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# Amir visits health ministry, praises frontline workers

Sheikh Nawaf says pandemic has proven strength, solidarity of Kuwaitis



**KUWAIT:** The exceptional circumstances the world is going through have proven the strength and solidarity of Kuwaiti people in confronting the coronavirus pandemic and any challenges facing the country with determination, HH the Amir Sheikh Nawaf Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah said yesterday. HH the Amir, during a visit to the health ministry, praised the great efforts by frontline workers and the entire health system, in addition to volunteers, to confront this virus despite the risk of infection.

HH the Amir also commended the ministry's good planning of securing all medical needs for hospitals that contributed to raising the numbers of people who have recovered. He also affirmed that he will spare no effort in order to develop the efficiency and capabilities of this national institution and provide it with the latest equipment and the best cadres to enable it to perform its duty in the best ways.

Health Minister Sheikh Dr Basel Al-Sabah said health preservation by all available means was a priority of the late Amir Sheikh Sabah Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah, as the whole world saw during this pandemic. "Your Highness has been a great supporter of these efforts through taking early precautionary measures to preserve the health system and protect Kuwait from

repercussions," he said.

"The ministry of health's work and efforts in facing this pandemic came from the wise directives of the political leadership to take care of the health conditions of everyone who lives on this land without discrimination," he confirmed. The ministry is following up closely what is being reported by scientific institutions and media of the promising results about the development of effective and safe vaccines against COVID-19, as Kuwait's ministry of health will be among first to provide safe and effective vaccine for citizens.

Later yesterday, Sheikh Basel briefed the Cabinet on the latest developments related to COVID-19, noting that more than one million swab tests have been conducted so far, which equals to around 23.6 percent of the population. The recovery rate has reached around 93 percent, the minister added, noting that the fluctuation in the number of cases necessitates the continuation of commitment to health precautions.

Kuwait registered 489 new COVID-19 cases and four deaths yesterday, bringing total cases and deaths to 137,329 and 842 respectively. Meanwhile, Kuwait registered 829 recoveries yesterday, raising the total to 128,414. Local health authorities have also conducted a total of 1,016,638 swab tests as of yesterday. — KUNA

## News in brief

### Iraq hangs 21 convicts

**NASIRIYAH, Iraq:** Iraq executed 21 men convicted of "terrorism" yesterday at the notorious Nasiriyah prison in the country's south, medical and police sources said. The Iraqi men from various provinces had all been convicted under a 2005 Counter-Terrorism Law, which carries the death penalty. They were hanged in Nasiriyah prison in Dhi Qar province. — AFP

### 'Western-Islamic' meet mullied

**DOHA:** Tunisia's President Kais Saied and Qatar will seek to promote dialogue between Muslims and the West to prevent anti-Muslim backlashes following extremist attacks, he said during a visit to Doha Sunday. Saied said the Western-Islamic conference's "aim is also to avoid confusing Muslims with those extremists who claim to be Muslims", adding there is a "need to differentiate between Islam and its true purposes and terrorism, which has absolutely nothing to do with Islam". — AFP

### Record Iran cases, deaths

**DUBAI:** Iran yesterday reported a record 13,053 new coronavirus infections and 486 deaths over the past 24 hours as the government planned tougher restrictions to curb the pandemic in the Middle East's worst-affected country. Health Ministry spokeswoman Sima Sadat Lari told state TV that the total number of infected cases had reached 775,121, while total fatalities had increased to 41,979. — Reuters

### Direct Etihad flights to Tel Aviv

**DUBAI:** Abu Dhabi's Etihad Airways said yesterday it would start daily flights to Tel Aviv in March after the UAE and Israel established formal ties this year. Flights will start March 28 and will be timed to connect with Etihad services to and from China, Thailand, India and Australia, the state-owned carrier said in a statement. Meanwhile, Bahrain's foreign minister will travel to Israel tomorrow in Manama's first official delegation there. Abdullatif Al-Zayani's trip to Israel will coincide with a visit there by US Secretary of State Mike Pompeo. — AFP

## Hashem blasts virus vaccine, rise in expats

By B Izzak

**KUWAIT:** MP Safa Al-Hashem yesterday said she will reject to be vaccinated by the new coronavirus vaccine, insisting it should be voluntary and not compulsory. "I do not agree to the coronavirus vac-

cine ... I reject what is being imposed by the World Cough (Health) Organization" she wrote on Twitter, insisting that the vaccine should not be obligatory.

She said that she learned that those who refuse to take the vaccine will be banned from leaving the country. Hashem, who was infected and recovered from the coronavirus, said she believes the vaccine is not absolutely safe. Hashem called on the prime minister to make sure that government subsidies only benefit low-income Kuwaitis, adding that currently, rich Kuwaitis and many expats also benefit from the subsidies. She said that the number of expats has grown in an abnormal way and this is impacting public services.

Candidates running for seats in the National Assembly elections next month have criticized what they call a weak government and previous Assembly performance and have cast doubt on the country's economic programs. MP Thamer Al-Suwait, bidding for re-election from the fourth constituency, said the government spent around KD 6 billion on roads over the past five years but the state of infrastructure remains appalling.

MP Riyadh Al-Adasani, who is running for a seat in the second constituency, called for stopping the squandering of public funds, boosting state reserves and fighting corruption.

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## New Moderna vaccine nearly 95% effective

**WASHINGTON:** US biotech firm Moderna yesterday announced its experimental vaccine against Covid-19 was almost 95 percent effective, marking a second major breakthrough in the quest to end the pandemic. Moderna released early results from a clinical trial with more than 30,000 participants, after American pharmaceutical company Pfizer and its

German partner BioNTech last week said their vaccine was 90 percent effective.

Both frontrunners are based on new technology that uses synthetic versions of molecules called "messenger RNA" to hack into human cells, and effectively turn them into vaccine-making factories. "This positive interim analysis from our Phase 3 study has given us the first clinical validation that our vaccine can prevent COVID-19 disease, including severe disease," said Moderna CEO Stephane Bancel. "Today's news of a second vaccine is further reason to feel hopeful," tweeted US

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DETROIT: In this file photo taken on Aug 5, 2020, a volunteer is tested before being given the Moderna mRNA-1273 coronavirus vaccine. — AFP

## Veteran Syrian foreign minister Muallem dies

**DAMASCUS:** Syrian Foreign Minister Walid Muallem, a stalwart of Bashar Al-Assad's regime who held his job through a decade of conflict and several reshuffles, died yesterday at the age of 79. The veteran diplomat was hit with US and European sanctions early on in the conflict that has torn Syria apart since 2011 and was known for his tirades claiming that the war was the result of a Western plot.

Muallem, who had been foreign minister since 2006, started his career in the diplomatic service in

1964. In 2012, he also became deputy prime minister. The government announcement did not specify the cause of his death, but his health was understood to have been deteriorating for some time. His last public appearance was at the end of last week in Damascus at the opening of a conference on refugee returns. He looked weak and was helped into the hall by two men.

At the same conference, which was snubbed by most international humanitarian players, foreign attendees and Assad took part via video link. Muallem was wearing a surgical mask and appeared to have lost weight. In 2014, he had undergone heart surgery in Beirut. The late minister was targeted by US sanctions as early as Aug 2011, less than six months after the eruption of protests demanding regime change - demonstrations that the Syrian authorities brutally repressed.

Muallem has "continued to beat this drum of



Walid Muallem

international conspiracy and has attempted to cover up the regime's horrific activities by making claims that terrorists or others were responsible", Washington said at the time. Muallem was one of

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## Local

# Kuwait's travel industry still stuck in doldrums

## Travel sector awaits lifting of ban on arrivals from 34 countries

By Sajeev K Peter

**KUWAIT:** Businesses in Kuwait are limping back to normal after an eight-month-long painful hiatus, but one industry in the country still remains deeply stuck in the doldrums. Kuwait's travel and tourism sector continues to reel from the coronavirus restrictions, enduring the trauma of hefty financial losses, layoffs and closure of branches as Kuwait has kept its airspace closed to airlines flying to and from several crucial destinations amid the resurgence of the pandemic.

While many travel agencies and tour operators were forced to shutter some of their branches and services, some resorted to layoffs to stay afloat in the face of a severe downturn. "The pandemic has inflicted debilitating damage on the travel industry in Kuwait. We lost about 70 percent of our business over the last seven months. The unprecedented crisis forced us to lay off 50 of our staff out of the total workforce of 450. It was a very painful decision, but we were left with no other option. Without any bookings or business, it is impossible for travel agencies to pay their staff, settle rents and run their business," said P N J Kumar, Chief Executive Officer at Caesars Travel Group.

Kumar's words underscored the magnitude of the crisis the travel industry is enduring in Kuwait in the aftermath of the coronavirus. Around 340 travel agencies had been operating in Kuwait prior to the outbreak of the pandemic, but as the situation became worse, some had to close a number of their branches.

### Pay cuts, layoffs

"In March, in the early days of coronavirus, my company told us to take a 50 percent pay cut. But later in July, the company terminated my services along with 19 of my colleagues," said Ashraf Ali, an executive who worked at a leading travel agency. "It was a huge shock for me. My wife is a homemaker without any job. With two young children to take care of, it was nearly impossible for me to make ends meet. Luckily, I got a job in another travel agency last month even though my salary is much less than what I was paid in my previous job. And the new branch is yet to open," he said.

Kuwait has allowed some airlines from select countries to operate flights to and from Kuwait airport, but flights from 34 countries are not permitted to fly directly into the country, significantly impacting the revenues of the local travel sector. The executive



**KUWAIT:** This August 1, 2020 file photo shows people arriving at Kuwait International Airport on the first day of resuming flights after months of suspension due to COVID-19. — Photo by Yasser Al-Zayyat

utive committee of Kuwait International Airport's international affairs is reported to have submitted a proposal to the government on a mechanism for allowing entry of people directly from the 34 banned countries. No decision has been taken yet on the matter, but the industry expects a favorable decision by the authorities soon.

"In fact, many passengers from India cancelled their bookings via Dubai hoping that Kuwait would lift the ban on flights from 34 countries and they can fly in directly. As a result, exorbitant UAE-Kuwait airfares have also come down. However, their expectations were short-lived and the ban continues to remain in force," said P N Kumar, General Manager at Badur Travels, Kuwait.

While demanding a review of this decision, the local travel and tourism industry projected that the

country has lost more than KD 1 million by restricting the entry of expats from these 34 countries. Although Kuwait's aviation industry pared some losses after airports in the UAE became transit hubs for passengers bound for Kuwait and tour operators began to manage to get some clients, revenues remained way behind pre-lockdown levels.

Industry experts point out that the authorities could have allowed flights from these countries, in compliance with COVID-19 regulations, so that the local travel and hospitality industry would have benefited. "In fact, Kuwait's decision is indirectly helping UAE carriers, its hotels and its travel industry. A direct flight to Kuwait will not only help the local travel sector, but inbound passengers as well," said Roy

Mathews, an Indian travel executive.

Tour operators attached to travel agencies in the country bore the brunt of the crisis, forcing many of the firms to shed jobs as leisure travel and foreign visits to and from the country came to a grinding halt since the coronavirus outbreak in February this year. Countrywide, nearly 30 percent of jobs in the travel industry were lost following the crisis, although some of them found jobs in other companies, at least temporarily, according to industry officials who spoke to Kuwait Times.

Arab Organization for Tourism and the Arab Air Transport Association had forecast that the number of air travelers to and from Kuwait will dramatically drop by about five million during 2020 compared to 2019. Kuwait Airways laid off as many as 1,500 expat employees while Jazeera Airways laid off around 500 employees as the pandemic continued to pummel demand for air travel.

### Hospitality sector

"Kuwait's hospitality industry has been one of the worst affected," said Anwar Ibrahim, an executive with a five-star hotel in downtown Kuwait. "Practically, there aren't any international guests travelling to Kuwait these days unless there is an emergency," he said. If the country's airspace reopens for foreign airlines and passengers, things could improve at least marginally," he added.

According to Ibrahim, occupancy rate in most of the hotels in the country has hit rock bottom, making it difficult for the industry to operate under the circumstances. The loss of visitors is also being felt in every segment of the economy - from restaurants and retail outlets to malls, transportation services, beauty salons and gyms. "We earnestly hope that the situation will improve and the authorities will lift the ban on airlines from the 34 countries sooner than later," said Mathews.

Upon resumption of commercial flights on August 1, Kuwait announced a list of countries where flights to and from are suspended until further notice. The list currently includes Afghanistan, Argentina, Armenia, Bangladesh, Brazil, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Chile, China, Colombia, Dominican Republic, Egypt, France, Hong Kong, India, Indonesia, Iran, Iraq, Italy, Kosovo, Lebanon, Mexico, Moldova, Montenegro, Nepal, Northern Macedonia, Panama, Pakistan, Peru, the Philippines, Serbia, Spain, Sri Lanka, Syria and Yemen.

## Veteran Syrian foreign minister...

Continued from Page 1

the most recognizable figures in a Syrian government which remains very isolated internationally despite recent efforts to normalize ties with Gulf countries. His funeral was held yesterday afternoon in the presence of a flurry of officials including deputy foreign minister Faisal Al-Meqdad. Syria's Prime Minister Hussein Arnous saluted a "veteran diplomat who capably defended his country in international fora". Russia, long a close ally of the regime and the main foreign broker in Damascus since its war-changing

military intervention in 2015, was the first nation to pay tribute to Muallem.

Mikhail Bogdanov, Russia's deputy foreign minister, hailed Muallem as a diplomat who "understood the importance of Syrian-Russian relations". "We have lost a very reliable partner and sincere friend," said Bogdanov, who was formerly stationed in Damascus. He stressed that he had been in "almost constant contact" with Muallem in the 35 years he had known him.

The foreign minister of ally Iran, Mohammad Javad Zarif, said Muallem "played an important role in serving and defending his country's national interests and security". Neighboring Lebanon, which says it hosts around 1.5 million Syrian refugees, and Oman also sent their condolences. Muallem, a Sunni Muslim from Damascus, never allowed any daylight between his statements and the official stance of Bashar Al-Assad, who hails from the ruling Alawite minority. — AFP

The Moderna vaccine, which was co-developed by the US National Institutes of Health, is given in two doses 28 days apart, and the preliminary results are based on the 95 of the 30,000 volunteers who fell ill with COVID-19. Of the 95, 90 had been in the trial's placebo group, and five in the group that received the drug, called mRNA-1273, translating to an efficacy rate of 94.5 percent.

There were 11 people who fell severely ill, all of whom were in the placebo group. A small fraction of people experienced severe symptoms such as fatigue, muscle and joint pains, or redness at the injection site, but these side-effects were short lasting. "The light at the end of the tunnel just got even brighter," tweeted Atul Gawande, a member of Biden's coronavirus advisory board and a surgeon at a Harvard-affiliated hospital.

Crucially, Moderna also announced that its vaccine can remain stable at standard refrigerator temperatures of 2 degrees Celsius to 8 degrees Celsius for 30 days. The company added it could be kept in long-term storage at standard freezer temperatures of -20 degrees Celsius for up to six months. Pfizer's vaccine, on the other hand, needs to be stored in deep-freezer conditions of -70 degrees Celsius which could complicate supply chain logistics, particularly in less developed countries. — AFP

contesting the elections. Eight candidates, including Talal Dashti and Ayedh Bukhousa, yesterday presented their arguments against the decision to disqualify them, while the government's legal department represented the interior ministry.

Dashti, the son of self-exiled former MP Abdulhamid Dashti, said on Twitter that the interior ministry barred him for old minor cases related to trade and customs, over which he has already been rehabilitated. Bukhousa expressed confidence that the court will scrap the interior ministry's decision. The court's verdicts can be challenged before the court of appeals and all the cases must be settled before the elections on Dec 5. Former Islamist opposition MP Bader Al-Dahoum filed his arguments on Sunday and the court also decided to rule on his case on Thursday.

## Around 23.6% of Kuwait population tested for COVID-19: Health Minister



**His Highness the Prime Minister Sheikh Sabah Al-Khaled Al-Hamad Al-Sabah chairs the meeting. — KUNA photos**

**KUWAIT:** Minister of Health Sheikh Dr Basel Al-Sabah briefed the Cabinet yesterday about the situation surrounding efforts to tackle the pandemic by Minister of Health Sheikh Dr Basel Al-Sabah. The minister mentioned that the number of swabs has exceeded one million, constituting about 23.6 percent of the total population, and that the percentage of those cured has reached 93 percent. The minister warned, however, of a fluctuation in the number of cases, which requires more dedication and continuing adherence to health measures and guidelines. Ministers went on to discuss committee recommendations on government preparations ahead of this year's rainy season. The Ministry of Public Works, in coordination with the Ministry of Finance, the Central Agency for Public Tenders and relevant authorities, were assigned to take the necessary action to speed up the process.

Chairing the Cabinet's weekly meeting yesterday, His Highness the Prime Minister Sheikh Sabah Al-Khaled Al-Hamad Al-Sabah briefed ministers about his recent visit to Bahrain, where he represented His Highness the Amir to offer Kuwait's condolences on the passing of Bahrain's late Prime Minister Prince Khalifa bin Salman Al-Khalifa, Deputy Prime Minister, Interior Minister and State Minister for Cabinet Affairs Anas Al-Saleh said.

