanced profitability was driven by scale improvement and operating profit in addition to a reduced cost of financing."

YTD 2020 Financial Performance Review

- Food Business Line: Total Revenue for the Food Business Line reached KD 129.5 million, an increase of 5.7 percent compared with the same period in 2019.

The Food Business Line accounted for 66.6 percent of Group Revenue. The Business Line comprises the following three divisions: Manufacturing and Distribution (generating 46 percent of Group Revenue), Catering (generating 13.6 percent of Group Revenue), and Services (generating 6.9 percent of Group Revenue).

- Manufacturing and Distribution: Revenue increased 7.7 percent.
- Catering: Revenue decreased by 1.0 percent.
- Services: Revenue increased by 7.2 percent.

Non-Food Business Line: Revenue reached KD 64.9 million, an increase of 37.1 percent compared with the same period in 2019. The Non-Food Business Line accounted for 33.4 percent of Group Revenue.

The Business Lines comprises the following divisions: FMCG and Healthcare (generating 31.7 percent of Group Revenue) and Industrials (contributing 1.7 percent).

- FMCG and Healthcare: FY Revenue increased by 41.2 percent, inorganic growth and heritage portfolio opportunities.
- Industrials: FY Industrials revenue decreased by 11.6 percent.

Regional Business Highlights in YTD 2020:

- In Kuwait: Revenue grew by 21.3 percent due to a strong performance in FMCG and healthcare segment spurred by acquisitions.
- In UAE: Revenue decreased by 1.9 percent, impacted by lower food service activity.
- In Qatar: FY Revenue decreased by 9.2 percent, driven by limited interruption of some operations.
- In KSA: Revenue increased by 5.8 percent.
- In Afghanistan: Revenue decreased by 6.6 percent.
- In Jordan: Revenue increased by 8.9 percent.
- In Iraq: Revenue increased by 68.9 percent, driven by the food services segment.

Gulf Bank launches campaign for its cardholders

KUWAIT: Gulf Bank has launched a new campaign for its credit, prepaid and debit cardholders who will be automatically entered into a draw for a chance to win an iPhone 12 Pro Max upon using their Gulf Bank cards.

During the campaign period, which will run from 10th November 2020 until January 10, 2021, Gulf Bank cardholders who spend using their cards will be automatically entered into the draw. For every KD 10 spent locally, Credit and Prepaid cardholders will receive one chance to enter the draw. For every KD 10 spent internationally, Credit, Prepaid and Debit cardholders will receive three chances to enter the draw. The draw to select 40 winners will

Does Brexit free Europe to seek closer union?

BRUSSELS: British politicians often speak of Brexit as an opportunity to escape Brussels' shackles but does the divorce also free Europe to go its own way? London's departure strips the bloc of its second largest economy after Germany's and of France's only peer as a nuclear-armed European military power.

But it also removes the biggest skeptic of a closer union. Some of those who support deeper integration of the remaining 27 member states sense an opportunity but the split could also unveil deeper fault lines masked by the Brexit storm. For some, the decision in July at a marathon EU summit to move towards joint borrowing to fund a post-coronavirus recovery plan for the union is a sign of what can now be achieved. "With the British, we wouldn't even have discussed this, they'd have said 'no' straight away," French professor Robert Frank, who wrote a book on Britain's dif-

ficent European relations, told AFP.

The stimulus plan, which emerged from four straight days and nights of haggling between EU leaders, was hailed as a breakthrough by EU enthusiasts. "It's going to create a common fiscal policy for the EU that it hasn't ever had before," says Andrew Duff, a British former MEP and European federalist, now a visiting fellow at the European Policy Centre.

The joint borrowing was resisted by a coalition of so-called frugals—the Netherlands, Denmark, Austria, Finland and Sweden—who would once have counted on British support. But, once France had convinced Germany—a long-time holdout against any EU joint debt to get behind the plan, these smaller states were left exposed and eventually had to compromise. "It isn't a determined, clearly thought out strategy, but it's a drift towards a more federal EU," Duff argues. In this reading, Brexit leaves France's President Emmanuel Macron freer to push forward an agenda of deeper EU integration.

Frugals resist

Other observers see trouble on the horizon, with the smaller, more

After EU, what's next for 'Global Britain'?

LONDON: A brave new world or a dangerous leap into the unknown? After nearly 50 years of integration with Europe, Britain starts an uncertain new chapter on January 1.

What changes on January 1?

Britain formally quit the European Union in January this year but has continued to observe all its rules during a transition period. That half-way house ends at 2300 GMT on December 31. So from 2021, it will stand on its own, for better or worse. If the two sides can secure a new trade deal in the time left, that will smooth the path by lifting the prospect of tariffs and quotas for cross-Channel goods, from cars to lamb. Without a deal, imports and exports face serious disruption with the abrupt return of barriers that have not existed for decades. There are fears that certain foodstuffs and medicines could run short. But even with a deal, the future won't be seamless. UK exporters will still need to file reams of new customs paperwork to prove their goods have authorization to enter the EU's single market.

Britain is urging business to be ready either way but industry players say the government has failed to deliver

take place on January 17, 2021, in the presence of officials from the Ministry of Commerce and Industry. Each winner selected in the draw will receive an iPhone 12 Pro Max, the latest smart phone launched by Apple.

Commenting on the announcement, Ahmad Al-Amir, Assistant General Manager of Corporate Communications at Gulf Bank, said: "We are excited to announce our latest campaign for our Credit, Prepaid and Debit cardholders as part of Gulf Bank's ongoing commitment to providing our clients with the highest levels of customer satisfaction, in addition to a multitude of creative solutions, products, and financial services. We are pleased to launch this campaign, especially in the light of the ongoing pandemic and customers increasingly opting to utilize their cards in place of cash. We hope that our customers gain an added benefit from using their Gulf Bank cards when shopping, and we wish them the best of luck in winning the draw."

Gulf Bank Credit cards grant cardholders a variety of exclusive offers and benefits, including trav-

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Ahmad Al-Amir



In this file photo taken on March 28, 2017 Britain's Prime Minister Theresa May, signs the official letter to European Council President Donald Tusk, invoking Article 50 and signaling the United Kingdom's intention to leave the EU, in the cabinet office inside 10 Downing Street. —AFP

open market economies having to speak up more against Paris and Berlin now that their British ally is gone. "I think we'll definitely be worse off," says Eoin Drea, an Irish researcher for the Wilfred Martens

Centre for European Studies.

"There will certainly, he believes, be a "centralizing focus" from France and Germany-backed by Italy and Spain—but this will be resisted by Ireland, the frugals and Eastern Europe. —AFP

which has shaken up the Foreign Office to integrate aid and development into Britain's diplomatic agenda.