The visit embodied the "unity of sentiment and the depth of enduring fraternal ties between the two countries and their brotherly peoples, and is in gratitude and appreciation for the role of the deceased and his honorable stances at all levels and in all fields," read a Cabinet statement. Minister Saleh also briefed ministers about His Highness the Amir Sheikh Nawaf Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah's recent visits to both the headquarters of the Ministry of Interior and the headquarters of the Kuwait General



**KUWAIT:** Minister of Health Sheikh Dr Basel Al-Sabah attends the Cabinet's weekly meeting yesterday, held via videoconference.

Fire Force. During both visits, His Highness the Amir met with senior officials praising them for their dedication and sincerity in performing their duties and cooperation with other state bodies to confront the coronavirus pandemic.

On the regional and international scales, the Cabinet extended its sincere congratulations to Oman's Sultan Haitham bin Tareq Al-Saeed and his people on the country's 50th anniversary of the National Day, which falls tomorrow. The ministers praised the great achievements that the Sultanate has made towards progress and prosperity and the warm fraternal bonds between the leaderships and peoples of the two countries, wishing the Sultanate further growth and prosperity. — KUNA

## New Moderna vaccine nearly...

Continued from Page 1

President-elect Joe Biden, but he cautioned that its widespread distribution was months away. "Until then, Americans need to continue to practice social-distancing and mask-wearing to get the virus under control," he said.

Moderna plans to submit applications for emergency approval around the world within weeks, and says it expects to have approximately 20 million doses ready to ship in the US by the end of the year. The company, which has received \$2 billion from the US government under "Operation Warp Speed," added it is on track to manufacture between 500 million to a billion doses globally in 2021.

Global infections from COVID-19 have soared past 54 million with more than 1.3 million deaths since the virus emerged in China late last year. US President Donald Trump also weighed in on Twitter, to take credit. "Please remember that these great discoveries, which will end the China Plague, all took place on my watch!"

## Hashem blasts virus vaccine...

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New candidate Abrar Al-Saleh, contesting from the third constituency, said both the Assembly and the government have let down the people by refusing to change the election system. She called for political reforms that serve national interests.

Meanwhile, the lower court yesterday said it will rule on the cases of a number of disqualified candidates on Nov 19, after at least nine candidates challenged the interior ministry decision to bar them from



## Local



KUWAIT: His Highness the Amir Sheikh Nawaf Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah poses for a group picture with top Ministry of Health officials during a visit to the ministry yesterday. —Amiri Diwan photo

## US, Kuwait convene security cooperation working group

KUWAIT: Senior US and Kuwaiti officials convened the Security Cooperation Working Group of the fourth Strategic Dialogue yesterday to discuss bilateral cooperation in the fields of counterterrorism, cyber security, and law enforcement. The US and Kuwait will also negotiate closer coordination on mutual legal assistance.

State Department Bureau of Counterterrorism Coordinator Ambassador Nathan Sales, Department of Treasury Acting Assistant Secretary Paul Ahern and A/FM for Development and International Cooperation Nasser Sabeeh Al-Sabeeh co-chaired

the meeting with participation from the Ministry of Interior and the Ministry of Justice, among others.

Also present from the US side was US Ambassador to Kuwait Alina L. Romanowski, Department of Justice Deputy Assistant Attorney General Bruce Swartz, Near East Affairs Principal Deputy Assistant Secretary Joey Hood, and State Department Deputy Coordinator for Cyber Issues Michele G. Markoff.

"I am very proud of the progress we made today in our discussions on security. Both the United States and Kuwait want to keep our countries safe, and being able to cooperate on counterterrorism, cyber security and all aspects of security really enhances those efforts," Ambassador Romanowski said.

"The United States stands ready to provide our expertise and assistance on security matters affecting Kuwait," Romanowski added. The discussion focused on counter terrorism financing, cyber secu-



Nathan Sales



Bruce Swartz



Joey Hood



Michele Markoff

ity, and enhancing the law enforcement working relationship between our two countries.

The US-Kuwait Strategic Dialogue, first launched four years ago, is an annual high-level

series of meetings which frames the two countries' work on issues of shared concern. The next working group on Consular and Customs is scheduled for tomorrow.

## Canadian ambassador praises KRCS efforts

KUWAIT: Canadian Ambassador to Kuwait Louis Pierre Emond praised yesterday Kuwait Red Crescent Society's (KRCS) efforts in helping those affected by natural or man-made disasters, and their role in combating Coronavirus in Kuwait. Emond said in a statement after his meeting with KRCS Chairman Dr Hilal Al-Sayer that the society's efforts are part of the humanitarian duty that reflects the official position of Kuwait's leadership and people. He said he discussed with Sayer issues related to promoting humanitarian work and volunteering, adding that he was briefed on KRCS humanitarian programs at the international and local scale in combating coronavirus and its great role in providing aid to affected workers and needy families. Sayer welcomed the Canadian ambassador's visit, pointing out that KRCS is keen to participate in humanitarian efforts by providing support and assistance to the afflicted people. —KUNA



KUWAIT: Canadian Ambassador to Kuwait Louis Pierre Emond meets KRCS Chairman Dr Hilal Al-Sayer. —KUNA

## Kuwait reports 489 new COVID cases, four deaths

KUWAIT: Kuwait tallied 489 new cases of coronavirus over the past 24 hours to up the total to 137,329, while four fatalities pushed its death toll from the outbreak to 842, the health ministry said yesterday. The number of people hospitalized with the virus currently stands at 8,073, with 115 of them in intensive care units, according to ministry spokesman Dr Abdullah Al-Sanad, adding that some 5,072 swab tests were conducted over the past 24 hours, raising the total to 1,016,638 so far. The ministry had earlier reported that some 829 people had recovered from the virus over the past 24 hours, raising the total of those to have overcome the disease to 128,414. The spokesman went on to urge the public to abide by health precautions, mainly following social distancing rules, explaining that following these precautions is the only way to halt the spread of the virus. —KUNA



489	4	829
إصابة جديدة NEW CASES	حالة وفاة جديدة NEW DEATHS	حالة تعافي جديدة NEW RECOVERIES
الإجمالي: 137,329	الإجمالي: 842	الإجمالي: 128,414
115	8,073	5,072
إجمالي الحالات في العناية المركزة TOTAL SERIOUS CASES	إجمالي الحالات التي تتلقى العلاج TOTAL ACTIVE CASES	مسحة جديدة NEW TESTS
		الإجمالي: 1,016,638

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## News in brief

Kuwait, Iraq  
prepare for talks

**BAGHDAD:** Preparatory talks were held yesterday ahead of joint Iraqi-Kuwaiti committee talks amid both countries' keenness to boost bilateral ties. Kuwait's Ambassador Salem Al-Zamanan and Iraq's National Security Advisor Qassem Al-Araji discussed ongoing preparations for the talks later due in Baghdad. They underlined the need to expand upon already historically significant relations in the benefit of the two brotherly countries and peoples, an Iraqi statement read. —KUNA

Turkmenistan president  
congratulates Amir

**KUWAIT:** His Highness the Amir Sheikh Nawaf Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah received a cable yesterday from President of Turkmenistan Gurbanguly Berdimuhamedow, to congratulate him on assumption of office, wishing him best of luck. His Highness the Amir thanked President Berdimuhamedow, in a cable, and wished him good health. —KUNA

## Ethiopian PM congratulates Amir

**KUWAIT:** His Highness the Amir Sheikh Nawaf Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah received a cable yesterday from Ethiopian Prime Minister Abiy Ahmad to congratulate him on assumption of office, wishing him best of luck. His Highness the Amir thanked Ahmad, in a cable, and wished him good health, and for Ethiopia to witness further development and prosperity. —KUNA

# People lost trust in MPs, govt, says candidate Dashti

## Assembly hopeful presents 'homeland document' to address corruption

By Nawara Fattahova

**KUWAIT:** Many new candidates are running in the upcoming National Assembly elections - and Ayoub Dashti is one of them. The engineer hopes to effect positive change and gain the trust of voters in the third district. People's disappointment in the current situation and promises made by MPs that were not realized were among the main reasons for him to run in the elections. "Wrong government decisions, appointing people in wrong positions and corruption among other issues made people to lose trust in both the MPs and the government. This is why I decided to run in the elections and gain voters' trust," Dashti told Kuwait Times.

"To correct rampant corruption and build a new Kuwait, we prepared a 'homeland document'. This document highlights our opinion and solutions for these problems. It should strengthen the trust of voters in the candidates, which got lost with some previous MPs. This document includes solutions and our financial disclosures. We signed these clauses with a covenant that if we don't implement these solutions if we become MPs, then voters can sue us. Until today, nine candidates from different districts have signed this document, and more will soon, although we don't know each other personally," Dashti said.

"This is the new way of running in elections, and it's our message to the voters. The traditional way of running in elections was by holding gatherings, where candidates presented speeches explaining their plans. But we presented this document, including our goals and our financial disclosures, to gain trust," he said.

According to him, some conditions for running in elections should be changed. "Our election law is 60 years old, and it has to be amended. It's not acceptable that one of the conditions to be a candidate is just to be able to read and write. There should be requirement of some educational degree at least. We also need to establish an independent authority to supervise elections to ensure transparency, instead of the authority that follows the ministry of interior, which is not independent," stressed Dashti.

According to him, there are many institutions that are a waste of money. "We propose to allow the Audit Bureau to transfer any case of corruption to the prosecution directly. Also, we don't need to have personal-

ized courts such as the ministers' court - all people are equal. Article 50 of the constitution should be applied for the separation of powers. I wonder why the previous MPs or legal experts didn't correct this situation. It's clear that they are benefiting from this situation. Such unnecessary institutions cost the budget high salaries, and on the other hand we have a high rate of unemployment," he explained.

## Housing crisis

Housing is an important issue. "Why should the government distribute new houses in areas such as Mutlaa or other faraway areas, while we have military installations on the Sixth Ring Road? Also, the demographics issue discussed by most candidates is not all about expats - it's mostly about redistributing land to meet our needs. It's wrong to have crowded residential areas without green spaces. Today, people care about the environment and fighting pollution. We need to have more services in new areas to become model areas," Dashti said.

He proposes a modern solution. "3D-printed houses are the best alternative during the waiting period instead of paying rent allowance, which is not enough anyway. 3D printing is cheap, so it can be changed every 10 years, for instance. A 200-m house is suitable for newlyweds to live in for a few years till they receive their government

house," Dashti told Kuwait Times.

"People can't buy houses because prices are extremely high. This is caused by manipulation of the market by some businessmen, who buy properties in residential areas to rent, and then the price of this house hikes. This is due to low tax of only half percent. All over the world, there is a cap on taxes, so a citizen can buy their first house without tax. If you buy a second house, you pay 30 percent, 50 percent for the third house and so on. This will stop real estate businessmen from trading in residential houses," he noted.

"There is chaos in the real-estate market. We need to establish an independent authority to supervise and control the real estate market to make it attractive for foreign investors. Then the price of real estate will return to normal and we can set a mortgage law that will allow anybody to buy a property financed from their salary. For instance, instead of paying KD 600 in rent, a citizen will only pay KD 200 and at the end



**KUWAIT:** Candidate Ayoub Dashti talks to Kuwait Times. —Photo by Yasser Al-Zayyat

own a property he likes," Dashti added.

## No entertainment

"The weather in Kuwait is pleasant between September and May, but the government hasn't provided any entertainment projects. We have a long coastline where tens of projects can be built. Only in the area of chalets in Khairan we can build over six cities similar to the Maldives, with resorts and utilities instead of renting these areas at nominal rates. This was clear during the pandemic, when the cost of renting a chalet reached KD 1,500. The new generation doesn't play as there are no entertainment places, which will affect their personality," Dashti said.

He said the postal service needs to be developed. "People don't even know that there are boxes at the post office. And many people can't get one as their numbers are limited. During elections in the US, more than half of the voters voted through the postal service. We need to reach that level," he said.

Dashti also believes the kafala (sponsorship) system should be canceled. "Instead of having a kafeel (sponsor), the ministry of social affairs or the public authority for manpower can be the sponsor. Instead of paying visa traders, an applicant will pay a fee to the ministry, which will be a source of income for the country. This will also force employers to establish labor cities to allow workers to live in a decent place," Dashti added.

Dashti concluded by mentioning two important topics that he will fight for if he reaches the parliament. "Children of Kuwaiti mothers are oppressed. There is great discrimination in the law between men and women, and I will work on correcting this law. The first solution is to give children of Kuwaiti mothers permanent residency till the problem of their right to Kuwaiti nationality is resolved. The second issue is canceling criminalization of opinion and setting the rights of freedom of speech."

## Kafala system should be canceled

## Palestinian culture center displays products at Zahra Complex



**KUWAIT:** Some of the items displayed at Zahra Complex. —Photos by Yasser Al-Zayyat

By Ben Garcia

**KUWAIT:** A variety of products from Palestine is being displayed at Zahra Complex in Salmiya as way to help women from a refugee camp in Jordan. Faten Abu-Ghazali, the daughter of the founding chairman of the Center for Palestinian Culture, based in Jordan, said the center seeks to revive Palestinian culture by displaying products in countries around the world. "We normally display our products at least twice a year to remind people about Palestinian culture that is slowly being taken away from them by the occupiers," said Abu-Ghazali.

The Center for Palestinian Culture is a non-profit organization that was founded in 1960 as part of the Palestinian Women's Union in Kuwait. Its mission is to assist and improve the level of education of women and children, quality of healthcare, help women become economically independent and preserve the cultural aspect (embroidery/ceramics) of Palestinian identity.

"Cultural heritage is slowly dying since the raw products are now nonexistent - we get some of it from other countries. Palestinian women are doing their best to preserve the identity and heritage of Palestinian people despite the continuous Israeli occupation of parts of Palestine. These women live in refugee camps. Motifs normally are from everyday events in Palestine, including the things they see in the environment. Some of the products have embroidered flowers, but others have a political message to honor the sacrifices of our Palestinian forefathers and the struggles of the Palestinian people for real freedom and cooperation," Abu-Ghazali said.

Because of the COVID-19 pandemic, the center's activities have slowed down considerably. "We have around 500 women depending on help from the center, but because of the global pandemic, we were unable to provide like we did prior to the pandemic. It's a great challenge, especially since most of the products here have to be brought from the refugee camp in Jordan," she said.

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## International

## Heat and hunger: Sudan struggles to shelter 25,000 Ethiopia refugees

## Exhausted and terrified Ethiopians flee

**UM RAQUBA REFUGEE CAMP:** In a sun-baked and dusty wasteland in remote eastern Sudan, crews are laboring to rebuild a refugee camp for the 25,000 people who have fled heavy fighting in neighboring Ethiopia's Tigray region. Exhausted and terrified men, women and children from the conflict zone have struggled against searing heat and hunger to escape ground fighting, air strikes, rocket fire and artillery barrages in northern Ethiopia.

Sudan - one of the world's poorest countries, now faced with the massive influx - has reopened its Um Raquba camp, 80 kilometers from the border. The camp once housed refugees who fled Ethiopia's 1983-85 famine that killed over a million people. For now, though, desperate families are huddling in the shade of sparse trees because only two permanent buildings remain from the camp that closed years ago - an old school house missing a roof and a dilapidated former clinic. Others are erecting their own basic tents or lying on plastic sheets provided by aid agencies. "You see I am sitting on the ground with my three little girls," said one of the recent arrivals, 37-year-old Gabriel Hayli.

"We thought the authorities would transfer us here because there are shelters - but there is nothing, we have been told to wait." So far, only basic emergency relief has been set up at the isolated camp, located amid abandoned fields some 10 kilometers from the nearest village. The UN's children's fund, UNICEF, has provided drinking water and the World Food Program is handing out sorghum and lentil rations, assisted by the Sudanese Refugee Commission. The Red Crescent is running a field clinic out of a tent.

## Bygone famine to war

Several dozen Sudanese workers have started digging trenches in the rocky ground to lay water pipes and build the foundations of wooden shelters and administration offices. "Electricity has been installed today but it will take at least seven to 10 days of hard work to get everything in place," said Adam Mohammad, one of the workers.

Camp director Abdel Basset Abdel Ghani told AFP that "the most urgent thing today is to build shelters. Our plan is to create three sectors that can accommodate 8,000 people each. We are going to use the land of the old camp and, if we can, we will extend it to the adjacent land." He said "this is the second time I've



**GADAREF, Sudan:** Ethiopians who fled intense fighting in their homeland queue for food at the Um Raquba camp on Sunday after being transported from the border reception center. — AFP

been involved in the establishment of this camp. In 1985, I started at the Sudanese Refugee Commission and now I'm doing this job again as a leader.

"At the time I received Ethiopians fleeing famine, and now I take them in because they are fleeing the war." In the early 1980s, Ethiopia was hit by extreme drought, but that spiralled into famine as the hardline Marxist government of Mengistu Haile Mariam battled Tigrayan rebels led by Meles Zenawi, who toppled the regime in 1991. Zenawi went on to lead the country until his death in 2012, presiding over a precarious and narrowly based stability, built on Tigrayan political dominance.