What about at home?

Johnson's pitch to voters in last December's general election was to "get Brexit done" and focus both money and attention on parts of the country that have failed to benefit from London's finance-driven growth. That "levelling up" agenda to bring new investment such as high-speed rail to northern England has been side-tracked by the pandemic. But the government insists its long-term goals remain in place and that membership dues sent to the EU will be better spent at home. Some Brexiters want a radical overhaul of Britain's economic model, to turn the country into "Singapore on Thames"—a lightly regulated, lightly taxed rival to supposedly sclerotic Europe. Yet the government stresses that any free-trade deals won't sacrifice its "red lines": the state-run National Health Service, food standards and UK farming.

All of those sacred cows could be carved up if the United States forces post-Brexit Britain to yield the same kind of concessions on trade that the world's most powerful economy has negotiated elsewhere. And Joe Biden's election as US president could restrict Johnson's plans to bind Northern Ireland into the post-January 1 UK internal market, free of EU influence. —AFP

vital IT systems and support staff in time, heightening the risk of chaos after January 1.

What is Global Britain?

Brexiters argue the EU has held Britain back through onerous regulation and it can now embark on a buccaneering new mission to support free trade around the world—"God's diplomacy", according to a February speech by Prime Minister Boris Johnson. But if heaven was listening, it had other plans in mind: a month after Johnson's speech, Britain was forced into national lockdown by the coronavirus pandemic. If the world ever gets back to normality, the idea is that Britain will not shrink inwards after Brexit but will look outwards, as far afield as a free-trade pact with Pacific rim countries.

"Now Global Britain is back, it is time for the makers, the doers and the innovators to help us write our most exciting chapter yet," International Trade Secretary Liz Truss declared in October, touting UK exports of everything from clotted cream to robots.

Truss has signed a post-Brexit trade deal with Japan, and is negotiating others with the United States, Australia, Canada and New Zealand—Britain's partners in the "Five Eyes" collective of English-speaking intelligence powers.

Further deals in the pipeline will cover 80 percent of overseas trade by 2022, according to the government,

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People visit the Social Uprising Museum, which exhibits street art pieces regarding the protests against the Chilean government of Sebastian Pinera in Santiago. — AFP photos

CHILEANS CHANNEL STREET RAGE INTO ART AT PROTEST MUSEUM

Awash with multicolored posters, angry graffiti and other symbols of protest - metal shields, tear gas cartridges - Santiago's Museum of Social Uprising is aiming to keep alive the memory of months of deadly demonstrations that have left a lasting mark on Chile. Months of demonstrations that left more than 30 people dead broke out in October 2019, initially against rising public transport fares but quickly mushrooming into wider anger at social inequality. As a colorful backdrop to the ugly clashes, the walls of Santiago were soon screaming their own artistic protest. The messages of the murals bore the accumulated rage of years of social injustice, but also the hopes of a raft of young Chilean artists for a better future. Now, with the tumult of the streets quietened, the rage has been preserved at the museum-located a stone's throw from Plaza Italia, the epicenter of the uprising.

"We wanted to create this space to show what was expressed in the street during the demonstrations," visual artist Marcel Sola told AFP. The museum brings together the work of some 70

street artists, asked to reproduce their protest pieces and assemble assorted objects seen as emblematic of the protests. They include frescoes that appeared at the height of the demonstrations, one depicting Salvador Allende—the former socialist leader overthrown by General Augusto Pinochet in 1973 — wearing a jacket of colored flowers and shaping a heart with his hands. Another shows a masked angel with the word "dignity" inscribed on its forehead.

Pots, pans and tear gas

The largest piece is Sola's giant sculpture of the stray dog that became a symbol of the uprising. A red bandana around its neck, the black dog attained celebrity status during earlier student demonstrations against the police. Protesters nicknamed the animal "Negro Matapacos" - or Black Cop-Killer. The museum opened at the beginning of November, just after the referendum in which Chileans voted overwhelmingly to replace the Pinochet-era constitution—seen as the principal obstacle to fundamental reform. Even with restricted open-



ing hours due to the coronavirus pandemic, the museum receives around 150 visitors a day. Many of them were participants in the events which the exhibits memorialize, moved now as they reflect quietly on the news photos and videos of the protests.

"I like the warmth I felt when I arrived. I felt at home. It gave me a lot of memories and a little bit of grief," said Pedro, a 24-year-old musician. "I felt like it was a collection of things in the streets, but in very

artistic terms," said Mailen, a 27-year old saleswoman. Among the objects that stand out are the metal shields fashioned by the radical "frontline" protesters-hooded youths who, armed with sticks and stones, confronted the riot-police, the water cannon and the tear gas. For some they were heroes of the demonstrations, for others, vandals.

Other works depict the 460 victims who received serious eye injuries during the protests, mostly from the impact of

birdshot or tear gas canisters fired by the riot police. There are also the pots and pans frantically beaten by ordinary men and women, to make their anger heard in countless "cacerolazo" protests. Those that hang in the museum bear the words: "Now that we woke up, we must be conscious." — AFP



UK film industry in rude health despite virus horror

Far from being wiped out by the coronavirus pandemic, Britain's film and television industry is enjoying a blockbuster run thanks in large part to a surge in online streaming. Attracting global production teams to spectacular landscapes, gothic castles and state-of-the-art studios in the UK, the nation's film industry has enjoyed big growth in recent years—also thanks to tax breaks. From blockbuster movie franchises "James Bond" and "Star Wars" to hit US series "Games of Thrones", Britain has a long history of filming international hits despite enduring some lean times. "The UK screen industries are a huge success story and a big contributor to the cultural economy of Europe," said Gary Davey, chief executive of Sky Studios. "We have a wealth of talent right across the UK, both on-screen and off-screen. I don't see that changing anytime soon," Davey told AFP.

US-owned broadcasting group Sky is meanwhile pressing ahead with new multi-billion-dollar facilities in Hertfordshire, north of London—already home to long-standing Elstree studios, or "Britain's Hollywood". Even if the real Hollywood continues to dominate, the British film sector is by no means a small player, employing about 140,000 people and generating billions of pounds to the economy annually. Bollywood is also a big fan.

'Preferred location'

"The UK is historically a preferred shooting location for a lot of Indian films," said Vikram Malhotra, CEO of Abundantia Entertainment. "The UK is a very shooting-friendly location. Not only is there support and facilitation available for production but also you get support in key areas like trained crew, equipment, actors and post-



In this file photo US actor Tom Cruise arrives for the UK premiere of the film Mission: Impossible - Fallout in London. — AFP photos

production." Malhotra meanwhile praised the UK's response amid the pandemic. "The UK government and its departments have moved quickly and supported us, especially where production is concerned, which has made the UK relatively even more attractive now," he told AFP.