## Conflict could spread

The latest unrest in Tigray started when Ethiopian Prime Minister Abiy Ahmed, the winner of last year's Nobel Peace Prize, announced he had ordered military operations in the region in response to an alleged attack on a federal base. On November 4, Abiy - who in 2018 became the country's first premier of Oromo eth-

nicity, Ethiopia's largest group - sent the federal army to attack Tigray.

His move followed months of growing tensions with the Tigray People's Liberation Front, which was the country's ruling party under Zenawi, but now only rules over its home region. Tigrayan forces on Saturday fired rockets at the Eritrean capital Asmara, which they accuse of assisting the Ethiopian federal army - an escalation that has sparked fears the conflict could destabilize the wider Horn of Africa region.

For now, more than 2,000 Ethiopian refugees are sheltering at the Sudanese camp, and both Khartoum and the UN refugee agency predict arrivals will multiply. Many are traumatized after witnessing what the United Nations has warned are possible war crimes and "targeted attacks against civilians based on their ethnicity or religion". One of the refugees, Dahlia Bourhane, 32, said he was both thankful and scared. "The Sudanese do a lot for us and I thank them, but we are too close to the border and the place is very isolated," he said. "It's very dangerous if the war spreads." — AFP

## What has Trump camp alleged?

The president tweeted Thursday, in all capital letters and without evidence, that "Dominion deleted 2.7 million Trump votes nationwide" cast in the November 3 election. He also claimed "data analysis" had found 221,000 votes were cast for him but switched to Biden in Pennsylvania, a key state that the Democrat won. The claim against Dominion and the broader unsubstantiated allegation the election was rigged have been relayed both by Trump supporters on the ground and those on cable TV news programs.

Trump's lawyer Rudy Giuliani echoed the president's claims Sunday on Fox News by attacking Dominion. "(It's) a company that's foreign, a company that has close, close ties with Venezuela and therefore China, and uses a Venezuelan company software that's been used to steal elections in other countries," Giuliani said without providing evidence. When pressed to back up his claims against Dominion, Giuliani said: "We have proof that I can't disclose yet."

Federal and state election officials issued a statement rejecting the assertions in Trump's tweet against Dominion. "There is no evidence that any voting system deleted or lost votes, changed votes, or was in any way compromised," the members of the Election Infrastructure Government Coordinating Council and the Election Infrastructure Sector Coordinating Executive Committees said. —AFP

## What is Dominion?

Dominion Voting Systems is a Canadian company founded in 2003 that has its US headquarters in Colorado's largest city, Denver. Specializing in election technologies, Dominion provides the machines and software that millions of Americans use to vote. More than 71 million US voters used the company's technology in 2016, according to a study from the Wharton business school at the University of Pennsylvania. Dominion is second only to Election Systems & Software in the US voting technology market.



**IGARAPE MIRI, Brazil:** A woman votes at a polling station in Para state on Sunday during the first round of municipal elections. — AFP

## Brazil tilts right in local elections, but Bolsonaro stymied

**SAO PAULO:** Traditional center-right and right-wing parties emerged as winners Sunday in the first round of local elections in Brazil, though far-right President Jair Bolsonaro's favorite candidates took a beating in the country's biggest cities. In the first elections since the man dubbed the "Tropical Trump" won the presidency in 2018, upending Brazil's political gameboard, voters continued to punish the divided and weakened left wing, tainted by corruption scandals during 13 years of rule (2003-2016).

But the pandemic-rattled vote was notably not a victory for the far-right president, who currently has no political party and whose candidates mostly lost to competitors from traditional centrist and conservative parties. "The elections were bad for Bolsonaro," said Mauricio Santoro, a political science professor at Rio de Janeiro State University. "They show the president is

no longer the kingmaker he was in 2018, when his support was enough to get even unknown candidates elected," he told AFP. "The general theme of this election is a more cautious voter, tending toward more experienced and moderate politicians than in the anti-establishment election of 2018, which was all about rage and revolt. In 2020, it was more about the pandemic and the economic crisis." Bolsonaro remains broadly popular, with approval ratings of more than 40 percent in recent polls, and he still excels at whipping his hardline base into a frenzy with his social media diatribes.

But he faces sharp criticism over his minimalist management of Covid-19, which he has compared to a "little flu" even as it has killed more than 165,000 people in Brazil - the second-highest death toll worldwide, after the United States. The resulting economic crisis is battering his administration, which could preside over a record recession this year. The recent election loss in the United States for his political role model, Donald Trump, has only heightened the sense of Bolsonaro's vulnerability.

In Sao Paulo, Brazil's biggest city and economic capital, Bolsonaro acolyte Celso Russomanno took a thrashing and failed to reach the November 29 runoff, finishing far behind center-right Mayor Bruno Covas and left-wing candidate Guilherme Boulos, according to early official results. In Rio de Janeiro, Mayor Marcelo Crivella, an

## France looks to Biden era as Pompeo visits

**PARIS:** France's Emmanuel Macron was forced to walk a diplomatic tightrope yesterday as he hosted US Secretary of State Mike Pompeo, a staunch defender of President Donald Trump, for talks while at the same time seeking to build relations with President-elect Joe Biden. Pompeo arrived in Paris Saturday at the start of a seven-nation trip to US allies.

America's top diplomat has been criticized for backing the president as he digs in over his unsubstantiated claims of election fraud. "There will be a smooth transition to a second Trump administration," a defiant Pompeo told reporters moments after announcing his trip last week. World leaders however have shown no doubt about whom they see as the victor, with Macron one of the first to congratulate Biden and speak with him by telephone.

Pompeo has been critical of such overtures to Biden, telling Fox News that such calls to Biden were not objectionable if it was "just saying 'hi'." "But make no mistake about it, we have one president, one secretary of state, one national security team at a time," he said. French presidential aides emphasized that it was Pompeo who sought the meeting with Macron and that it was granted "in full transparency with President-elect Joe Biden's team."

In a sign of the unease generated by his visit, no press conferences are planned after his meeting with Macron and separate meeting with Pompeo's French counterpart Jean-Yves Le Drian. A senior State Department official, asked whether Pompeo would insist to allies that Trump will remain in power, said that the former CIA director has a "broad strategy" in pursuit of US interests and that "he remains the secretary of state".

## Ongoing disagreements

In contrast to some other EU leaders, Macron sought from the outset to win over Trump, making him the guest of honor at Bastille Day celebrations in Paris in 2017 - a trip that included a dinner with their spouses on the second floor of the Eiffel Tower. But analysts say that the French leader has little to show for his efforts, with Trump pulling the US out of the landmark 2015 Paris climate accord and the two leaders also locking horns on Iran, trade and taxing digital giants. "The strong relationship between our countries cannot be overestimated, and I'm looking forward to my discussions here in Paris," he said. But there is ample scope for friction.

Le Drian said Friday that he would raise the concerns of France—which has been hit by a number of jihadist attacks—over Trump's plans to speed up the withdrawal of US troops from Iraq and Afghanistan. "We don't think that should happen," Le Drian said in a television interview. EU leaders are also still trying to save a hard-won international deal to curb Iran's nuclear ambitions, which Trump ripped up early in his term. A senior Trump administration official told the press that Washington's policy of "maximum pressure" on historic foe Iran was "not going to stop in the coming months."

## Farewell tour?

Pompeo, whose visit has the hallmarks of a farewell tour that dare not speak its name, had no official engagements in Paris over the weekend which he spent with his wife Susan. He will commemorate the victims of recent terror attacks in France, including teacher Samuel Paty who was decapitated over cartoons of the Prophet Mohammed and three people who were stabbed to death in a church in Nice.

From Paris he heads to Istanbul, where his trip has already caused friction. Pompeo's only announced meeting is with Bartholomew I of Constantinople—the spiritual leader of the Greek Orthodox world—to discuss religious freedom, a key topic for the evangelical Christian Pompeo. In Jerusalem, Pompeo will see Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu, who is a close partner of Trump but who has congratulated Biden. —AFP



**This RAMMB/CIRA satellite image shows Hurricane Iota yesterday as it approaches Central America. — AFP**

## Hurricane Iota closes in on storm-battered Central America

**BILWI:** Hurricane Iota rapidly strengthened into a "dangerous" Category Four as it headed towards Central America yesterday, the US National Hurricane Center warned, two weeks after powerful storm Eta devastated much of the region and left more than 200 people dead or missing. Iota strengthened to a Category Four out of five on the Saffir-Simpson wind strength scale yesterday as it tracked westward over the Caribbean towards the Nicaragua-Honduras border. It was packing maximum sustained winds of 145 miles per hour with higher gusts.

"Iota is forecast to be an extremely dangerous Category 4 hurricane when it approaches Central America," the Miami-based NHC said. Moving slowly over the southwestern Caribbean Sea, the hurricane was forecast to pass near or over the tiny Colombian island of Providencia in the next few hours and hit northeastern Nicaragua and eastern Honduras later. The NHC forecast "potentially catastrophic winds, a life-threatening storm surge and extreme rainfall" for Central America as Iota became the year's 13th hurricane.

## Evacuations underway

Honduras, Guatemala and Nicaragua announced evacuations last week, even as the region was still reeling from the devastation inflicted by Eta. In the Nicaragua coastal city of Bilwi, residents were desperately trying to secure the roofs of flimsy wooden homes with the same zinc sheets ripped off by Eta. Many people were wrapping their belongings in plastic bags to protect them from the coming rains.

"We are worried, nervous. Psychologically we are not doing well, because losing our things and starting over is not easy. Some of us have old little houses and we risk losing everything," Silvana Zamora told AFP. Authorities have ordered people to leave the area, but many are refusing to leave out of fear of catching Covid-19. "Some of us prefer to stay and die in our homes. There has never been a repeat hurricane in such a short time, but what can we do against the force of God and nature," Zamora said.

Eta's heavy rains burst river banks and triggered landslides as far north as Chiapas, Mexico. Initial estimates show "some 80,000 families are going to be at risk," said Guillermo Gonzalez, head of Nicaragua's disaster response agency Sinapred. Evacuations were underway in communities along the border with Honduras, he said. Authorities on Friday sent boats to evacuate the community in Cabo Gracias a Dios, where the Coco River flows into the Caribbean along the "Mosquito Coast." —AFP

Evangelical pastor and Bolsonaro ally, reached the second round but trailed ex-mayor Eduardo Paes 37 percent to 22 percent with nearly all the ballots counted, election officials said. It was a good night for Paes's center-right party, the Democrats (DEM), which looked on track to win a string of mayorships in cities including Curitiba and Florianopolis. Bolsonaro-backed candidates scored well in a comparatively small number of cities, including Belem and Fortaleza. "Bolsonaro will have to cede more to the traditional centrist parties if he wants to advance his agenda in the second half of his term," said political scientist Oswaldo Amaral of the University of Campinas. "It's still early to talk about 2022 (when Bolsonaro faces reelection), but his government will now face more demands to negotiate to get its measures through."

The Brazilian left, meanwhile, remains weakened and divided after the impeachment of president Dilma Rousseff in 2016 and the jailing of her predecessor, Workers' Party founder Luiz Inacio Lula da Silva, on corruption charges. The few bright spots for the left included Sao Paulo, with Boulos's survival for the runoff, and the southern city of Porto Alegre - though it was a disappointing second-place finish there for Communist Party of Brazil candidate and rising political star Manuela D'Avila, who will face centrist candidate Sebastiao Melo in the second round.—AFP



## International

# Asia at 'a crossroads' as coronavirus cases surge

## New outbreak threatens Australia's success in virus fight

**SYDNEY:** Countries across the Asia-Pacific region reported record new coronavirus numbers and fresh outbreaks yesterday, with Japan facing mounting pressure to reimpose a state of emergency and South Korea warning it was at a "critical crossroads". The resurgence of the virus in Asia comes as travel restrictions are gradually being eased in the region and it will dampen prospects for broader reopening that would boost the recovery underway in economies such as Japan.

New daily cases in Japan reached a record 1,722 on Saturday, with hot spots in the northern island of Hokkaido and the western prefectures of Hyogo and Osaka. In Tokyo, cases have neared 400 in recent days, levels not seen since early August. Analysts expect rising infections to slow the recovery in the world's third-biggest economy, which grew at the fastest pace on record in the third quarter.

But the new cases failed to dampen stock markets, which have been bolstered by news of a potentially successful vaccine from Pfizer Inc. Japan's Nikkei rose 2% to a 29-year high. South Korea's Kospi hit its highest since early 2018 and Australia's ASX 200 hit an eight-month top, before jamming there when a glitch halted trade. "Since we've got this vaccine news, as well as diminished risk around the US elections ... everyone's thinking now that it's the cue to get in," said Kyle Rodda, analyst at IG Markets in Melbourne.

Prime Minister Yoshihide Suga, desperate to maintain Japan's economic momentum, has said the new infections did not warrant the reimposition of a state of emergency, or a halt to the government's campaign to encourage domestic tourism. Japan first adopted a state of emergency

in April and lifted it the following month. Since then, Tokyo has eased restrictions to boost the economy and prepare for next year's postponed Olympic Games. International Olympic Committee (IOC) President Thomas Bach met Suga yesterday and said he was "very, very confident" that spectators would be able to safely watch the Games in stadiums.

In South Korea, officials reported more than 200 new coronavirus cases for the third consecutive day yesterday, as the government considers tightening social distancing. "We are at a critical crossroads where we might have to readjust distancing," South Korean Health Minister Park Neung-hoo said. "The current situation is taking a very dangerous turn considering the rising infections from daily lives and the unrelenting pace of the spread."



### Japanese cases surge; Olympics chief visits

#### Reminder

In Australia, 14 new cases were reported in South Australia yesterday after a months-long streak of no infections in the state ended on the weekend. One official said the cluster was likely connected to a hotel for quarantined travelers. Several other states imposed new border restrictions as the outbreak threatened Australia's strong record of controlling the disease, with several days of no new infections reported nationally this month. Prime Minister Scott Morrison said the new cases were "a reminder, even after a lockdown, even after all this time, the virus hasn't gone anywhere".

India said on Sunday it would fly doctors from other regions into the capital, New Delhi, and double testing rates to contain record case numbers in the city of 20 million people. While India's daily increase in cases has been under the 50,000 mark for eight straight days, about half the peak, Delhi has recorded more than 7,000 daily infec-



**MUMBAI:** Devotees pray at a shrine yesterday after places of worship in Maharashtra state reopened following more than eight months of shutdown due to the COVID-19 pandemic. —AFP

tions in recent days - a record level. New Zealand has made masks mandatory from Thursday on public transport in Auckland as well as on all domestic flights, after a new infection was reported in the community.

Last week's positive test was linked to a known case from a border isolation facility, suggesting less risk of a wider unseen spread. Indonesia, which has the highest number of cases in Southeast Asia, has reported new spikes after signs infection rates were plateauing in recent weeks. It announced a record daily jump of 5,444 infections on Friday. Mainland China, where the pandemic began late last year, reported eight

new infections on Sunday, down from 13 a day earlier. China's last significant outbreak died down this month.

Beijing is ramping up testing of frozen food after repeatedly detecting the virus on imported products, even though the World Health Organization says the risk of catching COVID-19 from frozen food is low. Taiwan, which has kept the pandemic well under control, is expected to announce tougher measures this week after a rise in positive cases imported from abroad. Taiwan reported eight new cases on Friday, all imported, the highest in a single day since April 19. —Reuters

## Erdogan says Cyprus to stay divided, visits 'ghost town' in north

**NICOSIA:** Turkey's president said he favors a permanent "two-state" division of Cyprus during a visit Sunday to the breakaway Turkish-held north condemned as a provocation by the internationally recognized Greek-speaking south. Recep Tayyip Erdogan also visited the beachfront area of Varosha in the north, a one-time luxury resort turned ghost town along the United Nations buffer zone that has split the Mediterranean island since Turkey's 1974 invasion of the north. "There are two peoples and two separate states in Cyprus," Erdogan said after arriving for the 37th anniversary of the self-proclaimed Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus, which is recognized only by Ankara.

"There must be talks for a solution on the basis of two separate states." Commenting on previous, failed UN-led efforts to reunify the island as a bi-communal federal state, Erdogan used the phrase "You can't dry today's laundry in yesterday's sun". The comments marked a further setback to hopes

for an eventual reunification of the island — split between EU-member the Republic of Cyprus, which controls the island's southern two thirds, and the north, occupied by Turkey.

European Union foreign policy chief Josep Borrell criticized the Turkish leader's visit. "The EU's message is very clear: there is no alternative to a comprehensive settlement of the Cyprus problem other than on the basis of relevant UN Security Council Resolutions," Borrell said in a statement. "In this respect we deplore today's actions regarding" Varosha and "statements contradicting the UN principles for a settlement of the Cyprus question. They will cause greater distrust and tension in the region and should be urgently reversed", the EU official added.