Cruise reassured

Tuning in to the sector's importance, the government authorized at the start of July—as the UK was exiting its first lockdown—the resumption of filming "Mission Impossible 7", while allowing crews quarantining exemption. Culture minister Oliver Dowden, whose parliamentary constituency Hertsmere is home to Elstree studios, even contacted "Mission Impossible" star Tom Cruise to reassure him. In general, the UK film industry got back to work quickly after the end of the first lockdown, while it has been allowed to keep the cameras rolling during the ongoing second enforcement endured by much of the country.

"The vast majority of our shows both in the UK and internationally are now back up and running," said David McGraynor, chief operating officer at ITV Studios. Davey said that since resumption, Sky has split production into various close-contact groups. "The very few cases of Covid we have seen on set have all been contained very quickly proving that this method of pooling teams together is working. "Productions can take a little longer, but it's actually the pre-production work and planning that now takes up more time," he noted. Davey said the sector has adapted quickly—"reimagining storylines and using new technology such as remote editing to deliver shows on time and on budget". "One thing that our industry is good at is innovation," he added.

New studios

The killer disease is boosting already popular streaming platforms—such as Netflix and Disney+ — in part owing to the



In this file photo Britain's Prince Charles (right), Prince of Wales meets British actor Daniel Craig as he tours the set of the 25th James Bond Film at Pinewood Studios in Iwer Heath, west of London.

temporary closures of cinemas worldwide. And these two US entertainment giants are among a group of companies helping to expand Britain's studio network. Sky Studios Elstree is due to open in 2022 on a site close to world-renowned Elstree Studios—where many "Star Wars" have been filmed as well as global hits including "Indiana Jones", "Superman" and "The Shining".

Also in 2022, US group Blackhall is set to open new studios west of London. The capital's Shepperton studios has meanwhile struck an agreement with Netflix, broadcaster of "The Crown"—the hit series chronicling the life of Queen Elizabeth II. Pinewood, which has forged a partnership with Disney, is expanding its site most famous for its key role in the 007 films and also wants to open it up to the public by offering attractions. "We have all these incredible opportunities," Adrian Wootton, CEO of Film London and the British Film Commission, told a recent conference. —AFP

Nigeria to build new museum for looted art

Nigeria intends to build a new museum over the next four years that could exhibit looted Benin bronzes currently displayed in European and American museums, officials said Friday. Many Benin bronzes—a group of more than a thousand prized metal plaques and sculptures looted in 1897 by British troops from the royal palace of the Kingdom of Benin, in modern-day Nigeria—are at the British Museum and the Ethnological Museum of Berlin. The possibility of having the objects returned to Benin City in Nigeria's southern Edo state and shown at the future Edo Museum of West African Art has long been a dream for many. "I am elated," Theophilus Umogbai, curator of the existing National Museum in Benin, told AFP. "The museum will serve as an identity symbol of the rich cultural arts traditions of Benin people."

Museums in Europe and America have wrestled with a tangle of legal and ethical problems concerning objects taken during the colonial period. Even in well-documented cases of pillaging, the law often prevents countries from giving them back—as is the case with the British museum, which could however loan the Benin bronzes to the new Edo museum. "This project will help us reconnect our past glory to our present realities," Edo state's governor Godwin Obaseki said, announcing the project at an event on Friday. He said he hopes the overall project "should be far developed if not totally completed" by the end of 2024. The 10,000-square foot (930-square meter) museum is being designed by David Adjaye, the award-winning architect behind the Smithsonian National Museum of African American History and Culture, in Washington. —AFP

Lifestyle | Features



These pictures show the view of the recently restored fortress of Shali and its surroundings, in the Egyptian desert oasis of Siwa, some 600 kms southwest of the capital Cairo. — AFP photos

Egypt's Siwa fortress renovation boosts hopes for ecotourism

Tucked away in Egypt's Western Desert, the Shali fortress once protected inhabitants against the incursions of wandering tribes, but now there are hopes its renovation will attract ecotourists. The 13th-century edifice, called "Shali" or "home" in the local Siwi language, was built by Berber populations atop a hill in the pristine Siwa oasis, some 600

brightly coloured robes at the renovated fortress' inauguration ceremony last week. Dotted by thick palm groves, freshwater springs and salt lakes, the Siwa oasis's geographic and cultural isolation offers a rare eco-friendly getaway, far from Egypt's bustling urban communities. The region's tourism model contrasts with Egypt's mass approach in other areas, such as

facades. Restoration works at the Shali fortress were carried out under the aegis of the Egyptian government, which has been pushing to make Siwa a global "ecotourism destination". The project also includes setting up a traditional market and a museum on local architecture. "The project will certainly benefit us and bring tourists. Today, I can

in the Middle East in 2011. Foreign tourist arrivals at the oasis have plummeted from around 20,000 in 2010 to just 3,000, said Mahdi Al-Howeiti, director of the local tourism office. Domestic tourism has only partially made up for the sharp decline, he added.

Ailing infrastructure

This year, the coronavirus pandemic put a brake on travel worldwide and dealt a further blow to arrivals. And though the project is seen by some as a way to bring back visitors, critics say it fails to address the concerns of the 30,000-strong Siwi population, a Berber ethnic group. "No Siwi goes to Shali. We are attached to it, but from afar, like a landscape," said Howeiti. He said there were more pressing issues for residents, such as fixing crumbled and unsafe roads or treating agricultural wastewater that harms the cultivation of olives and date palms—key pillars of the local economy.

Tourism and Antiquities Minister Khaled Al-Anani said at the inauguration that the fortress was a "cultural asset" and its renovation was "essential". But he also acknowledged that "we need to work on the infrastructure of the region, the airport and especially the roads". The closest airport to Siwa, located just 50 kilometers (around 30 miles) from the border with war-torn Libya, is restricted to the military. But some locals remain skeptical. "The fortress was not in danger of collapsing," said Howeiti. "In my opinion, it would have been better to leave it as it is. These ruins have a history." — AFP



Egyptian school children dressed in traditional outfits, gather during a celebration to mark the inauguration of the fortress of Shali following its restoration, in the Egyptian desert oasis of Siwa.



This picture shows a view of the recently restored fortress of Shali and its surroundings, in the Egyptian desert oasis of Siwa.

kilometers (370 miles) southwest of Cairo.

The towering structure is made of kershef—a mixture of clay, salt and rock which acts as a natural insulator in an area where the summer heat can be scorching. After it was worn away by erosion, and then torrential rains almost 100 years ago, the European Union and Egyptian company Environmental Quality International (EQI) began to restore the fortress in 2018, at a cost of over \$600,000. "Teach your children, and mine, about what ancient Shali means," sang a choir of young girls in

its Red Sea resorts in the east or along the Nile valley, especially in Luxor and Aswan in the south.

Employment opportunities

Tourists began gravitating to Siwa from the 1980s, after the government built roads linking it with the northwestern city of Marsa Matrouh, the provincial capital on the Mediterranean. The Marsa Matrouh governor has called the oasis, registered as a natural reserve since 2002, a "therapeutic and environmental tourism destination". Eco-lodges offer lush vegetable gardens and kershef

offer my palm frond products inside Shali," said Adam Aboukassem, who sells hand-crafts in the fortress. EQI project manager Ines al-Moudariss said the materials used in the restoration work were sourced from the fortress site itself. She said the project was about "bringing the inhabitants of Siwa back to their origins and offering them employment opportunities" and services. Events in the past decade outside the desert oasis have had a ripple effect in Siwa, and tourism slumped after political unrest that rocked Egypt and other countries



An Egyptian laborer works on the restoration of one of the walls of the fortress of Shali, in the Egyptian desert oasis of Siwa.



An Egyptian laborer works on the restoration of the fortress of Shali, in the Egyptian desert oasis of Siwa.



Egyptian school children dressed in traditional outfits, gather during a celebration to mark the inauguration of the fortress of Shali following its restoration, in the Egyptian desert oasis of Siwa.



Egyptian laborers work on the restoration of the fortress of Shali, in the Egyptian desert oasis of Siwa.



Egyptian school children dressed in traditional outfits, walk with sticks during a celebration to mark the inauguration of the fortress of Shali following its restoration, in the Egyptian desert oasis of Siwa.

EGYPT FINDS TREASURE TROVE OF OVER 100 SARCOPHAGI



Archaeologists clean statues and funerary masks. — AFP Photos



An archaeologist cleans a statue.



A picture shows a funerary mask on display.



A picture shows wooden sarcophagi.

Egypt announced Saturday the discovery of an ancient treasure trove of more than a 100 intact sarcophagi, dating back more than 2,500 years ago, the largest such find this year. — AFP

Sports

Photo of the day



Accomplished mountaineer and world class skier Johnny Collinson prepares to perform in Alaska. —Photo taken from www.redbullcontentpool.com

Zverev under a cloud as he bids for second ATP Finals title

LONDON: Alexander Zverev will begin his challenge at the ATP Finals today still under a cloud in the wake of accusations of domestic abuse by his former girlfriend Olga Sharypova. The German, ranked seventh in the world, responded to the allegations after arriving in London for the eight-day event that will bring the curtain down on the season. "I am looking forward to playing, but the last few days the focus has shifted a little bit to the off court," Zverev, the champion in London in 2018, said in a statement. "While I very much regret that those allegations have been made, I have to stick to my initial thing of them being untrue and continue to deny them."

"These accusations are just unfounded, untrue. We had our ups and downs, but the way our relationship was described in the public is not how it was. That's not who I am, not how I was raised by my parents," Zverev, 23, reached the final of the Paris Masters this month but his on-court performances have been overshadowed by the comments of former Russian junior player Sharypova. Sharypova said in an interview with *Racquet Magazine* that she does not want to press charges.

"It makes me sad the impact that such accusations can have on the sport, on the outside world, on myself as well," Zverev said of the accusations. The ATP Tour issued a statement this week saying that it condemns any form of violence or abuse. "In circumstances where allegations of violence or abuse are made against any member of the Tour, legal authorities investigate and due process, we then review the outcome and decide the appropriate course of action. "Otherwise we are unable to comment further on specific allegations," Zverev starts against Daniil Medvedev today. —Reuters

News in brief

Champions Flamengo held 1-1

RIO DE JANEIRO: Brazilian champions Flamengo missed a chance to move into joint top spot in the Serie A table on Saturday when they were held 1-1 at home by Atletico Goianiense. Bruno Henrique gave Flamengo the lead right on half time after running on to a sumptuous pass from Thiago Maia but Ze Roberto took advantage of poor defending to equalise for the visitors on the hour mark. Atletico beat Flamengo 3-0 in the opening match of the season but they are currently just three points above the relegation zone and without a win in their last six games. With title rivals Atletico Mineiro and Sao Paulo both winning, Flamengo drop into fourth place with 36 points, two behind leaders Atletico, who have played a game less. Atletico Goianense are in 14th spot in the 20-team table with 24 points. —Reuters

England Women's Super League

LONDON: Manchester United came back from two goals down to seal a 2-2 draw over rivals Manchester City at Leigh Sports Village on Saturday, retaining their top spot in England's Women's Super League. Forward Chloe Kelly gave City an early lead when the 22-year-old flicked the ball from close range amid chaos in the United box following a corner and midfielder Laura Coombs doubled their lead before the break with a long-distance goal. Casey Stony's United, however, bounced back in the second half when new signing Tobin Heath halved the deficit with a 54th-minute goal, capitalizing on an error from City who tried to play from the back. The US international cut inside from the left side before firing into the top corner of the near post. Scottish forward Kirsty Hanson found the equaliser 20 minutes later, volleying home a rebound after her first-time effort was blocked by goalkeeper Ellie Roebuck. —Reuters

Atletico return to top spot

SAO PAULO: Atletico Mineiro lost an early goal but came back to beat Corinthians 2-1 away from home on Saturday and return to the top spot in Brazil's Serie A. Davo gave Corinthians a 1-0 lead with a fifth-minute header but former Corinthians player Guilherme Arana equalized for the visitors when he fired home an angled shot following a cute backheel by new signing Eduardo Vargas. Marrony's goal seven minutes from time sealed the win for Atletico and lifted them back into first place ahead of Internacional, who went down 2-0 at Santos. Atletico are now two points clear of Inter and have a game in hand over their rivals. Corinthians are in 11th place in the 20-team table. —Reuters

Rampant Gremio in 4-2 win

PORTO ALEGRE: Four different players got their name on the scoresheet for a rampant Gremio in their 4-2 win over Ceara in Porto Alegre on Saturday. Jean Pyerre and Pepe put the home side 2-0 up after 33 minutes and although Kelvin got one back for Ceara with a deflected shot just minutes later Diego Souza restored Gremio's two-goal cushion before halftime. Diego Churin made it 4-1 with a header after 70 minutes and Tiago Pagnussat got a late second for Ceara. The win lifted Gremio into sixth place in a competitive Serie A, just three points behind the leaders. Only seven points separate the top eight clubs. Ceara are in 13th place in the 20-team table. —Reuters