#### Provocation

During Erdogan's visit, Turkish jets left vapour trails in the sky in the shape of the star and crescent of the Turkish flag, mirroring a huge flag painted decades ago on a rocky mountainside in the north. In the south, meanwhile, Greek Cypriots demonstrated against his visit at a checkpoint along the UN-patrolled Green Line.

Erdogan's visit to the Turkish-held area comes amid heightened tensions on the island and in the Eastern Mediterranean and was condemned as a



**VAROSHA, Cyprus:** Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan and Turkish Cypriot leader Ersin Tatar make a joint statement in this fenced-off eastern town on Sunday. —AFP

"provocation without precedent" by the Republic of Cyprus. An eventual reunification has looked more remote since an Erdogan-backed Turkish nationalist, Ersin Tatar, was elected leader of the north last month. Unlike his predecessor, Mustafa Akinci, who advocated reunification in the form of a federal state, Tatar also favors a two-state solution. The last UN-sponsored peace talks, based on a reunification of the island, failed in 2017. —AFP



**LIMA:** A woman gestures in front of police officers standing guard as people celebrate outside the Congress after Peruvian interim president Manuel Merino presented his resignation on Sunday. —AFP

mat came after the health ministry said two protesters were killed on Saturday during a massive march in Lima, which was repressed by police firing shotgun pellets and tear gas. —AFP

Police statistics reveal that 13 farmers have been killed by thieves so far this year. Damien King, an economist and executive director of the Caribbean Policy Research Institute, a nonprofit think tank, said agricultural theft is a crime of opportunity, as so much property around the country is not properly secured. Government investment in helping farmers protect their property would have far-reaching benefits, he said. "No one wants to invest in farming if they won't get to reap their own crops," King said in emailed comments.

"Therefore, aggressively targeting praedial larceny and other property insecurity manifestations will have a huge return in growth and employment." In 2015, the Jamaican government set up a dedicated unit to combat the crime. So far this year, 42 people have been arrested in relation to praedial larceny, said Welsh of the JCF. "Praedial larceny is no longer a minor, petty crime. As criminal enterprises thrive, they seek funding for their criminal actions," he said. The government has also addressed criticisms about the weak penalties for agricultural theft by promising in June to increase fines to a maximum of 3 million Jamaican dollars (about \$20,000) and imprisonment up to one year. —Reuters

#### News in brief

##### Pakistan's capital sealed off

**ISLAMABAD:** Pakistan authorities sealed off a major road into Islamabad for a second day yesterday as a far-right religious party held fresh anti-France protests. Around a thousand protesters gathered at the roadblock preventing them from entering the capital, a day after 5,000 people rallied in neighboring Rawalpindi. Authorities have suspended mobile phone services in Islamabad and surrounding areas since early Sunday to prevent rally organizers from coordinating, apart from some brief intervals when coverage appeared to resume. Commuters faced lengthy delays on alternative routes into the city. Pakistan has seen small and scattered protests in recent weeks after French President Emmanuel Macron condemned the beheading of a teacher by an extremist at a school near Paris. The teacher had shown cartoons of Mohammed-forbidden under Islam's ban on depictions of the prophet-during a class on free speech. —AFP

##### India oil fire extinguished

**NEW DELHI:** A massive oil well fire that raged for more than five months in northeast India has finally been extinguished, officials said Sunday. Oil India engineers had battled the blaze in Assam state since an explosion in June, weeks after the well blew out and began discharging huge quantities of natural gas. Two employees of the state-owned company died in the blast, which sent a wall of flame and massive plumes of smoke into the sky. A third worker died in September after an accident at the site. Experts from Singapore, the United States and Canada joined efforts to contain the inferno, and Oil India spokesman Tridiv Hazarika said Sunday the fire had now been "doused completely". "The well has been killed with brine solution and is under control now," he said, adding that the well had yet to be capped. —AFP

##### Trial opens for wife killer

**VESOU:** A Frenchman went on trial yesterday for beating his wife to death and burning her body in the woods, a crime he admitted to after initially reporting her missing. Jonathann Daval, 36, risks life in prison for the murder of his wife Alexia, whose charred remains were found hidden under branches near their town of Gray-la-Ville in eastern France in October 2017. Daval initially said Alexia, a 29-year-old bank employee, had gone jogging and never came back. After her death he cut a distraught figure, appearing in tears at a press conference with his in-laws and leading one of several events arranged countrywide in her memory. Three months later, prosecutors said the IT worker confessed to the murder-beating her after a heated argument, knocking her face against a concrete wall and strangling her. He initially denied setting fire to her body, but finally admitted that too, in June last year. —AFP

##### Turkey probes Istanbul mayor

**ISTANBUL:** Turkey's interior ministry has launched a probe into the Istanbul mayor over his opposition to President Recep Tayyip Erdogan's dream of building an alternative to the Bosphorus Strait, the mayor's spokesman said yesterday. Erdogan argues that the new Istanbul canal, which he has dubbed one of his "crazy projects", would relieve pressure on one of the world's busiest shipping lanes. The Bosphorus creates a border between Europe and Asia, splitting Istanbul in two as it runs between the Black and Marmara Seas. The proposed 75-billion-lira (\$9.8-billion) alternative would run to the west of the Bosphorus along a new 45-kilometre route. —AFP

## Peru left without president; Merino quits after protest

**LIMA:** Peru was without a president yesterday after Congress failed to agree on a successor to interim leader Manuel Merino, who resigned following days of street protests against him. Merino announced he was stepping down Sunday, following an ultimatum from Congress for him to quit or face censure after a police crackdown on protesters left at least two dead and scores injured. "I want to let the whole country know that I'm resigning," said Merino, 59, in a televised address, sparking celebrations in the capital Lima following street protests against the ousting of his popular predecessor.

Congress now has to name Merino's successor to become the country's third president in a week. Merino only assumed office on Tuesday, a day after

## Jamaica women worst hit by crop, livestock theft in pandemic

**KINGSTON:** Early each morning, Pamela Dann arrives at her farm in eastern Jamaica hoping thieves have not stolen any of her crops. She carefully checks the onions, watermelon and papayas - more often than not, something has been snatched overnight. Over the 14 years Dann has been cultivating her 2-acre plot in Poor Man's Corner, a rural community an hour east of the capital, Kingston, the 60-year-old farmer has had about \$3,500 worth of crops, fertilizer and tools stolen. "It happens every other day. As long as (the produce) is there, they will steal it," she said.

The theft of livestock, crops and farming equipment - known as praedial larceny - is on the rise in Jamaica, say farmers and police, as the economic impact of the COVID-19

the assembly impeached predecessor Martin Vizcarra on corruption charges. As speaker of Congress, he was next in line as the post of vice president was vacant. A crisis session of Congress failed to agree on a new president Sunday night. Leftist legislator and former human rights activist Rocio Silva Santisteban, supposedly a consensus candidate, needed 60 votes but she only got 42, with 52 against and 25 abstentions.

"Congress had in its hands the solution to this political crisis that they generated. However, today they have turned their backs on the country," former economy minister Vizcarra Maria Antonieta Alva tweeted. Party whips then held a closed-door meeting as thousands of protesters remained peacefully on the streets, undisturbed by police. Thousands have taken to the streets in days of protests against Merino, who had launched the first, unsuccessful, impeachment proceedings against Vizcarra in September.

Elections are scheduled for April 2021 and Merino was due to leave office in July, when Vizcarra's mandate was to end. The Congress ulti-

pandemic pushes criminals to find new ways to fund their illegal activities. "A lot of the things they steal end up on the black market," said Gary Welsh, assistant commissioner of police with the Jamaica Constabulary Force (JCF), adding that women farmers are more susceptible to being targeted.

"Women feel vulnerable, and thieves prey upon them because they are less likely to retaliate," he told the said. The most recent statistics from the JCF say there have been more than 900 instances of praedial larceny since 2014 across Jamaica. But Welsh warned that those numbers are "grossly underreported", mainly because farmers feel the police will not be able to offer immediate assistance.

#### Lack of land titles

According to the government's Jamaica Agricultural Society (JAS), the theft of livestock, crops and agricultural equipment costs Jamaica up to 7 billion Jamaican dollars (\$48 million) annually. "The problem has gotten worse and worse," said Denton Alvaranga, the society's first vice president. "When praedial thieves come, they might take a whole herd of cattle, and they tie up the farmer and sometimes kill them."



# Business

TUESDAY, NOVEMBER 17, 2020

## Japan exits recession as GDP grows 5.0%

### Rise in domestic demand and exports helps drive Q3 growth

**TOKYO:** Japan's economy exited recession in the third quarter, growing a better-than-expected 5.0 percent, government data showed yesterday, following a record contraction. A rise in domestic demand as well as exports helped drive the quarter-on-quarter growth, after the coronavirus pandemic and a consumption tax hike slammed the economy into reverse earlier in the year.

The positive figures come after three quarters of contraction in the world's third-largest economy, with revised data showing the economy shrank 8.2 percent in Q2, more than the previously estimated 7.9 percent. That was the worst figure for Japan since comparable data became available in 1980, exceeding even the brutal impact of the 2008 global financial crisis.

The Q3 growth will be welcome news for Japan's government, which has avoided the tough lockdown

measures seen in some other countries as it tries to balance preventing the spread of coronavirus with protecting the economy. The results also beat economist expectations of 4.4 percent growth, and analysts said the recovery was likely to continue into the final quarter of the year.

"Between July and September, economic activity in Japan experienced a return to a somewhat normal status as the government lifted the state of emergency in the country," said Naoya Oshikubo, senior economist at Sumitomo Mitsui Trust. "Looking ahead, we believe that GDP figures in the next quarter should continue to show signs of recovery, albeit at a slower pace," Oshikubo said in a note before the official release of the data. "Pent-up demand should decelerate, mainly due to second waves of COVID-19 overseas," he added.



**TOKYO:** People walk on a pedestrian crossing in Tokyo yesterday as government data showed Japan's economy exited recession in the third quarter, growing a better-than-expected 5.0 percent following a record contraction. — AFP

## Saudi Aramco hires banks to sell international bonds

**RIYADH:** Energy giant Saudi Aramco said yesterday it had hired banks to sell dollar-denominated bonds, to boost finances as the coronavirus pandemic weighs heavily on global demand for crude oil.

This comes two weeks after the company, seen as Saudi Arabia's main cash cow, posted a 44.6 percent slump in third-quarter profit compared to the same time last year. Aramco said in a statement its multi-tranche offering will range between three and 50 years, subject to market conditions. It did not specify the total value, which is expected to be in the billions.

The company said it had hired the banks Citi, Goldman Sachs, HSBC, JP Morgan, Morgan Stanley and NCB Capital. Aramco has said it is committed to a bumper dividend even as third quarter net profits dropped to 44.21 billion Saudi riyals (\$11.79 billion) compared to \$21.3 billion in the same period last year.

Aramco's net profit for the first nine months of this year also dropped, by 48.6 percent to \$35.02 billion, the company said. Although the results underscore a downbeat market, Aramco's July-September results showed an improvement amid relatively steady crude prices compared to the second quarter, when it posted a profit of \$6.57 billion. The latest results stood in contrast to the losses reported by Aramco's rivals, which are also reeling from pandemic-driven economic shutdowns that have suppressed energy demand. Saudi Arabia has been hit hard by the double blow of low oil prices and sharp cuts in production. A drop in oil income is expected to hinder Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman's ambitious "Vision 2030" reform program to overhaul the kingdom's energy-reliant economy. — AFP

## 'Data' issue stops day's trade on Sydney exchange

**SYDNEY:** Trading was halted on Sydney's leading ASX stock market for almost all of yesterday, as operators struggled to fix unspecified "market data issues". The problems began shortly after trade opened for the week, forcing a market pause as ASX investigated the cause. Several hours later, the firm said equity markets "will not open for the remainder of today". "The underlying cause of the issue has been identified," it said, adding that trading should restart on Tuesday's open. "ASX apologises for the disruption," a spokesman earlier told AFP. The cause of the stoppage was not immediately stated, but the outage coincided with a system update which was scheduled to go live Monday-after almost a year of consultations and dress rehearsals.

There was no immediate suggestion of a cyberattack. Earlier this year New Zealand's stock market was hit by what was believed to be an overseas cyberattack that disrupted trading for several days. — AFP

## Spain's BBVA sells US unit for \$11.6bn

**MADRID:** Spain's second-largest bank BBVA said yesterday it has agreed to sell its US unit to PNC Financial Services for \$11.6 billion (9.7 billion euros), a deal that will create the fifth-largest bank in the United States.

The sale price is more than 2.5 times the average valuation of 3.8 billion euros assigned to BBVA's Houston-based unit, which accounted for less than 10 percent of BBVA's net profit last year, the Spanish lender said in a statement.

"This is a very positive transaction for all sides," BBVA executive chairman Carlos Torres Vila said in the statement. "The deal enhances our already strong financial position. We will have ample flexibility to profitably deploy capital in our markets, strengthening our long-term growth profile and supporting economies in the recovery phase." BBVA's unit in the United States has \$104 billion in assets and operates 637 branches in Alabama, Arizona, California, Colorado, Florida, New Mexico and Texas, PNC Financial Services group said in a separate statement.

The all-cash deal, which is expected to close in mid-2021 pending regulatory approval, will give Pittsburgh-based PNC Financial Services a coast-to-coast presence in 29 of the 30 largest markets in the United States, the statement added. It will transform PNC Financial Services into the fifth-largest retail bank by assets in the United States, the two lenders said in their statements.

### 'Opportunity'

"Our acquisition will accelerate our growth trajectory and drive long-term shareholder value," PNC president William S. Demchak said. "This transaction is an opportunity to navigate our future from a position of strength, accelerating PNC's

### Third wave

Japan was already struggling with a stagnating economy and the impact of a consumption tax hike implemented last year before the pandemic hit. It has seen a smaller coronavirus outbreak compared to some of the worst-hit countries, with infections approaching 120,000 and deaths at slightly under 2,000. But Prime Minister Yoshihide Suga last week issued a warning over a recent rise in infections, though he said the government's campaign to promote domestic tourism would not be halted for now.

Japan imposed a nationwide state of emergency in April as cases spiked, but restrictions were significantly looser than in many countries, with no enforcement mechanism to shutter businesses or keep people at home. The emergency was lifted in June, and the government has been reluctant to reintroduce curbs. Suga instructed his ministers last week to draw up a fresh economic stimulus package to help the economy weather the pandemic. Earlier this year, the government unleashed massive spending, including sending approximately \$900 in stimulus funds to every adult and child in the country.

Tom Learmouth, Japan economist at Capital Economics, said the effects of the stimulus efforts were clear in the latest figures, with a 2.2 percent quarter-on-quarter rise in public spending. "We expect GDP to rebound a further 1.2 percent quarter-on-quarter this quarter and to reach pre-virus levels-although not pre-sales tax hike levels-in the second half of next year," he wrote in a note.

"While the third wave of coronavirus that is now a reality is a downside risk, our current assumption is that it will be contained as the second wave was, with minimal restrictions imposed on economic activity," he added. In October, the Bank of Japan lowered its economic growth and inflation forecasts for this fiscal year, but its governor said officials were ready to unveil fresh support measures if needed.

For the year to March 2021, the BoJ expects the economy to shrink 5.5 percent, against a 4.7 percent contraction in the July estimate. — AFP

expansion while drawing on our experience as a disciplined acquirer." Banks across Europe are struggling to cope with record low interest rates and the economic downturn sparked by the coronavirus pandemic, which has boosted pressure on them to boost liquidity and capital ratios by selling assets or through tie-ups. In September, Spain's Caixabank and rival Bankia approved their merger into the country's biggest domestic lender in a move which will transform the landscape of Spanish banking.

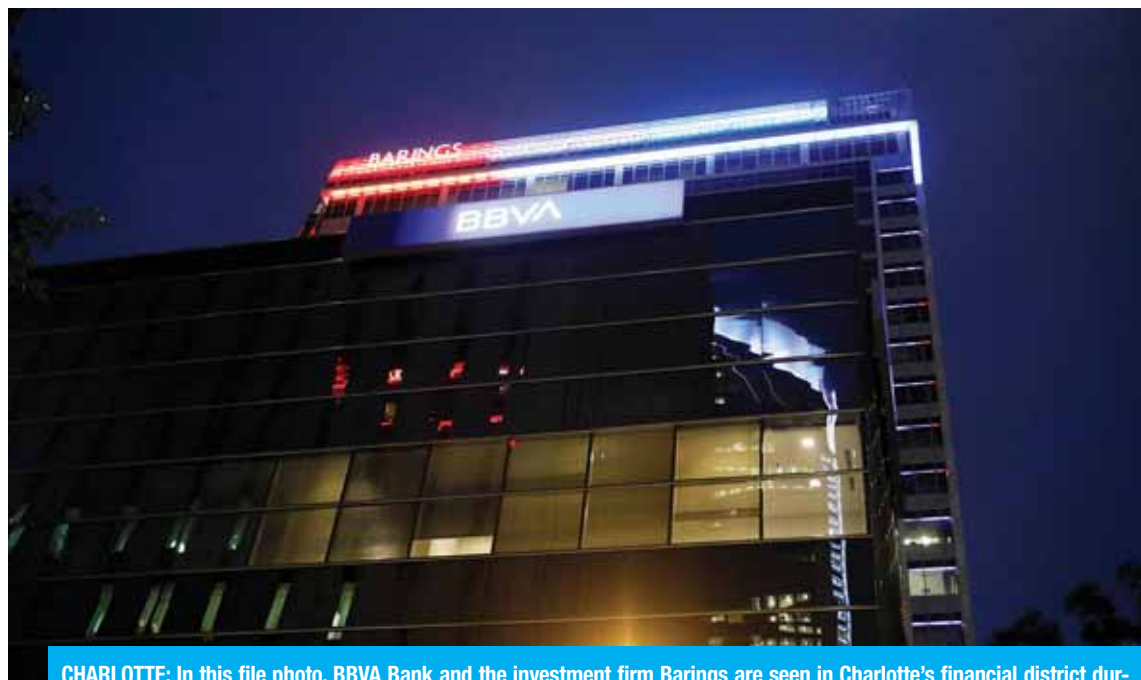
BBVA posted a net loss of 15 million euros during the first nine months of 2020, due mainly to a writedown for its US business and higher provisions against the potential fallout from the coronavirus pandemic, although it has shown signs of improvement in the third quarter. The bank warned last month that due to "worsening macroeconomic prospects" because of the pandemic, it would book asset depreciation-led writeoffs for the first nine months of 2020 worth 5.0 billion euros.