PSL: Karachi in final

KARACHI: The Karachi Kings reached their maiden final Saturday after outlasting the Multan Sultans in a thrilling tie-breaker finish as Pakistan's Super League resumed eight months after stopping due to the pandemic. The match at Karachi's National Stadium went into a Super Over after 40 overs ended with both teams tied on 141 - thanks to Kings skipper Imad Wasim hitting a last-minute boundary. The local team scored 13-2 in the Super Over, with the Sultans falling four runs short. The Sultans managed a below-par 141-7 in their 20 overs after they were sent in to bat, with former England all-rounder Ravi Bopara scoring a 31-ball 40 spiced with three boundaries and a six. The Sultans' Sohail Tanvir, a former Pakistan paceman, turned the match on its head in the 17th over as the Karachi Kings were seemingly cruising to victory, needing just 26 runs in the last four overs. Tanvir dismissed Babar Azam off the third ball and Chadwick Walton for two. —AFP

Johnson eyes Masters win to end fourth round major hex

Dustin Johnson fires a bogey-free seven-under par 65

AUGUSTA: Dustin Johnson teed off in yesterday's final round of the Masters trying to capture the green jacket by turning a 54-hole major championship lead into victory for the first time in four attempts. Should the 36-year-old American, who grew up only an hour's drive north of Augusta National, come out on top he would be the first current world number one to win the Masters since Tiger Woods in 2002.

"If I want to win, I'm going to have to go out and keep playing aggressive," Johnson said. "There are a lot of good players out there, so I'm going to have to play really well." Johnson, whose only major win came at the 2016 US Open, fired a bogey-free seven-under par 65 Saturday to match the 54-hole course record of 16-under par 200. That gave him a four-stroke edge over South Korea's Im Sung-jae, Australian Cameron Smith and Mexico's Abraham Ancer, with South African Dylan Frittelli on 205 and world number three Justin Thomas sixth on 206.

Those nearest pursuers to Johnson have only one major win between them, the 2017 PGA Championship victory by American Thomas. While Johnson has only lost majors when carrying a 54-hole lead, he has never enjoyed as wide a margin as he owns at Augusta National, which lacks its usual atmosphere with spectators banned as a COVID-19 safety measure. Johnson stumbled at the 2010, 2015 and 2018 US Opens and in August at the 2020 PGA Championship, where he settled for a runner-up spot. "If I can play like I did (Saturday), I think it will break that streak," Johnson said. "It's just 18 holes of golf. I need to go out and play solid."

In the swing

Johnson's approaches were impressive, setting up a tap-in eagle at the par-5 second and five birdies. "I feel like I'm swinging really well," Johnson said. "If I can just continue to give myself a lot of looks at birdie, I think I'll have a good day." If he breaks 70, Johnson would shatter the 72-hole Masters scoring record, the 18-under 270 set by Woods in 1997 and matched by Jordan Spieth in 2015.

Players have taken full advantage of rain-softened conditions at Augusta National, although drying greens promised a formidable challenge over the final round. Johnson, the PGA Player of the Year, has won or been second in five of his past six starts, including a victory at the Tour Championship. After finishing sixth at the US Open in September, he contracted Covid-19 last month and missed two events, but was a runner-up last week at Houston.

Johnson, a runner-up in three of the past six majors including last year's Masters, would silence critics of his missed opportunities with a victory. But there will be challengers trying to emulate the record eight-stroke Masters last-round winning comeback by Jack Burke in 1956. Rory McIlroy, needing a green jacket to complete a career Grand Slam, went 66-67 after an opening 75 but stood eight adrift of Johnson. "I think I've left myself too far back after the bad first day," McIlroy said. "But I'll go and give it a good effort and see where that leaves me."

Tiger starts 11 back

Defending champion Woods teed off sharing 20th on 211 after back issues limited him Saturday, when he was



AUGUSTA: Dustin Johnson of the United States lines up a putt on the first green during the final round of the Masters at Augusta National Golf Club yesterday in Augusta, Georgia. —AFP

forced to play 26 holes. He could only manage 71 and 72 after matching his best-ever Masters start with a 68. "I'm going to get a little bit sore," Woods said. "That has always been the challenge with my back issues and I guess will always continue to be." Im and Ancer, each making his Masters debut, could become the first newcomers to swipe the green jacket since Fuzzy Zoeller in 1979. Ancer, trying to become the first Mexican to win a major title, and Smith could become the first golfers to shoot four rounds in the 60s in 84 editions of the Masters. Im could become only the second Asian man to win a major crown after South Korean Yang Yong-eun captured the 2009 PGA Championship. —AFP

Spanish Ambassador visits Tennis Complex

By Abdellatif Sharaa

KUWAIT: President of Kuwait and Arab Tennis Federations Sheikh Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Abdallah Al-Jaber Al-Sabah invited the Spanish Ambassador to Kuwait, Miguel Moro Aguilor to visit Sheikh Jaber Al-Abdallah Al-Jaber Al-Sabah international Tennis Complex. The Ambassador was keen to visit the facility after learning that it includes one of the most important Spanish Tennis Academies - Rafa Nadal Academy Kuwait (RNAK). Ambassador Miguel Moro Aguilor toured the complex - accompanied by (RNAK) General Manager Martijn Belgraver and the academy's administrators.

The Spanish Ambassador described the complex as an artwork of architecture of the highest stan-



dards, and commended the efforts of the investor in the project - Tamdeen Group. He said the complex is one of the best in the world and hoped that it will enhance the sport of tennis in Kuwait and the region.

The Spanish Ambassador thanked Sheikh Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Abdallah Al-Jaber Al-Sabah for his invitation. The Sheikh Jaber Al-Abdallah Al-

Jaber Al-Sabah International Tennis Complex includes: one indoor center court with 5,000 seats; one outdoor center court with 1,500 seats, eight outdoor courts, 8 indoor courts, Rafa Nadal Academy Kuwait, head quarters and offices of Kuwait Tennis Federation, Arab Tennis Federation in addition to the Mall 360.

Al-Fatat Club (B) team wins (3x3) Basketball tournament

By Abdellatif Sharaa

KUWAIT: Al-Fatat Club (B) were declared champions of the women (3x3) Basketball open tournament after they defeated Al-Fatat (A) 17-15 in their final match that was held at the Basketball hall at Sheikh Saad Al-Abdallah Complex. Al-Qurain (C) club took third place - defeating Qurain (D) 9-7. The final match was attended by a Member of Parliament Ahmad Al-Fadhel, Municipal Council member Maha Al-Baghli, Chairman of Basketball Federation Rashid Al-Enezi, Head of the Women Committee at Kuwait Olympic Committee Fatima Hayat and other dignitaries.

16 teams participated in the tournament and the matches were highly competitive and exciting.



Municipal council member Maha Al-Baghli lauded the organizers of the tournament adding that "we are seeing the quality moves women sports are making, and that such tournaments will encourage women to go for sports".

KBA Chairman Rasheed Al-Enezi thanked the

women committee member for their efforts. Meanwhile Chairman of Al-Fatat Club Fadhlia Al-Shuailan said she was happy with the first tournament of the season. She thanked the women committee and Basketball Association for the organization and their cooperation.

Sports

France, Germany shine; Ramos endures a miserable landmark

France eclipse holders Portugal to reach Nations League final 4

PARIS: World champions France and Germany rode on the influence of their Chelsea stars to rack up Nations League wins on Saturday while Spain's Sergio Ramos missed two penalties on the night he celebrated a record-setting 177th international appearance. Chelsea midfielder N'Golo Kante scored just his second international goal as France defeated European champions Portugal 1-0 in Lisbon to secure a place in next year's finals.

Kante was quickest to react to a rebound as he netted the winner on 53 minutes that clinched France top spot in their group. France lead Cristiano Ronaldo's Portugal by three points ahead of Tuesday's clash with Sweden in Paris but are guaranteed first place by virtue of their superior head-to-head record.

"It's very nice to see them snatch the win. It's deserved. We've fulfilled our objective of finishing first," France coach Didier Deschamps said after the win over a Portuguese side which had won the inaugural Nations League title on home soil in 2019. Kante's teammate in the English Premier League Timo Werner scored twice on his return to Leipzig as Germany enjoyed a 3-1 win over Ukraine. Werner spent four years at Leipzig before moving to London and he flourished in familiar surroundings at the Red Bull Arena despite the absence of fans.

The win leaves Germany undefeated in their last 12 games and top of their group, a point ahead of second-placed Spain with the sides due to meet in Sevilla tomorrow. "I had four good years here and it was fun to come back and win," Werner told ZDF. Ukraine took an early lead when Roman Yaremchuk caught the German defence napping. The hosts

roared back with three unanswered goals by Leroy Sane and Werner, who scored either side of half-time, to seal a deserved win.

In Basel, Ramos missed two penalties as Spain needed a late equalizer from Gerard Moreno to draw 1-1 with Switzerland. Ramos was making his 177th appearance to break the international appearances record for a European player, pulling clear of Italy's Gianluigi Buffon, who has 176. But it was a night to forget for the defender, who saw one spot-kick saved by Swiss goalkeeper Yann Sommer but backed himself to score a second, only to miss again with a dreadful attempted 'Panenka'.

Ramos had previously scored 25 penalties in a row and his inaccuracy from the spot cost Spain, who will now have to beat Germany to reach the final stage. "Sergio's numbers for penalties are out of this world," said Spain coach Luis Enrique. "If there had been a third penalty, he would have taken that one as well." Remo Freuler gave the Swiss a 26th-minute lead but they had Nico Elvedi sent off for conceding the second penalty with 11 minutes left. Spain finally found an equalizer in the 89th minute as Moreno capitalized on a tiring Swiss defense by converting Sergio Reguilon's cross.

Shadow of COVID-19

After losing all four of their opening games in the Nations League, Sweden finally found some form in Solna, beating World Cup runners-up Croatia 2-1. The Swedes, whose coach Janne Andersson has been sidelined with coronavirus, were 2-0 up at half-time. Juventus star Dejan Kulusevski opened his international account in the 36th minute when



LEIPZIG: Ukraine's goalkeeper Andrey Pyatov (center) fails to save the 3-1 scored by Germany's forward Timo Werner (not in picture) during the UEFA Nations League Group 4 football match of Germany vs Ukraine on November 14, 2020. — AFP

the 20-year-old controlled a long pass from Mikael Lustig before scoring. Defender Marcus Danielson, who plays his club football in China with Dalian Pro, headed in the second from a corner in first-half stoppage time. Danielson had the misfortune to put through his own goal with eight minutes left after making contact with an Ivan Perisic header.

Croatia had beaten the Swedes 2-1 in their first meeting but they arrived for the return without mid-

fielder Marcelo Brozovic and defender Domagoj Vida, both of whom had tested positive for Covid-19. The coronavirus pandemic also saw UEFA cancel Sunday's match between Romania and Norway after Norwegian authorities banned the squad from travelling to Bucharest due to a COVID-19 case. Norway's health minister had ordered the squad not to travel after full-back Omar Elabdellaoui, who plays for Galatasaray in Turkey, tested positive for coronavirus. — AFP

England thrash Georgia in Autumn Nations Cup

TWICKENHAM: Jamie George became the first England hooker to score a hat-trick of tries in a Test as they opened their Autumn Nations Cup campaign with a comfortable 40-0 win over Georgia at Twickenham on Saturday. Six Nations champions England were out of sight at half-time, leading 26-0 after scoring four of their six tries.

Jack Willis marked his Test debut with the opening try before George crossed twice and full-back Elliot Daly went over. The second half saw George complete his hat-trick before replacement scrum-half Dan Robson snuck over. England captain Owen Farrell kicked five conversions. For all that Argentina had caused a huge upset earlier Saturday by beating New Zealand in Sydney, there was an inevitability about this result even though it took England 15 minutes to open the scoring in what was Georgia's first Test at Twickenham.

The teams had only met twice before, with England enjoying comfortable 84-6 and 41-10 wins at the 2003 and 2011 World Cups. And the omens were not promising for a Georgia side rarely exposed to top-class opposition outside of World Cups following their 48-7 loss away to Scotland last month. An often error-strewn England, playing in their change strip of blue so as not to clash with Georgia's white, laid siege to the Lelos' line in the opening minutes and

declined kickable penalties as they attempted to nullify the visitors' scrum—the strongest part of their game.

Meanwhile the players' shouts were clearly audible in a match played behind closed doors because of coronavirus restrictions. England's pressure eventually told when Willis, given a first cap on the back of an outstanding 2019/20 season with Wasps, was driven over for a 15th-minute try that Farrell converted. England, last year's losing World Cup finalists, continued to play the game deep in Georgia's 22 but too often squandered promising positions by kicking possession away and knocking-on. It was not until the 29th minute that England had their second try when George was driven over from a close-range line-out.

And four minutes later, George had his second try, again from a rolling maul. Farrell missed the conversion but England still led 19-0. And before half-time, England had a fourth try as their backs got in on the act. Jonathan Joseph, playing on the wing rather than his usual centre position, cut across field and deploying a clever dummy as he burst through a gap in Georgia's midfield before releasing Daly for a well-taken try converted by Farrell.