### BBVA shares jump

The deal will not include BBVA's broker dealer and branch in New York, through which the Spanish lender will continue to provide corporate and investment banking services, as well as its representative office in San Francisco. The price PNC Financial Services has agreed to pay represents 19.7 times the unit's earnings last year and amounts to nearly 50 percent of BBVA's current market capitalization, according to BBVA.

Founded in 1857, BBVA employs over 100,000 people in about 30 countries. It has a strong presence in former Spanish colonies in Latin America and in Turkey. During the first nine months of this year Mexico accounted for 45 percent of its net profit, while Turkey accounted for 19 percent. Spain represented 16 percent.

BBVA posted a 2019 net profit of 3.5 billion euros, a 35 percent decline over the previous year which saw its results inflated by its subsidiary in Chile. Shares in BBVA jumped by 15.78 percent to 3.67 euros in late morning trade on the Spanish stock market on news of the deal. — AFP



**CHARLOTTE:** In this file photo, BBVA Bank and the investment firm Barings are seen in Charlotte's financial district during the week of the Republican National Convention in Charlotte, North Carolina. — AFP

## What happens now RCEP trade deal has been signed?

**HANOI:** Fifteen Asia-Pacific economies signed what could become the world's largest free trade agreement on Sunday, covering nearly a third of the global population and about 30 percent of its global gross domestic product. The Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership (RCEP) will progressively lower tariffs and aims to counter protectionism, boost investment and allow freer movement of goods within the region.

### Who has signed?

RCEP includes China, Japan, South Korea, Australia, New Zealand and the 10 members of the Association of South East Asian Nations (ASEAN): Brunei, Vietnam, Laos, Cambodia, Thailand, Myanmar, Malaysia, Singapore, Indonesia and the Philippines.

India was involved in early discussions but opted out last year over concerns related to cheap Chinese imports. Member states have said there is still room for India to join RCEP, however. Anyone can join RCEP 18 months after it comes into force but India, as one of the original negotiating partners, can join at any time once the deal comes into effect.

### What happens next?

RCEP was signed at the end of a four-day ASEAN summit in Hanoi on Sunday and must now be ratified before coming into effect, a process that will take months to start and years to complete. The 510-page, twenty-chapter agreement was not made public before Sunday's ceremony because "a number of parties would not consent to the release of the text prior to signature", New Zealand's foreign ministry said in a statement.

According to copies of the agreement uploaded to the foreign ministry websites of RCEP member states on Sunday, the deal must be ratified by at least six ASEAN countries and three non-ASEAN signatory countries before it can come into effect.

### East Asian rivalry

Notably, RCEP marks the first time China, Japan and South Korea have been brought together under a single trade agreement – a process that has been otherwise marred by historical and diplomatic disputes. Last year, at the height of a trade dispute between Japan and South Korea, which had its roots in a dispute stemming from Japan's wartime colonization of the Korean peninsula, South Korean officials said Japanese trade restrictions violated the "spirit" of the RCEP. "Japan may find significant benefits (with RCEP), as it now has preferential access to South Korea and China, which it did not have," said Deborah Elms of the Singapore-based Asian Trade Centre.

### When will it kick in?

RCEP provides some flexibility for less-developed members to implement the practical and legislative changes it requires. Cambodia and Laos, for example, have three to five years to upgrade customs procedures. Specifically which areas are open to tariff reductions under RCEP is complex and changes from country to country. Some states have listed what RCEP includes, others have listed what it does not.

For countries which already have free trade agreements with each other, an added benefit of RCEP is that it creates a common set of rules of origin, which will facilitate easier movement of goods between the 15 members.

### How does RCEP compare with CPTPP?

The idea of RCEP, hatched in 2012, was seen as a way for China, the region's biggest importer and exporter, to counter growing US influence in the Asia-Pacific. It gained momentum when Trump withdrew the United States from the Trans-Pacific Partnership (TPP) in 2017.

The TPP has since been renamed the Comprehensive and Progressive Agreement for Trans-Pacific Partnership (CPTPP) and it includes seven RCEP members, but not the United States. RCEP focuses heavily on cutting tariffs and increasing market access but is seen as less comprehensive than the CPTPP.

It also requires fewer political or economic concessions and has less emphasis on labor rights, environmental and intellectual property protections and dispute resolution mechanisms.

RCEP's market size is nearly five times greater than that of the CPTPP, with almost double its annual trade value and combined gross domestic product. "For an agreement signed with countries that did not volunteer to participate and with such incredibly diverse membership, the quality of RCEP actually exceeds expectations," said Elms at the Asian Trade Centre. "It will deliver significant economic benefits to many firms." — Reuters



## Business

# Growing fear: Anxiety mounts over Vietnam's food staples

## Country's urban consumers willing to pay the extra for 'safe food'

**HANOI:** Vietnam's fragrant noodle soups and fresh spring rolls have won fans across the globe, but mounting food safety scandals on the country's streets are sparking a rising tide of anxiety among millennials about what they eat. Tran Huong Lan, a 32-year-old accountant, spent two nights in hospital the last time she ate "bun cha", Hanoi's signature noodles gobbled up by former US President Barack Obama and late celebrity chef Anthony Bourdain on a visit four years ago.

"About two hours after lunch I started feeling unwell. I went home and I started vomiting," she said. Rushed to hospital by her husband, doctors told her there was only one explanation: food poisoning. Lan didn't eat out for a month after her scare, and frequent high-profile food safety scandals have fed others' fears.

In July, 14 people were taken to hospital in a severe condition after being poisoned by a vegan pate. Many experienced droopy eyelids and paralyzed respiratory muscles. As well as anxiety over hygiene standards, there is growing unease about high pesticide use for vegetables and herbs thrown in typical street food dishes such as fresh shrimp rolls and bun bo, dried noodles with beef.

Some 70 percent of 16 to 30-year-olds said food safety was their biggest concern-ranking the same as job security-when polled by the British Council in Vietnam this year. Truong Quoc Tung, director of the Vietnam Plant Protection Association, recently said the problem was approaching "crisis proportions".

"Banned pesticides are being used, the environment is polluted and agricultural products are being sent back after being shipped abroad," he told state media. Problems with food safety cost Vietnam around \$740 million per year in productivity, the World Bank says.

### 'Safe' food

But across the country, from lush countryside fields to tiny urban rooftop gardens, Vietnamese



**HO CHI MINH CITY:** A street food vendor selling spring rolls and grilled pork in Ho Chi Minh city, Vietnam's fragrant noodle soups and fresh spring rolls have won fans across the globe, but mounting food safety scandals on the country's streets are sparking a rising tide of anxiety among millennials about what they eat. — AFP

are doing what they can to ensure they eat safely. Ngo Xuan Quyet, 26, used to sell pesticides for a living before switching to "safe" farming. With the help of Rikolto, an NGO that promotes safe food policies, he is trying to ensure his lettuce, spring onions and herbs-grown with a strictly controlled dose of pesticides-make it into as many bowls of bun cha as possible.

"When I worked (at the pesticide company) I really got to know about the chemical substances in them," said Quyet, who studied agriculture at university. "I learnt about the awful impact (of overuse).. and I started to want to grow safe vegetables." At the moment "we are targeting workplace canteens, school kitchens and supermarkets but my goal is also to reach pregnant women, who very much need to eat quality food", he added.

Heavy metals found in soil or water used for agriculture in Vietnam may be a significant contributor to

the incidence of some forms of cancer, the World Bank says, while heavy pesticide use may also have long-term impacts. In southern provinces, between 38 and 70 percent of farmers used pesticides higher than the recommended level in 2014 — the latest figures available-according to the ministry of agriculture. The amount of pesticide used in Vietnam has remained relatively stable since then, it says.

A ban on the import of herbicides containing glyphosate, classified as "probably carcinogenic" by the World Health Organization (WHO), will come into force next year but it is unclear how rigorously it will be enforced. Priced 10-20 percent higher than standard vegetables, Quyet's produce is on sale at two major supermarkets in Hanoi.

A growing proportion of the country's urban consumers are willing to pay the extra, according to the World Bank-while some are largely turning their backs on traditional street food stalls.—AFP

## China's consumer spending picks up in October

**BEIJING:** China's retail sales continued a general recovery in October, official data showed yesterday, on the back of a national holiday and policies aimed at boosting spending.

Although China has largely brought the coronavirus under control, spending has been slower to recover as the world still grapples with the impact of the pandemic. Retail sales in the world's second-largest economy rose 4.3 percent on-year last month, Beijing's National Bureau of Statistics (NBS) said yesterday. At a press briefing, spokesman Fu Linghui said the pandemic "has dealt a second blow to countries" including the United States and those in Europe, and that global recovery had "further stalled" as a result.

"The domestic economy is still in recovery, with multiple challenges to be conquered before a full recovery," Fu added. While the retail figure is lower than the five percent growth expected by analysts polled by Bloomberg, it still continued an upward trend as spenders gradually began to open their wallets again, particularly around the week-long national holiday in October. Catering sector revenue growth turned positive for the first time this year, the NBS said.—AFP



**A worker loading packages on a train at Nanchang Railway Station in China's central Jiangxi province during the annual Singles' Day shopping festival. — AFP**

tainability and Finland's climate policy goals."

But campaigners are worried that expanding mining in Finland will destroy sensitive ecosystems.

"You simply cannot produce these minerals in an environmentally friendly way," campaigner Antti Lankinen told AFP, standing in front of a towering pile of waste rock on the perimeter of the Terrafame site in Sotkamo, central Finland. Lankinen has worked with the Finnish Association of Nature Conservation to try and force Terrafame to change how it stores the waste rock, which it argues can cause acid runoff into the adjacent landscape if exposed to rainwater.

The mine's previous owners, Talvivaara, were prosecuted after an ecological catastrophe in 2012 when uranium and other toxic metals leaked into local waterways. However Joni Lukkaroinen, CEO of new owner Terrafame, said there have been no environmental issues since his firm took over the mine five years ago. "We do have environmental impacts, but those impacts are in line with our permits," Lukkaroinen said. Elsewhere in Finland, campaigns have sprung up against new extraction in Lapland and in the Saimaa lake district, a tourism hotspot known for its unique wildlife.

"Lake Saimaa is Europe's fourth largest freshwater system and is not a suitable area," campaigner Miisa Mink told AFP, adding that four new prospecting permits have been granted in the area since May. "If we're not careful, sure we'll have electric cars but we won't have fresh water."—AFP



**SEOUL:** A file photo shows Korean Air planes parked on the tarmac at Gimpo domestic airport in Seoul. Korean Air, South Korea's top airline, said yesterday it will buy out its smaller troubled rival Asiana Airlines in a \$1.6-billion deal that will merge the country's two biggest carriers. — AFP

## Korean Air to take over troubled Asiana for \$1.6bn

**SEOUL:** South Korean flag carrier Korean Air said yesterday it will buy out its smaller, troubled rival Asiana Airlines in a \$1.6 billion deal as it looks to consolidate with the global aviation sector devastated by the coronavirus pandemic. The deal combining South Korea's two biggest airlines comes as carriers around the world struggle with low demand, hemorrhaging cash and grounding planes to survive. "The main reason behind Korean Air's decision to acquire Asiana Airlines at this time is to stabilize the Korean aviation industry, which is suffering from the Covid-19 pandemic," Korean Air said in a statement.

"Once Korean Air completes its acquisition of Asiana Airlines, the airline is expected to be ranked as one of the top 10 airlines in the world," Korean Air said it would pay 1.8 trillion won (\$1.6 billion) for Asiana, using cash from a 2.5 trillion won rights issue early next year. The deal also includes Asiana's affiliates, including low-cost carriers Air Seoul and Air Busan.

"Considering that Korean Air's financial status

could also be endangered if the Covid-19 situation is prolonged, it is inevitable to restructure the domestic aviation market to enhance its competitiveness," Korean Air added. Asiana has long been plagued by financial problems, prompting parent company Kumho Industrial to put its 31 percent stake up for sale last year as it came under pressure from its creditors. A previous deal for South Korean builder HDC Hyundai Developer to buy Asiana collapsed in September as the pandemic tore through the aviation industry.

Asiana reported operating losses of 268 billion won in the first six months of this year-with its debts soaring to 11.5 trillion won. But Korean Air and its parent firm Hanjin Group expect Asiana's acquisition to boost their competitiveness in the global market.

"In general, countries with a population less than 100 million have a single full-service carrier," they said in a statement. "However, Korea has two full-service carriers, which gives it a competitive disadvantage compared to countries like Germany, France and Singapore with a single major airline."

The Asiana deal will "give the airline the competitiveness to compete with global mega airlines". South Korea's Yonhap news agency reported that the country's transport ministry and Asiana's creditors, including state-run Korea Development Bank, saw the deal as "inevitable" to prevent greater losses during the pandemic.—AFP

the fast-growing sector, Finland is one of the most active member states vying for a share of the lucrative battery business, but competition between EU countries is fierce.

### Environmental minefield

Finland's government has promised 300 million euros (\$353 million) in stimulus for battery industry this year, and seven new excavation sites are among the commercial projects now underway to try and create a "battery cluster". Mika Nykanen, charged with drawing up the government's "battery strategy", said the Nordic country's approach "will be strongly grounded in sus-



**The new structure where the first stage of battery production will take place is pictured at the Terrafame extraction nickel and cobalt mine operation in Sotkamo, Finland. — AFP**

## Finland's battery plans spark environmental fears

**SOTKAMO, Finland:** Lines of trucks carrying piles of rock crisscross Finland's rugged Terrafame mine, which sits 300km (186 miles) below the Arctic Circle and is Europe's largest source of nickel for electric car batteries. At the immense, 60 square kilometer site, the extracted stone is crushed, heaped into vast mounds and fed with oxygen and water through red hoses, allowing the nickel, along with some cobalt, to gradually leach out.

"Even today more than 50 percent of our turnover is coming from the electric vehicle value chain," Terrafame CEO Joni Lukkaroinen told AFP. Finland is the only EU country whose bedrock is known to contain all the major battery minerals-including cobalt and lithium-and the Nordic nation is drawing up plans to exploit these resources in order to become a major industry player.

Yet the prospect of increasing mining is controversial in sparsely populated Finland, whose vast forests, diverse wildlife and pristine lakes are prized national assets. As Europe looks to counter Asia's dominance in

### News in brief

#### Egypt development funding

**CAIRO:** Egypt has agreed 132.8 million euros in funding from Germany for 11 development projects in 2021, its ministry of international cooperation said yesterday. The projects span across different fields including irrigation, enabling the private sector and electronic governance, the statement said. — Reuters

#### Walmart to sell Japan subsidiary

**TOKYO:** Retail giant Walmart will sell 85 percent of its Japanese subsidiary Seiyu to investment firm KKR and e-commerce group Rakuten, the pair announced yesterday. The deal, which values Seiyu at 172.5 billion yen (\$1.6 billion), is expected to close in the first quarter of next year, with New York-based KKR acquiring 65 percent of the supermarket chain. Japan's Rakuten-which already set up an online grocery delivery service with Seiyu in 2018 — will buy 20 percent and set up a new subsidiary called Rakuten DX Solution focused on internet sales. — AFP

#### German economy 'stagnating'

**FRANKFURT:** The German economy is likely stagnating or contracting as measures taken at home and abroad to contain the second wave of the coronavirus pandemic hit leisure activities as well as exports, the Bundesbank said yesterday. With schools open and restrictions mainly affecting the catering and hospitality sectors, Germany has taken a softer approach than some of its neighbors but was still bound to suffer from weaker demand from abroad. "Overall economic performance could stagnate or even decline after very vigorous growth in the summer," the Bundesbank said in its monthly report. — Reuters

#### Argentina's IMF talks hit

**BUENOS AIRES:** Economy Minister Martin Guzman and other Argentine officials were placed in preventive isolation Sunday after a member of a visiting IMF mission tested positive for Covid-19, the government said. The International Monetary Fund team has been in Buenos Aires since Tuesday for talks on a new rescue package for the crisis-ravaged South American country. "All of those who had meetings with the IMF team are isolated and will be tested according to established protocols," the government said in a statement, adding that none of the Argentine officials had shown symptoms of the disease. — AFP

## India to shore up manufacturing, jobs after warning

**MUMBAI:** India's government has announced new measures to support the manufacturing sector and create jobs after the central bank said the country was set to enter a recession with estimates of another quarterly contraction. India-Asia's third-largest economy and home to 1.3 billion people-has seen its economy badly hit by the coronavirus pandemic, with growth shrinking by a record 23.9 percent between April and June. "India has entered a technical recession in the first half of 2020-21 for the first time in its history," the Reserve Bank of India said. The economy was estimated to contract by 8.6 percent in the quarter ending September, resulting in a "technical recession" which occurs with two consecutive quarters of negative growth, the RBI said in its report released late Wednesday.

The International Monetary Fund said last month that India's economy would contract by 10.3 percent for the year. But Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman said Thursday the economy was now recovering strongly, pointing to global ratings agency Moody's revision of India's calendar year contraction to -8.9 per cent from its previous -9.6 percent estimate. "(It is) indicative of corrections happening in a positive direction," she told reporters in New Delhi.

The Reserve Bank also added in that the "contraction is ebbing with gradual normalization in activities and expected to be short-lived". The official GDP figures for July-September will be published on November 27.

Even before Prime Minister Narendra Modi announced a strict lockdown in late March, India's economy was already sluggish-weighted down by record unemployment and a flurry of bad loans that made banks reluctant to lend. Sitharaman announced some \$27 billion in fresh measures to support the manufacturing sector and create jobs. They include incentives to produce goods and services locally, as well as benefits for foreign firms that invest in Indian firms.

They come on top of the \$266 billion package announced by Prime Minister Narendra Modi in May to revive the stuttering economy. The RBI economists however warned that households were still facing financial stress. —AFP



## Business

# Ooredoo Kuwait, IOM collaborate to support community initiatives

## Collaboration allows Nojoom members to donate their points to IOM



A group photo of Ooredoo and IOM representatives



Mijbil Al-Ayoub and Mazen Abu Al-Hassan during the signing ceremony

**KUWAIT:** Ooredoo Telecom, the first to introduce innovative digital services in Kuwait, collaborated with the International Organization for Migration (IOM), a related organization of the United Nations (UN), that plays a leading role in the field of migration governance globally. The collaboration allows Nojoom members who are also Ooredoo customers to donate their points to IOM on MyOoredoo Application. The signing ceremony took place on 15th of November 2020 in Ooredoo Tower, with the attendance of Abdulaziz Al-Babtian, Chief Executive Officer, and Mijbil Alayoub, Senior Director, Corporate Communications, Ooredoo Kuwait, Mazen AboulHosn, Chief of Mission, and Dana Al-Othman, External Relations and Project Assistant of IOM Kuwait.

Nojoom is Ooredoo's loyalty program and the

biggest and only one of its kind in Kuwait by a telecom operator with free enrolment for all Ooredoo customers. Customers can earn points based on their Ooredoo spending to benefit from an attractive range of rewards, services and experiences. Customers can then redeem their points for cash vouchers from Ooredoo's network of partners such as Kuwait Finance House, eureka, and west elm, exchange their points to miles with leading airline companies such as: Kuwait Airways and Qatar Airways, select specific Ooredoo services and top-ups and transfer their points to friends or charity donations. The newest redemption option is Nojoom Deals, offering the chance to unlock unique merchant discounts and deals.

Ooredoo Kuwait has a long history of entrepreneurial activities that pay back to society and con-

tribute to human development. With this in mind, Ooredoo Kuwait recognizes the positive contribution of migrants in inclusive growth and sustainable development. Thus, Nojoom members will be able to transfer their points to IOM and at the end of each month, and Ooredoo-Nojoom will transfer cash value in KD to the organization with the purpose of supporting community initiatives that will benefit vulnerable foreign workers communities in Kuwait.

"We, at Ooredoo draw a bright line in every single humanitarian initiative we conduct, to maintain awareness of the importance of supporting communities, touching people's lives and enhancing the public wellbeing," said Mijbil Alayoub, Senior Director, Corporate Communications - Ooredoo Kuwait.

"Through our collaboration with the

International Organization for Migration, we create a coherent framework and expand our contribution to the local community, supporting the notion of equality, human rights, and freedom of all migrants regardless of their migratory status," Alayoub added.

"IOM as an intergovernmental organization works closely with entities from different fields to tackle migration issues at a global, regional, and local levels. In Kuwait, we work with the government on technical subjects and with other partners to promote harmony between vulnerable foreign workers and the local community by organizing events and activities that inform, transform and promote inclusion, attracting a wide range of audiences," said Mazen AboulHosn, Chief of Mission-IOM Kuwait.

## Gulf Bank announces winners of Al-Danah weekly draw

**KUWAIT:** Gulf Bank held its weekly Al-Danah draw on 15th November 2020 announcing the names of the winners for the week of 8 - 12 November 2020. The weekly draw consists of five winners who receive KD 1,000 each, every week.

### The winners this week are:

Hamdeya Jasem Mohammed  
Mohammad Aref Mohammad Alkhayat  
Mshari Khair Alah Majli Khalef  
Hanani Ali Suwayed Alazmi  
Turki Naser Madhi Al-Hajri

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

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

Gulf Bank's Al-Danah account is open to Kuwaiti and non-Kuwaiti residents of Kuwait. Customers require a minimum of KD 200 to open an account and the same amount should be maintained for customers to be eligible for the upcoming Al-Danah draws. If the customer's account balance falls below KD 200 at any given time, a KD 2 fee will be charged to their account monthly until the minimum balance is met. Customers who open an account and/or deposit more will enter the weekly draw within two days. To take part in the Al-Danah 2020 quarterly and yearly draws, customers must meet the required hold period for each draw.

## KIB opens newest digitally-advanced branch in 89 Mall

**KUWAIT:** As part of its highly-focused branch restructuring plans and efforts to reach the largest number of customers possible, Kuwait International Bank (KIB) announced the inauguration of its newest branch in 89 Mall in Egaila. The new branch boasts advanced technical facilities, in line with the Bank's digital transformation strategy which seeks to establish KIB as an innovation-driven, digital-first bank.

"KIB constantly strives to take its customer experience to the next level and remain easily accessible to all its customers, offering them the easiest, most convenient way to bank possible," said Musab Al-Shalan, Deputy General Manager of KIB's Retail Banking Department. "This latest branch in 89 Mall joins our recently opened branch in eMall as part of our new branch development plans, which includes restructuring existing branches, opening new branches in strategic locations, and implementing a unique and technologically advanced branch design concept."

Al-Shalan noted that the 89 Mall branch is characterized by its modernized and innovative ideas for engaging with customers, as it has been equipped with advanced concepts and unique designs that create a truly next-level customer journey. Optimized for comfort and convenience at every touchpoint



Musab Al-Shalan

while birthing a conceptual vision that aims to change the perception of corporate banking the instant customer enter the branch.

The branch architectural design itself was carefully thought of and carefully developed: avoiding the sterile, corporate feel that is usually associated with banks in favor of creating a contemporary, open, communal space. The concept seamlessly fuses the high-tech elements of a digital banking experience with a comfortable and homely environment inspired by traditional elements of the Kuwaiti culture. The overall design layout is inspired by the Liwan in the old Kuwaiti houses, making use of the terrazzo flooring - a material commonly used in Kuwaiti houses since the 1950s.

With a strategic focus on elevating both aesthetic and function, the branch has been equipped with several bespoke



elements to elevate the customer experience. From a unique and inviting waiting area featuring a full-sized natural tree (a symbol of life and continued growth) and a self-serving coffee station, to the plethora of digital devices and interactive screens made available throughout the branch to cater to the digitally-sophisticated customer of today - every element of the branch design serves to deliver the best and most digitally-advanced banking experience possible.

The branch introduces the concept of casual consultation points, via a 'device desk', to enable easy access of general information and quick assistance through allocated tablets and laptops. On the other hand, private consultations with staff will take place within bespoke rooms for a more 'one on one' feel.

Beyond just the branches, KIB's

## Lulu gets ready for Super Friday promotion

**KUWAIT:** Starting 23rd November, leading retailer Lulu will launch "Super Friday" promotion offering massive discounts on electronics, mobile phones, fashion, and more key products from grocery and fresh food categories, which coincides with the Black Friday shopping season across the globe.

Mujeeb Rehman, Director - Buying of LuLu Group, shared: "Super Friday is our biggest promotion yet and our customers can expect up to 70 percent OFF on a wide range of products, not just featuring gadgets and fashion but grocery essentials as well. Apart from our in-store offers, we are launching exclusive online discounts and promo codes

for hourly offers alongside with free delivery. We have also partnered with banks and e-payment platforms for cashbacks and vouchers for additional discounts."

In anticipation of high demand, LuLu has added more vehicles and beefed up its global contact center with a significant increase in manpower to better reach and serve its valuable customers. Running till 5th December, offers will be available all of our 10 stores in the country and its online shopping portal [www.luluhypermarket.com](http://www.luluhypermarket.com). Apart from its high-quality product range, LuLu has ensured safe shopping by implementing health and hygiene measures, from contactless payments to safety measures among its employees, and regular sanitization of warehouse and transport facilities.

Lulu hypermarket, where the world comes to shop-is the top retailer in the Middle East and one of the most suc-



cessful businesses worldwide. Serving more than 1,600,000 shopping patrons every day, it is the fastest growing retail chain across 10 countries that include the GCC, India, Egypt, Indonesia, and

Malaysia. Founded in the early nineties, it has successfully expanded to different parts of the world and currently operates more than 196 stores with a staff force of more than 55,000.

## CBK bonds and related Tawarruq

**KUWAIT:** The Central Bank of Kuwait (CBK) announced the most recent issues of CBK bonds and related Tawarruq at a total value of KD 240 million for 6 months with a rate of return 1.250 percent.

## Biden turns focus to US economy amid Trump challenges

**WILMINGTON/WASHINGTON:** President-elect Joe Biden on Monday will focus on reviving a pandemic-battered US economy as he prepares to take office, while outgoing President Donald Trump has promised more lawsuits of the type that so far have failed to alter his election defeat. With coronavirus

cases surging, Biden will receive a briefing and give a speech in his home state of Delaware on rebuilding an economy that has suffered millions of job losses as the pandemic has killed more than 245,000 Americans. Biden's scientific advisers will meet this week with pharmaceutical companies developing vaccines to prevent COVID-19, a top aide to the president-elect said, in preparation for the logistical challenges of widespread vaccination after the Democrat takes office on Jan. 20.

Trump, a Republican, briefly appeared to acknowledge defeat on Sunday only to backtrack,

saying on Twitter that he concedes "nothing" and repeating his unfounded accusations of voter fraud.

He later promised on Twitter to file "big cases showing the unconstitutionality of the 2020 Election," even though he has made no headway with his legal challenges in multiple states so far. Election officials from both parties have said there is no evidence of major irregularities. Federal election security officials have derided "unfounded claims" and expressed "utmost confidence" in the integrity of the elections, according to a statement last week by the lead US cybersecurity agency. —Reuters



# CLINIC PAGE



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Palestinians walk, jog and ride their bicycles on the Mediterranean beachfront promenade at dawn amid the COVID-19 pandemic, in Gaza City. — AFP photos



## GAZANS TAKE COASTAL WALKS TO ESCAPE 'DOUBLE CONFINEMENT'

At sunrise in Gaza, a coastal path begins to fill up with pedestrians as growing numbers of Palestinians have taken up walking to relieve the stress of being trapped inside the Israel-blockaded enclave. Life in Gaza, controlled by the Islamist group Hamas since 2007, was mentally taxing even before the novel coronavirus outbreak brought additional hardship, including nightly curfews and tight movement restrictions. "There's a lot of mental pressure in Gaza. We suffer from it," said 40-year-old Walid Al-Louh, wearing a New York Yankees cap. "People come out to walk along the seashore, just to let off steam."

As the pandemic has dragged on larger crowds of men in tracksuits and women, their running shoes just barely visible beneath their long robes, stroll or stride briskly along Gaza's Mediterranean coastline. "I used to walk before coronavirus," Louh told AFP. "There were maybe dozens of people walking then, but now its hundreds and hundreds." One of the new devotees is Hanadi Al-Akawy, 32, who said she walks five kilometers (three miles) a day with her husband "to get rid of psychological pressure".

### 'Window of freedom'

Gaza's densely-packed population of two million was, in the early phase of the pandemic, seen as uniquely protected given the movement restrictions already in place. The coastal strip has only two entry and exit points, the Erez crossing to Israel and the Rafah crossing to Egypt. The flow of people through Erez is tightly controlled by Israel, which has fought three wars with Hamas since 2008 and maintains a crippling blockade it says is necessary to contain a hostile Islamist group. As the virus began to spread globally, both crossings were almost completely closed, and Hamas imposed

strict quarantine measures for the small numbers of people allowed in and out.

Gaza's health infrastructure is weak, partly due to the blockade, so when the virus began to spread within the enclave, Hamas imposed draconian measures to contain it. Those included nightly curfews and a mandatory 5:00 pm closing hour for businesses. Gazans began to lament their "double confinement," refer-

since the seaside is our only window of freedom."

### 'Walking is life'

Zaqout said Hamas had not done enough to mitigate mental health issues in the strip. According to a 2017 study published by the PLOS ONE scientific journal, the Palestinian Territories had the highest rates of depression compared to



ring to coronavirus restrictions and the blockade. Gaza has so far recorded 10,985 Covid-19 cases, including 48 deaths, and Sunday's infection number was 490, the highest yet for a single day. However, fears that a raging pandemic would devastate the enclave's vulnerable and impoverished population have not materialized.

But, said psychiatrist Samir Zaqout, the additional stress brought by the pandemic was "too much" for a population that already felt imprisoned. The Gaza-based expert said that watching people take their coastline jaunts reminded him of prison inmates relishing their daily walk in the exercise yard, before being sent back to their cells. "People do what they can to let out their emotions," Zaqout told AFP. "Walking is a part of that, especially

a group of 20 countries surveyed, from Morocco to Afghanistan. A 2020 poll from the British charity Islamic Relief said that 80 percent of 2,000 workers surveyed in Gaza reported having "mental problems" caused by the pandemic, which reduced their already limited income.

On Gaza's corniche, Marwan al-Assar told AFP he had been jogging along the coast for years, but until recently had been alone. "Now people are copying me," he said. "The culture is growing." With a body-builder's frame visible under his yellow rain coat, he described himself as a "hero" for encouraging others to join him. "It's good for the spirit!" he said, resuming his stride. "Walking is life." — AFP

## Aussie 91-year-old survives paragliding crash

A 91-year-old Australian man has survived a paragliding crash, walking away with only minor injuries after plunging into the ocean near Sydney's northern beaches. The elderly paraglider was helped out of the water by locals after he went down near Warriewood around 6:00 pm Sunday, police said. Emergency services were called to a cliff face near the site, where paramedics assessed the man had escaped with just cuts and bruises. Local media footage showed the daredevil, who has not been named, walking across rocks, his left leg bandaged, with assistance from rescuers. Police said the glider's chute was retrieved from the water. The man was taken to Sydney's Royal North Shore Hospital for treatment. — AFP

## Pigeon sells for record €1.6m to Chinese fancier

An unidentified Chinese buyer on Sunday paid a world record 1.6 million euros (\$1.9 million) for a female homing pigeon called New Kim, online auctioneers Pigeon Paradise (PIPA) said. The sale beat the 1.25 million euros paid for male pigeon Armando last year, according to PIPA. New Kim, a well-bred two-ear-old from a renowned Antwerp loft, was put up for auction at just 200 euros. "I believe it's a world record, there has never been an officially documented sale at such a price," PIPA chairman Nikolaas Gyselbrecht told AFP. "I didn't think we could reach that amount." The buyer, who was not named, "will probably want to breed her", he added.

New Kim won the 2018 crown as "Ace Pigeon Grand National Middle Distance" in competitions held at Chateauroux and Argenton-sur-Creuse in France. Top European birds have won global fame in recent years and particularly in China where pigeon rac-

ing can generate huge winnings. Wealthy buyers from the Gulf and Asia have forced up prices for champion birds for their instinctive ability to fly as many as hundreds of kilometers (miles) and still find their way back home. Pigeon fancying is rooted in Belgian and Dutch life with the tradition spreading over to northern France. The sport had been considered in decline until auctions started showing serious prices for potential champions and proven winners. Gyselbrecht said Belgium alone counts 20,000 breeders for racing birds destined to take part in major competitions. New Kim was trained by father and son Gaston and Kurt Van De Wouwer at their world-class loft in Berlaar, near Antwerp. They sold their entire "collection" of pigeons on Sunday. — AFP



This handout picture shows a white shoe that once belonged to Queen Marie-Antoinette, made of silk and goatskin, that will be auctioned in Versailles. — AFP

## Marie-Antoinette's silk slipper fetches \$50,000

A white shoe made of silk and goat leather that belonged to Marie-Antoinette, France's last queen before the 1789 revolution, sold for 43,750 euros (\$51,780) on Sunday, the auctioneers said. The 22.5 centimetre-long (8.8-inch), heeled shoe, roughly equivalent to a European size 36, is adorned with four ribbons and in good condition, apart from slight wear of the silk, the Osenat auction house said. With international collectors showing strong interest, Osenat said the price quickly rose from the reserve of 8,000 to 10,000 euros (\$9,450 to \$11,800) and was snapped up by an unidentified buyer.