Scotland take bonus point
Meanwhile, Scotland made it five



LONDON: England's lock Joe Launchbury runs with the ball during the Autumn Nations Cup international rugby union match between England and Georgia at Twickenham in London on November 14, 2020. — AFP

wins in succession with a hard-fought 28-17 bonus-point victory over Italy in the Autumn Nations Cup in Florence on Saturday. The Scots played on the back foot for most of a first half which saw tries for Italy full-back Matteo Minozzi and Scotland wing Duhan van der Merwe. But after slipping 14-7 down early in the second half, Gregor Townsend's side hit back with tries from prop Zander Fagerson, lock Scott Cummings and replacement hooker George Turner to complete the win.

Italy's 20-year-old fly-half Paolo Garbisi fired over four penalties but missed the conversion. With the France v Fiji match called off because of coronavirus, Scotland lead Group B. Their next match is against France next week while Italy

are due to face the afflicted Fijians. "I always ask the boys to believe in themselves as individuals and us as a collective." Scotland captain Stuart Hogg told Amazon Prime Video.

"The boys want to go out there and express themselves. You can see that we have a smile on our faces and we're enjoying our rugby and ultimately we're winning Test matches. "That's what we're here to do and long may it continue." Scotland went into the game looking for their fifth successive win but missing both first choice fly-halves Finn Russell and Adam Hastings. That meant a first start since 2016 for 29-year-old Duncan Weir whose previous experience against Italy included kicking a match-winning drop goal 20 seconds from time in 2014. — Agencies

Nonu marks Toulon comeback with win over struggling Agen

PARIS: Ma'a Nonu may be 38 years of age, but the ex-All Black centre showed glimpses of his former glittering past in an assured comeback for Toulon in their comprehensive 38-9 Top 14 victory over Agen on Saturday. More than 900 days since he last turned out for Toulon, the two-time World Cup winner, capped 103 times by New Zealand, again proved a menacing presence in midfield, against an Agen side that has now lost all nine games this season.

Nonu bossed Toulon's effective defense, producing a couple of turnovers and a solid tackling display, albeit against the club which has not only the worst attacking record of the Top 14, but also the worst defensive one. A slick one-step pass by Nonu's Australian midfield partner Duncan Paia'aua enabled winger Erwan Dridi a clear run in for the opening try.

The Kiwi's attacking guile was demonstrated as he produced a deft grubber through that was collected on the Agen line by Fijian flanker Masivesi Dakuwaqa for try number two. France scrum-half Baptiste Serin missed the two conversions, having hit an early penalty. Two Paul Abadie penalties, allied with a Jean-Marcellin Buttin drop-goal, kept Agen in the game at 13-9 at half-time. The tide quickly changed in the second half, Tongan half-back Sonatane Takulua, with literally his first touch of the ball after coming on for Isaia Toeava, darting over from close range after an effective attacking line-out.

Theo Dachary, who replaced Nonu after 57 minutes, crossed for Toulon's fourth try after fine bulldozing work by Paia'aua, Serin converting. And flanker Swan Rebbadji added some gloss for Toulon by muscling over for a fifth and final try in injury time after fielding a pinpoint crosskick by Serin, who also converted. "We didn't want to be the first team to lose at Agen," said Toulon coach Patrice Collazo.

There was some consolation for rudderless Agen, however, with the post-match announcement that Regis Sonnes will take over as head coach, aided by fellow former club players Jalil Narjissi (forwards) and Sylvain Mirande (backs). The trio has signed until 2022, according to president Jean-Francois Fonteneau, who assumed interim coaching responsibilities after the sackings of Christophe Laussucq and his assistant Remi Vaquin earlier this month.

"All three of them have a link, a particular attachment to the club," said Fonteneau. "They are profiles that correspond to the identity and values of Agen rugby club." Fonteneau added: "I haven't lost hope of winning a match. That will be the mission of the new coaching team." Earlier in the day Toulouse beat Pau 22-16, a welcome first victory during the international window that has seen the team deprived of its players on Test duty. Antoine Hastoy scored all of Pau's points, thanks to a try, conversion and three penalties.

Toulouse's sole try came from veteran France back Maxime Medard, Australian playmaker Zack Holmes making the difference as he hit the conversion and five penalties. Gaetan Germain kicked 19 points to help Bayonne notch up an impressive 29-20 home win over Montpellier. But Racing 92 left it late, scrambling to a 23-19 win away at Brive thanks to a last-minute Fabien Sanconnie try converted by Francois Trinh-Duc. Bordeaux-Begles edged Castres 30-29 on Friday, while Stade Francais host La Rochelle in Sunday's match. — AFP

Kuwait Women Indoor Football



By Abdellatif Sharaa

KUWAIT: The second round of the Women Indoor Football saw Qadisiya Club held 3-3 draw during their match on Saturday. Kuwait ended the first half - losing 0-2 before their international star Fajer Mohammad scored three consecutive goals for its club after which Qadisiya grabbed the third goal. The second match saw Al-Fatat club defeating Al-Sabha team by 4-2.



Knives out for Foster after 'shambolic' All Blacks loss

WELLINGTON: Ian Foster said after the loss to Argentina on Saturday that he was not feeling under any great pressure but the morning papers back home in New Zealand on Sunday would have made for grim reading for the All Blacks coach. Expectations are always high in New Zealand when it comes to rugby and a 40% win rate over his first five tests in charge have led inexorably to calls for Foster to be sacked. "The first and most obvious thing to say about Argentina's brilliant win over the All Blacks, from a New Zealand point of view, is that Ian Foster must go," columnist Chris Rattue wrote in the New Zealand Herald.

Gregor Paul in the same newspaper said the team had been reduced to a "shambolic, unimaginative, uninspiring body of players that couldn't catch, couldn't pass, couldn't win their lineout ..." The extent of the shock of Saturday's defeat against an Argentina side which had not played for 13 months can be gauged by Stuff.co.nz's preview of the contest, which rated the Pumas chances of a win as close to zero.

"Between Foster sending out the heavy artillery and this being the Pumas' first test since the World Cup last year, things are just stacked too heavily against them," it read. Foster's heavy artillery misfired at Western Sydney Stadium, however, and the Pumas conjured up a performance for the ages to win 25-15. That came on the back of last week's 24-22 loss to Australia in Brisbane, where a young Wallabies side coached by New Zealander Dave Rennie also found the All Blacks wanting under pressure. — Reuters

14 Johnson eyes Masters win to end fourth round major hex



15 England overpower Georgia 40-0 in Autumn Nations Cup



15 France, Germany shine; Ramos endures a miserable landmark



Hamilton takes seventh title in style

Lewis Hamilton wins record-equalling 7th F1 world title



PARIS: This combination of file photographs shows the 94 victories held by British Formula One driver Lewis Hamilton from June 10, 2007 to November 15, 2020. Lewis Hamilton, 35-year-old, became Formula One's record all-time race-winner yesterday, when he claimed his 94th victory in the Turkish Formula One Grand Prix to seal the title of seven Formula One world wins. — AFP

ISTANBUL: Lewis Hamilton secured a record-equalling seventh Formula One world title yesterday after winning the Turkish Grand Prix and then warned pretenders to his crown "I'm only just getting started!" After a momentous drive from sixth on the grid in wet and treacherous conditions, the Briton matched Michael Schumacher's haul of drivers' crowns with three races of the season remaining. The 35-year-old sealed his latest title 12 years after his first with a typically measured masterclass, handling the slippery early conditions to claim his 94th career win.