The sale took place in Versailles, the town west of Paris that was once home to France's royal court and where from her arrival at the age of 15 Marie-Antoinette enjoyed a lavish lifestyle. In the turmoil of the French Revolution the shoe ended up in the hands of Marie-Emilie Leschevin, a close friend of the

queen's head chambermaid. Her family held on to it for generations before it came to auction 227 years after her death. Marie-Antoinette-born an Austrian archduchess was the wife of Louis XVI. "Let them eat cake," she is often said to have responded when told that peasants were starving because there was no bread.

The royal couple was executed by guillotine during the Terror in 1793 but France continues to be fascinated by Marie-Antoinette. Last year an exhibition at the Conciergerie, the former Paris prison where she was incarcerated before execution, retraced changes in the representation of the country's last queen through paintings, mangas, films and even Barbie dolls. The Versailles palace, including the grand Hall of Mirrors, and its grounds remain a major tourist attraction. — AFP



## Lifestyle | Features



Employees prepare narguilehs (water pipes) for customers at a coffee shop in Iraq's central holy city of Karbala. — AFP photos



Iraqi men smoke narguileh (water pipe) at a coffee shop in Iraq's central holy city of Karbala.



A carpenter shaves a piece of wood to make a narguileh (water pipe) at his workshop.

# HOLY SMOKE: WATERPIPES KEEP BUBBLING IN IRAQI SHRINE CITY

Iraq's Karbala is known as a religious pilgrimage site, visited by millions of worshippers, but shisha-smokers revere it for a different reason: its signature wooden waterpipes. About 120 kilometers (75 miles) south of Iraq's capital, within walking distance of Karbala's two Shiite shrines, avid smokers drag puffs of fruit-flavored tobacco from their tall pipes. The business of strictly gender-

at Ali's cafe are carved from local white willow wood. The hollow upper stems of these waterpipes or nargilehs are called bakkar-and Ali maintains the wood enhances the flavor of the tobacco by keeping the smoke cool, unlike their metal rivals. "If your tobacco tastes like apple or mint, you can smell it," he told AFP. "With the others, you only have smoke."

comes to me. It turns out beautiful or how the customer wants it." The manual labor involved in shaping the thick wood into a polished product is intensive, but makes for a unique product. He averages about 20 bakkars a day.

A few streets away is Mohamed Jassim, whose father and grandfather practiced the same trade, and who is already training his teenage son how to carve. Smokers gravitate towards his craftsmanship because of a sense of history and hard work, but also because the wood makes smoking more refreshing for people living in Iraq's scorchingly hot south. "In Baghdad and further north, it's a bit cooler, so they can use metal," he explained to AFP.

## 'Creative'

In his workshop, Jassim keeps an old bakkar that his grandfather carved in the 1950s-and he still uses the same family signature in his modern works. One of his designs is nicknamed "Islamic," because he digs small domes resembling mosques into the wood. "If you love your job, you become creative at it," he said. Woodworkers are glad to have survived the three-month closure of shisha cafes across Iraq earlier this year, part of efforts to stem the spread of Covid-19. Orders come from both locally and beyond. All of the bakkars at Ali's cafe are from Jassim, who has also shipped his work to various local provinces, and even to Lebanon and as far away as Germany. Jassim does not fear his craft withering away anytime soon. "As long as there's tobacco, we're always going to be just fine," he said. — AFP



A carpenter shaves a piece of wood to make a narguileh (water pipe) at his workshop in Iraq's central holy city of Karbala.



A carpenter shaves a piece of wood to make a narguileh (water pipe) at his workshop.

separated cafes has carried on, despite the heavy health risks associated with smoking and a full-blown pandemic that has brought an average of 4,000 new coronavirus cases a day to Iraq. Cafe owner Hassan Ali is serving endless streams of sweet tea-a must in any Iraqi establishment-to customers sipping on locally-made waterpipes.

When they drag on the hand-held hose, the glass base full of water begins to bubble, cooling the smoke that passes through a half-meter pipe from a clay head, where sticky flavored tobacco is laid out. Normally made of iron or copper and imported, the pipes

## A blank slate'

One of the last woodworkers keeping the craft alive in Karbala is Mohamed Baqer, a moustached, 56-year-old who has spent 30 years of his life as a carpenter. "The designs that come out while I'm carving are all from my head," Baqer told AFP with a beaming smile, surrounded by mounds of sawdust in his sweltering workshop. "I carve what I feel like really." He puffs away on a cigarette as he whittles down the light wood, which comes from forests by the Euphrates River. "Before I put the wood in the turning machine, I'm a blank slate," said Baqer. "As soon as it starts turning, it



Iraqi men smoke narguileh (water pipe) at a coffee shop.

## Ancient statue of Hermes dug up in Athens

The head of an ancient statue of the Greek god Hermes has been unearthed during excavations for sewage system improvements in central Athens, the ministry of culture said Sunday. The "original artwork dating late 4th century BC or early 3rd century BC" is in good condition, a statement said. The marble head, found just 1.3 metres (four feet) under the pavement on the busy Aioulou street on Friday, "depicts the god in a mature age and is obviously a part of a herm", the statement added. Herms or Hermas are sculptures, usually of the head of Hermes, and sometimes a torso, which were set on a squared column erected at road crossings as signs.

According to Greek mythology, Hermes was the son of Zeus and the messenger of the gods, who also protected travellers and merchants. The ministry



This handout picture released by the Greek Culture Ministry shows the head of an ancient statue of the Greek god Hermes, in Athens. — AFP

gave no estimate of the value of the sculpture but it was immediately transported to a warehouse of the directorate of antiquities. On Saturday, Athens mayor Kostas Bakoyannis posted a photo of the Hermes head on his Facebook account. "Unique Athens", he said. — AFP

## Sory Bamba: Malian music's forgotten great

Sory Bamba, a Malian music pioneer, spends his days ensconced in the courtyard of his home in the old quarter of Mopti, a town in the center of the country on the edge of the Sahara. One of the original modernizers of Malian music, the 82-year-old infused traditional sounds with funk and jazz. He was also a dedicated talent scout. But few now remember Sory Bamba in Mali, a conflict-ridden state known to music fans for its strong guitar-playing tradition. Outside of the country, the musician is almost a complete unknown, though connoisseurs insist he belongs among the ranks of Mali's musical icons such as Ali Farka Toure or Salif Keita. "He is one of the greatest Malian musicians," says Cheick Tidiane Seck, a Malian musician himself whose blend of jazz and traditional music won him renown in the 1990s.

But Bamba "is not someone who puts himself forward," Seck says, adding that he prioritized "real music" over commercial tunes. Wearing a corduroy flatcap, and with eyes clouded by cataracts, Bamba sits in his courtyard surrounded by clucking chickens and children at play. He says he once brought a young Ali Farka Toure to play in his home-long before the singer-songwriter achieved international success-and that few recognized his talents. "Many people didn't like (his) type of rhythms," Bamba says. Toure, who died in 2016, went on to become a two-time Grammy winner and one of the African continent's most important musicians. Bamba, who never achieved the same level of success, appears to harbor no bitterness. "He was here, in this very house," he says of Toure, with a smile, before taking out his flute and spontaneously beginning to play.

## Mali's Pink Floyd

Bamba began his musical career as a child in the late 1940s when Mali was

still a French colony and a friend gifted him a flute. Later, he worked as an assistant to a trumpet player in a Mopti band-before making off with his boss's instrument and dedicating himself to music full time. In 1957 he started his first group, Kanaga de Mopti, which quickly became popular with youngsters in the town. The band found wider success after Mali's independence in 1960, through nationwide musical competitions designed to foster a sense of national identity in the vast country. Bamba, as leader of the group, also

the Niger river and the rural camps of nomads for undiscovered musical talent.

## Nothing without music

Next, Bamba pursued a solo career in Ivory Coast, and then in France, completing 33 tours. He also cut a record titled "Du Mali" in 1979. But international recognition never really came. Bamba's prospects brightened in 2010 when Universal Music offered him a record deal, after the then 72-year-old musician gave a concert in Paris. But



Malian musician Sory Bamba, 82, holds a flute in his courtyard in Mopti, central Mali. — AFP

sought and received rare permission from ethnic Dogon elders to play their traditional music-to which he added his own layers of Latin-jazz, funk and folk. Some dubbed Kanaga de Mopti "Mali's Pink Floyd".

But reggae artist Koko Dembele, 66, a former member of Kanaga de Mopti, said: "Anything that doesn't evolve is bound to disappear," says Malian. "Sory Bamba has always evolved by trying to make innovative music". Bamba recruited Dembele to his band when the latter was 18 years old, and was known to scour the floodplains of

the ensuing album, Dogon Blues, enjoyed little commercial success, and Bamba returned home to Mopti. His children now describe him as "tired", and some hope he will stop playing music. But this is out of the question for Bamba, who hums tunes with young children every time they pass him by in his courtyard. "Without music, it's all over. And there are so many things left to do," he says, resting his flute on his knees. — AFP

## FRENCH AUTHORS TO PAY FINES OF BOOKSHOPS OPEN DESPITE VIRUS CLOSURE

One of France's best-known authors, Alexandre Jardin, vowed Sunday that writers would bail out rebel bookshop owners fined for opening in defiance of a nationwide coronavirus lockdown. Literature lovers are fuming over the government's shutting of bookstores, along with all other outlets selling "non-essential" goods or services, for the second time this year. A handful of bookshops have openly flouted the shutdown, backed by writers, literary critics and tens of thousands of bookworms who argue that books are essential to well-being. Jardin, who penned bestselling romance novels "Le Zebre" and "Fanfan", has rallied in their defence.

He said Sunday that authors would pay the fines incurred by rogue booksellers. Jardin told Europe 1 radio that Didier van Cauwelaert, winner of the Prix Goncourt, France's top literary prize for his 1994 novel "Un Aller Simple", had offered to cover any penalty imposed on a bookshop in the city of Cannes, leading the revolt. "The next bookshop will be me, and the next somebody else," he said, declaring that "no state has the moral right to close bookshops". France has some of the highest book readership figures in the world, studies show, and one of the largest networks of independent bookstores. — AFP



## Sports

## Photo of the day

Red Bull Off-Road Junior Team member Blade Hildebrand drives in Poland. —Photo taken from [www.redbullcontentpool.com](http://www.redbullcontentpool.com)

## Australia cricketers to make a barefoot anti-racism gesture

**SYDNEY:** The Australian men's cricket team will form a "barefoot circle" before the upcoming series against India to demonstrate opposition to racism and celebrate Aboriginal culture, vice-captain Pat Cummins said yesterday. Cummins said the decision came after discussions within the team, which was criticised by West Indies great Michael Holding for not taking a knee during a tour of England in September.

The practice of gathering barefoot on the pitch before a series was introduced by the Australian women's team this year at the urging of all-rounder Ashleigh Gardner, who has Aboriginal heritage. Cummins said the men's team would introduce it for the India tour, which gets under way on November 27, and make it a regular pre-match ritual at the start of a series.

"We think it's really important to do our bit and we've decided to do the barefoot circle," he told reporters in a conference call. "Not only as a sport, but we as people are absolutely against racism. I think we could probably put our hands up and say we haven't done enough in the past and we want to get better, so this is one small thing we're going to introduce this summer." The act of placing a knee on the ground was made famous by former American NFL quarterback Colin Kaepernick, who first did so in 2016 to protest police brutality against Black people and other minorities.

Cummins said Australia's cricketers instead chose the barefoot circle because of its nod to Aboriginal culture. "In Australia, we think the most marginalized group is the First Nations people, the indigenous people," he said. "We think the barefoot circle is a great way to celebrate them. Some people might want to take the knee and show it (support) in different ways, we're absolutely all for that." Australia coach Justin Langer was stung by Holding's criticism and said at the time that his team wanted to send a "sustained and powerful" message against racism. —AFP

## Bach projects confidence in Tokyo Games as coronavirus cases surge

## 'Reasonable' number of fans can attend Games

## News in brief

## Indian cricketer held over gold

**MUMBAI:** Two days after winning the Indian Premier League with the Mumbai Indians, cricketer Krunal Pandya was stopped by airport customs carrying gold and luxury watches, media reports said. The 29-year-old all-rounder was stopped at Mumbai airport late Thursday as he returned from Dubai where the IPL was played, the Press Trust of India news agency and other media reported. Pandya, who is often photographed wearing expensive jewellery, was carrying gold watches worth more than \$115,000, which exceeded his customs limit. The player, brother of fellow India international Hardik Pandya, was held for several hours but was freed after telling investigators he was unaware of the rules and would pay any penalties, the reports said. Neither the Directorate of Revenue Intelligence nor Pandya commented on the case. India is the world's second biggest consumer of gold and men can only bring in \$670 worth of gold duty-free, while the allowance for women is twice as much. —AFP

## Liverpool goalkeeping great dies

**LONDON:** Kenny Dalglish led the tributes to Ray Clemence on Sunday after the former Liverpool and England goalkeeper, a key member of three European Cup-winning teams, died aged 72. Clemence, who was diagnosed with advanced prostate cancer in 2005, was one of the finest keepers of his generation, winning a host of trophies during 14 glittering years at Liverpool. An £18,000 signing from Scunthorpe in 1967, Clemence was part of the Liverpool team which won the club's first ever European Cup in 1977. He also played in their 1978 and 1981 European Cup final triumphs and won the UEFA Cup in 1973 and 1976. Liverpool clinched five First Division titles with Clemence between the posts, while he also won the 1974 FA Cup and the 1981 League Cup during his time playing for Bill Shankly and his successor Bob Paisley. He is survived by his wife Veronica, son Stephen - a former player himself and now a coach - and daughters Sarah and Julie. —AFP

## Footballer Obodo kidnapped

**WARRI:** Former Nigeria midfielder Christian Obodo, who spent over a decade in Serie A, including spells with Fiorentina and Udinese, has been abducted in the country's oil-rich Delta state, police said yesterday. The 36-year-old was stopped by unknown gunmen on Sunday in the southern city of Warri, police spokesman Onome Onowakpoyeya said. "The police are on some intelligence lead towards his rescue," Onowakpoyeya said, but "no contacts have been made with the abductors". Kidnappings for ransom by criminal gangs are common in Africa's most populous country, in particular in the oil-producing Delta region. Obodo was abducted in the same area in 2012, and rescued a day later in a police raid. His kidnappers had demanded a ransom of about \$188,000 (149,000 euros). A friend of the midfielder, who was a regular in the Nigeria team between 2003 and 2008, told AFP that this time Obodo was with his girlfriend in his car when he was abducted. —AFP

## Chelsea WSL draw with Arsenal

**LONDON:** A late Beth Mead goal was cancelled out by an even later own goal by Charlotte Wubben-Moy as Arsenal drew 1-1 at home to Chelsea after an enthralling derby in the FA Women's Super League on Sunday. Arsenal thought they had the game won when Dutch forward Vivianne Miedema beat centre-back Millie Bright for pace before squaring the ball for Mead to ram home from close range in the 86th minute. The Gunners' joy was short-lived, however, as Chelsea's Danish striker Pernille Harder fired a cross that deflected off defender Wubben-Moy and into the net in the final minute of normal time. Chelsea almost stole all three points in stoppage time, but Sam Kerr's lob bounced just wide of the far post. —Reuters

**TOKYO:** International Olympic Committee (IOC) chief Thomas Bach expressed confidence yesterday that the Tokyo Games will be held successfully next year, even allowing spectators to attend, as the world grapples with a sharp rise in coronavirus infections. Bach's two-day visit to Tokyo is likely to bolster Japan's efforts to stage the Olympics, but will do little to assuage the concerns of a public deeply worried about the spread of the virus. The IOC president spent the day with the Tokyo organisers discussing how to stage the massive sporting event during an unprecedented pandemic and ensure safety for a gathering of more than 11,000 international athletes.

The visit is Bach's first to the Japanese capital since he and former prime minister Shinzo Abe decided in March to postpone the 2020 Games to next year. Yesterday, Bach fist-bumped with Japan's new premier, Yoshihide Suga, and told Tokyo governor Yuriko Koike they could be confident a vaccine would be available by next summer. The IOC will arrange to ensure vaccination of both participants and visitors before they arrive in Japan, he added.