It was widely declared as one of his finest triumphs and entirely appropriate on the day he drew alongside the German in the record books. "That's for all the kids out there that believe in the impossible," said an emotional Hamilton on Mercedes' team radio. "You can do it." Later he claimed he still had the hunger for more titles and paid tribute to his team and fans after a season in which he led his sport in supporting the

Black Lives Matter movement. "I feel like I'm only just getting started. Physically, I'm in great shape. And mentally this year has been really hard for millions of people and it's no different for us athletes," he said. "This has been a challenge that I didn't know how to get through, but with the help of Team LH I managed to get through." Hamilton, who sealed his first title in 2008, added to his unprecedented roster of records—most wins with 94, most pole positions (97), most podium finishes (163) and most consecutive points finishes (47). He added: "We dreamed of this when I was young. I remember watching Michael win those world championships. To get one or two or even three is so hard. "Seven is unimaginable. There is no end to what we can do together, me and this team."

Blew away rivals

He lapped his team-mate and only remaining title rival Valtteri Bottas, who finished 14th after a desultory outing, to claim his 10th victory in 14 races of a

season delayed by the coronavirus pandemic. Hamilton came home over half a minute clear of Racing Point's Sergio Perez. Both chose to make only one pit-stop and spent most of the race on a single set of intermediate tyres as their rivals pitted several times to cope with the slippery conditions. Hamilton's old rival, four-time former champion Sebastian Vettel, finished third ahead of his Ferrari team-mate Charles Leclerc, Carlos Sainz of McLaren and, after a wild and impulsive afternoon, Max Verstappen in the leading Red Bull. Alex Albon came home seventh in the second Red Bull ahead of Lando Norris in the second McLaren. Lance Stroll, who had started from his maiden pole position for Racing Point, and Daniel Ricciardo of Renault.

This latest triumph gave Hamilton an unassailable lead over 31-year-old Bottas, with two races in Bahrain and the season-closing Abu Dhabi Grand Prix to come. Vettel, who grabbed a podium finish on the final lap, was the first man to congratulate Hamilton in the pits, leaning into the Englishman's

cockpit to tell him he had made history. Bottas said: "He deserves it fully - he is the best of all of us this year and he really deserves it so it's great for him. "So I will have to try to beat him next year." Tributes flooded in from his fellow drivers and motorsport's president Jean Todt, and from beyond the F1 family.

"Game recognizes game. From all of the Barca family, congratulations @LewisHamilton on your 7th @F1 World Championship!" tweeted La Liga giants Barcelona. Kenya's world marathon record holder Eliud Kipchoge added his congratulations, telling Hamilton: "Longevity is equal to experience, this is what inspires the world!" Mercedes boss Toto Wolff said that the team's success had been even more significant coming in a time of the global coronavirus health emergency. "This year has been very, very special, in difficult circumstances for everyone around the world. "I hope that we've entertained and that's why coming on top after such a year in such a tough race, it's exceptional." — AFP

Mir wins first MotoGP world championship

VALENCIA: Suzuki's Joan Mir won the MotoGP world title yesterday a week after finally securing his maiden Grand Prix triumph at the same Valencia circuit. The 23-year-old from Mallorca inherited the crown left vacant by the injured six-time champion Marc Marquez when finishing seventh in the Valencia Grand Prix won by Italy's Franco Morbidelli. The ecstatic new champion better known for diligence and perseverance, was able to make a rare celebration.

Pulling wheelies and screeching his smoking tyres in front of the paddock, there were no fans but his family where there to celebrate too. "I've been fighting for this all my life, I can neither laugh nor cry but I'm flooded with emotions," said Mir. This was the first MotoGP title won by a Suzuki rider since 2000. As this often chaotic and memo-

orable season entered its end game Mir's guts and endurance saw him emerge as a worthy champion. Mir's championship has been a model of consistency with three second places and three thirds before a single win from 13 races. Born in Palma, he first rode a motorcycle at a nearby track aged six, under the watchful eye of his father. Many years later the early promise delivered a world title. "It really hasn't sunk in," said Mir at the finish line. "It's a wonderful moment and I'm so happy."

After a season of solid consistency, Mir held a 37-point lead meaning he only needed to finish on the podium in the penultimate race to secure the title, while fourth would have been enough if neither Alex Rins nor Fabio Quartararo won. Frenchman Quartararo ruined any chance he had of prolonging the title race with a fall that put him out of the race. The 21-year-old had often looked the most likely inheritor to Marquez. But the Yamaha-SRT rider championship was already in a serious wobble when he hit the deck on the first lap of last weekend's race and his luck did not improve yesterday.

Morbidelli won the penultimate race of

the season, leading from pole until the very last lap when he came under intense pressure from Australian Jack Miller. "I just came up short," said the Australian. "There was quite a bit of tailwind that just stopped me getting the win but we're happy to back on the box (podium) though." Morbidelli and Miller played cat-and-mouse overtaking each other several times over the final tight corners. Earlier yesterday Spain's Jorge Martin stole in at the death to win the Moto2 race, overtaking his compatriot Hector Garzo and Italy's Marco Bezzecchi just ahead of the finish line.

This marked a second win of the season for Martin, who was Moto3 champion in 2018. The title itself will go down to the wire in Portugal next week with championship leader Enea Bastianini of Italy on 194pts after his sixth place in Valencia leading British rider Sam Lowes by 14 points. In the lower ranks starting 13th on the grid Italy's Tony Arbolino won the Moto3 GP to climb third in the standings with 159 pts. Spain's Albert Arenas was fourth on the day and leads the championship on 170pts ahead of Japanese rider Ai Ogura of Honda 162. —AFP



VALENCIA: Petronas Yamaha SRT's Italian rider Franco Morbidelli (front), Pramac Racing's Australian rider Jack Miller (right) and Red Bull KTM Factory Racing's Spanish rider Pol Espargaro compete in the MotoGP race during the Valencia Grand Prix at the Ricardo Tormo circuit in Valencia yesterday. — AFP