"In order to protect the Japanese people, and out of respect for the Japanese people, the IOC will undertake great effort so that ... the Olympic participants and visitors will arrive here vaccinated if, by then, a vaccine is available," he said. At a news conference later, Bach said he would not make vaccination a requirement for Games participants, however. News of a potentially successful vaccine from Pfizer Inc has lifted hopes for the staging of the Games, but public opinion in Japan remains mixed. Nearly 60% of respondents in a November poll by TV Asahi said the event should be further postponed or canceled.

After meeting Koike, Bach approached a handful of protesters who were holding banners and using loudspeakers to press their demand for cancellation of the Olympics. "Do you want to speak or do you want to shout?" he asked, as security guards stood between him and one protester. But the protesters rebuffed his offer of dialogue, Bach told the news conference. Last week Japan reported record new daily cases, sparking concerns of a third wave of infections, although it has mostly avoided the high death tolls recorded elsewhere.

Bach called next year's games a "light at the end of



TOKYO: Tokyo Governor Yuriko Koike (left) bumps elbow with International Olympic Committee (IOC) president Thomas Bach during their meeting in Tokyo yesterday. —AFP

the tunnel" after the world's pandemic battle, and pointed to recent sporting competitions in Japan as proof that events could already take place safely, saying the IOC was now "very confident" that spectators would be able to attend the Games. But he told reporters it was not realistic to put a figure on the cost of the postponement until next year's virus precautions are ascertained. This month, Tokyo successfully hosted an international gymnastics meet at which organizers tested a range of COVID-19 countermeasures. During his visit to Tokyo, Bach also awarded Abe the Olympic Order in gold, the IOC's highest accolade.

When premier, Abe made himself all but synonymous with Tokyo 2020, even famously appearing as video game character Mario at the closing ceremony of the Rio Games in 2016. Abe played a critical role in Tokyo's bid to win the Olympics, making the campaign a national priority. A few years later, a French investigation into doping by Russian athletes revealed evidence of two payments totaling \$2.3 million by the Tokyo bidding committee to a little-known Singapore firm, Black Tidings. France is investigating if that money was used to win the backing of an influential IOC member for Japan to host the 2020 Games. —Reuters

## Australia cricket great Waugh captures spirit of India through lens

**SYDNEY:** Australian great Steve Waugh has long held a deep affection for India, first touring the country in 1986. But his experiences were all too often fleeting glimpses, before he got the chance to return and photograph everyday cricket in the sport's powerhouse. Travelling from one ground to the next as a player, and function to function as Australia's captain, Waugh felt he never got to properly see and feel the melting pot of life in the teeming, South Asian nation.

But those small peeks into backstreets and alleyways from Kolkata to Jodhpur never left his mind. Waugh, one of most successful skippers in cricket history, recalls being overwhelmed by "the absolute and complete bombardment of my senses", and vowed to one day go back when his star was shining a little less brightly. "It's something that's always been in the back of my mind. I was always fascinated by what I saw out of the bus window, everyday life, the spirit of the people," Australia's most capped player told AFP in an interview.

"I couldn't comprehend really how important cricket was to the people and how it was almost a religion," Waugh, 55, put it off for years, until the Australian team were plunged into crisis in 2018 by the ball-tampering scandal in South Africa. With Australian cricket at a low point, he began planning a "feel-good" project which culminated in an 18-day journey through far-flung parts of India with his camera to capture the essence and simple joys of the game, and raise money for sick children at the same time.

"It was just a fun project. You know, 18 months or so ago people were saying that cricket had lost its soul after what happened in Cape Town," Waugh said. "I just wanted to do a feel-good project that I was passionate about." Accompanied



DHARAMSALA: Photo shows monks playing cricket under the Himalayan foothills in Dharamsala, India's northern Himachal Pradesh state. —AFP

by a mentor in professional photographer Trent Parke, Waugh set off in January before the coronavirus pandemic changed the world. His journey took him to the desert of Rajasthan, the foothills of the Himalayas and the teeming streets of Mumbai, stopping wherever he saw the game being played. He met cricketing monks, a 100-year-old player, and a three-year-old Instagram batting sensation, while being inspired by blind and physically challenged players. Old friends like Sachin Tendulkar got involved and the end product was a book - 'The Spirit of Cricket' - and a documentary due to air ahead of a India's limited-overs and Test tour of Australia.

Proceeds will support his work with charities in India and the Steve Waugh Foundation, which raises funds for children with rare diseases, a philanthropic role he has embraced since a meeting decades ago with the late nun and missionary Mother Teresa. Waugh, who made his international debut against India and captained Australia through a golden era from 1999 to 2004, took about 17,000 photos and had to whittle them down to 220 for the book. —AFP

## Australia virus cluster causes jitters over India cricket tour

**ADELAIDE:** Snap restrictions to curb a coronavirus outbreak in South Australia complicated preparations for India's blockbuster cricket tour yesterday, with Australian captain Tim Paine reportedly forced into isolation and questions raised over the first Test in Adelaide. Australian health and cricketing authorities yesterday said it was too early to tell what a rapidly emerging cluster of virus cases around Adelaide would mean for India's tour, which gets underway on November 27.

Virat Kohli's men are scheduled to play a series of ODIs and T20s in relatively virus-free Sydney and Canberra before travelling to Adelaide for the first Test on December 17-21. The South Australian city has become the epicenter of Australia's efforts to suppress the pandemic, with 17 cases linked to an outbreak in hotel confinement.

Australian states yesterday rushed to reimpose restrictions on domestic travel that could complicate the squads' movements. Australia's Test captain Paine and several other players from multiple states were told to isolate after travel to South Australia, where they had been playing Sheffield Shield cricket, Australian media reported. South Australian state premier Steven Marshall said he was hopeful the outbreak could be brought under control in time to avoid disruption to the Test tour. —AFP



## Sports

## Nadal cruises at ATP Finals as Thiem gets its revenge

**LONDON:** Rafael Nadal launched his bid for a first ATP Finals trophy in style on Sunday, taming in-form Andrey Rublev in straight sets in London after Dominic Thiem beat Stefanos Tsitsipas. The Spanish world number two, chasing the biggest prize missing from his glittering resume, barely broke sweat as he outclassed the Russian debutant 6-3, 6-4 at the empty O2 Arena.

Earlier, US Open champion Thiem avenged his defeat by Tsitsipas in the championship match last year, beating the Greek sixth seed 7-6 (7/5), 4-6, 6-3. Nadal, who last month equaled Roger Federer's record of 20 Grand Slams by winning the French Open, has won 86 titles but just one of those has come on an indoor hard court.

His record at the eight-man elite event pales in comparison with his main rivals. Federer, who is absent with injury, has won it a record six times and Novak Djokovic has triumphed five times. Nadal, 34, and Rublev both held serve comfortably in the early stages of their Group London 2020 round-robin match. But the Spaniard, who was comprehensively out-serving his 23-year-old opponent, made his move in the sixth game, breaking the Russian, who hurled his racket to the ground in frustration, and wrapping up the set with the minimum of fuss.

Rublev, who has won a tour-leading five titles during the coronavirus-interrupted 2020 season, was broken again in the first game of the second set, leaving him with a mountain to climb. —AFP



**KUWAIT:** Kuwaiti Rawah Al-Saeid competes in the high jump during Kuwait's first women's athletics tournament, in the capital Kuwait City on November 14, 2020. —Photo by Yasser Al-Zayyat

# Pedersen wins first ever women's golf tournament in Saudi Arabia

## First Saudi ladies golf title draws 'sportswashing' charges

**KING ABDULLAH ECONOMIC CITY:** Denmark's Emily Pedersen won the first ever women's golf tournament in Saudi Arabia in a tense playoff, but the event designed to soften the kingdom's austere image has drawn charges of being a "sportswashing" exercise. With a birdie on the extra hole, Pedersen edged out England's Georgia Hall and secured the \$150,000 winner's cheque in the inaugural Saudi Ladies International on Sunday at the King Abdullah Economic City close to the western city of Jeddah.

"I'm so happy to be the first winner of this event," Pedersen said in a statement. "It's been such a fantastic experience to be here in Saudi Arabia." But Amnesty International and other rights groups said the event glossed over Saudi's poor human rights record and the jailing of several women activists who have called for reforms.

The appearance of female golfers, dressed in casual T-shirts and trousers, is a striking anomaly in Saudi Arabia, an ultra-conservative Muslim nation that has long imposed a strict dress code on women. As part of a sweeping liberalization drive, de facto ruler Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman has accelerated investment in glitzy sports and entertainment events in a bid to improve its reputation. In March, the kingdom hosted the world's richest horse race, after staging the Italian and Spanish football Super Cups last year.

It already hosts the Dakar Rally, a 12-day marathon through the Arabian desert, and the all-electric Formula E series, in addition to an array of

boxing, golf and tennis events. And this month, Saudi Arabia announced it will host a Formula One Grand Prix for the first time in 2021. The expanded sporting schedule is part of a push to draw more international tourists, business and investment, as the kingdom embarks on reforms designed to lessen its reliance on oil revenues. But critics have accused the country's rulers of "sportswashing" to improve their image after long being condemned over rights abuses.

"Saudi citizens and residents should enjoy top-notch entertainment and sporting events, but they also should enjoy basic rights such as free expression and peaceful assembly," said Michael Page, deputy Middle East director at Human Rights Watch. "So, when Hollywood A-listers, international athletes, and other global celebrities take government money to perform in Saudi Arabia while staying silent on the government's atrocious rights record, they are boosting the kingdom's strategy of whitewashing Crown Prince Mohammad bin Salman's abuses."

Alexandra Armas, CEO of the Ladies European Tour, shrugged off the criticism and said that taking the opportunity to bring the game to Saudi was an "easy decision". "We did discuss it with our members how they would feel about coming to play in Saudi, and it was very accepted," she said. Maha Haddioui, a Moroccan and the first Arab professional on the Ladies European Tour, said she was thrilled to be playing in the event and to help write "a new page of history in



**KING ABDULLAH ECONOMIC CITY:** Danish golfer Emily Kristine Pedersen (center) poses next to the trophy after winning the Saudi Ladies International golf tournament on November 15, 2020, at the King Abdullah Economic City, north of Jeddah. —AFP

Saudi. "I got a lot of messages from young Saudi women telling me how does it work if I want to

start golf... so just being part of this, for me it's a winning week." —AFP

## Tearful Johnson captures Masters; 2nd major title

**AUGUSTA:** Top-ranked Dustin Johnson won the Masters in record-smashing fashion on Sunday, capturing his second major title with the lowest total score in Augusta National history. The 36-year-old American, known for keeping his cool on the course, was in tears after winning the green jacket only an hour's drive from where he grew up. "It's a dream come true," a crying Johnson said. "As a kid I always wanted to become a Masters champion. It's just incredible. I never have this much trouble gathering myself. On the golf course I'm good at it."

No one in Masters history was better as Johnson, whose other major victory came at the 2016 US Open, fired a four-under-par 68 to finish on a Masters record 20-under-par 268. That was good enough for a five-stroke triumph over South Korean Im Sung-jae and Australian Cameron Smith with third-ranked American Justin Thomas fourth on 276. Johnson's score in relation to par matched the lowest in major history and smashed the old 72-hole Masters mark of 18-under 270 set by Woods in 1997 and matched by Jordan Spieth in 2015.

It was an incredible turnaround for a player who missed his planned Masters tuneups after contracting Covid-19 last month, returning only last week with a runner-up effort in Houston. Johnson, who began with a four-shot edge, had never converted a 54-hole major lead into a title, stumbling at the 2010, 2015 and 2018 US Opens and in August's PGA Championship, where he settled for a runner-up spot. That hex ended Sunday, but not without some early drama as Johnson's lead fell to one.

Johnson made back-to-back bogeys at the fifth and par-3 sixth, ending a run of 33 bogey-free holes, to leave Im one back. "They weren't bad shots," Johnson said. "I didn't let it bother me too much. At six I made a birdie and that got me back." Im fell back with bogeys at six and seven, Johnson also birdied the par-5 eighth and never looked back.

"I was nervous all day," Johnson said. "I could feel it. The Masters to me was the biggest. It still feels like a dream. I'm proud of the way I handled myself and fin-



**AUGUSTA:** Dustin Johnson of the United States poses with the Masters Trophy during the Green Jacket Ceremony after winning the Masters at Augusta National Golf Club on November 15, 2020. —AFP

ished off the golf tournament." Johnson, the first reigning world number one to grab the green jacket since Tiger Woods in 2002, was denied the usual champion's roars from spectators as no fans were allowed due to the Covid-19 pandemic that postponed the event from its usual April slot.

### 'Amazing ability'

After overcoming his early wobble, Johnson was unflappable with deadly accuracy and consistency, his birdie streak from 13 through 15 lifting his week to historic status. "DJ has just an amazing ability to stay calm in tough moments," Woods said. There's no one more suited to that, I think, than DJ." Johnson's four total bogeys were the fewest of any Masters champion. Im had the lowest score for any Masters newcomer but couldn't become the first debut winner since 1979.

"My goal was to make the cut," Im said through a translator. "To finish tied for second is unbelievable." Smith closed on 69, becoming the first Masters player to shoot all four rounds in the 60s. "That's cool," he said. "A lot of good around here this week." Four-time major winner Rory McIlroy, needing a green jacket to complete a career Grand Slam, shot 69 to share fifth on 277 but never threatened Johnson. —AFP

## Belgium end England Nations League hopes as Italy eye finals

**PARIS:** Belgium ended England's hopes of reaching the Nations League finals with a 2-0 win on Sunday while Italy edged closer to next year's title shake-up. Belgium were just five minutes from joining world champions France at next October's finals when Iceland pulled level at 1-1 with group rivals Denmark in Copenhagen. However, a stoppage time penalty by Christian Eriksen gave the Danes a 2-1 win and kept alive their chances of pipping Belgium to top spot in Group A2.

Youri Tielemans and Dries Mertens scored the goals which gave world number one Belgium victory over Gareth Southgate's England. Leicester midfielder Tielemans's deflected effort went in off the post after 10 minutes. Fourteen minutes later, Declan Rice was harshly punished for a challenge on Kevin De Bruyne just outside the area and Mertens curled the resulting free-kick perfectly over the wall to give Jordan Pickford no chance. "We were always in control at 2-0, sometimes it can be dangerous, you feel comfortable but we defended Thibaut Courtois's goal very well," said Belgian coach Roberto Martinez.

A second consecutive defeat leaves England down in third place, five points adrift of Belgium, with just one game remaining. "We don't like losing, but enormous credit to the team, all the way through they created problems and defended resiliently," said Southgate. Denmark's late winner over Iceland means Belgium still need a point when they host the Danes tomorrow to secure their place in the final four.

In Copenhagen, Iceland, whose Euro 2020 hopes were dashed by Hungary in a 2-1 play-off defeat in midweek, suffered more agony. Eriksen gave the Danes the lead from the penalty spot after 12 minutes following a foul by Ari Freyr Skulason on Daniel Wass. Vidar Orm Kjartansson levelled for Iceland in the 85th minute but another penalty by Eriksen in the second minute of injury time after a handball by Hordur

Magnusson gave the Danes the three points.

Italy brushed off the absences of several players and coronavirus-hit coach Roberto Mancini with an impressive 2-0 victory over Poland. The Azzurri took top spot in Group A1 from the Netherlands, who beat Bosnia and Herzegovina 3-1 earlier in the day. Italy will be sure of a place in next October's finals with victory over the Bosnians in Sarajevo.

Chelsea midfielder Jorginho opened the scoring in the 27th minute with a penalty awarded after Grzegorz Krychowiak had brought down Andrea Belotti. In the 77th minute, Poland had Jacek Goralski sent off before the Italians added a second goal from Domenico Berardi. "It's our culture, Italians give their best during difficult moments and become more united," said assistant coach Alberico Evani whose 41-man squad had been whittled down to 28, due to injuries, as well as positive and inconclusive COVID-19 tests. Frank de Boer won his first match as Netherlands coach after Georginio Wijnaldum scored twice in the win over Bosnia.

### 'Good feeling'

Liverpool midfielder Wijnaldum struck his goals early in the first half to help new coach De Boer break his duck at the fifth attempt following three draws and a defeat, with Memphis Depay scoring the other for the dominant Dutch. "It had been five games since we'd won, so it was a good feeling to win again," said Wijnaldum. "If I'm playing more in a sitting role, I don't get in the box that often, but tonight I was playing as a No10 so I'm expected to. I basically just did my job." The Dutch go to Poland in their final group game but even a win won't be good enough should Italy prevail in Bosnia.

In promotion ties, Scotland failed to follow up their heroics of reaching a first major tournament for 22 years as Steve Clarke's men were beaten 1-0 by Slovakia, their first defeat in 10 games. Jan Gregus's deflected strike on 32 minutes decided the meeting of two teams who qualified for Euro 2020 this week. Wales winger David Brooks sealed a 1-0 win over the Republic of Ireland. After a seventh successive clean sheet in all competitions, Wales-unbeaten in their last 10 games-need a point on Wednesday against Finland to earn promotion to League A. —AFP



# Sport Times

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**14** IOC president 'very confident'  
Tokyo Olympics will have fans



**15** Johnson wins Masters to  
claim second major title

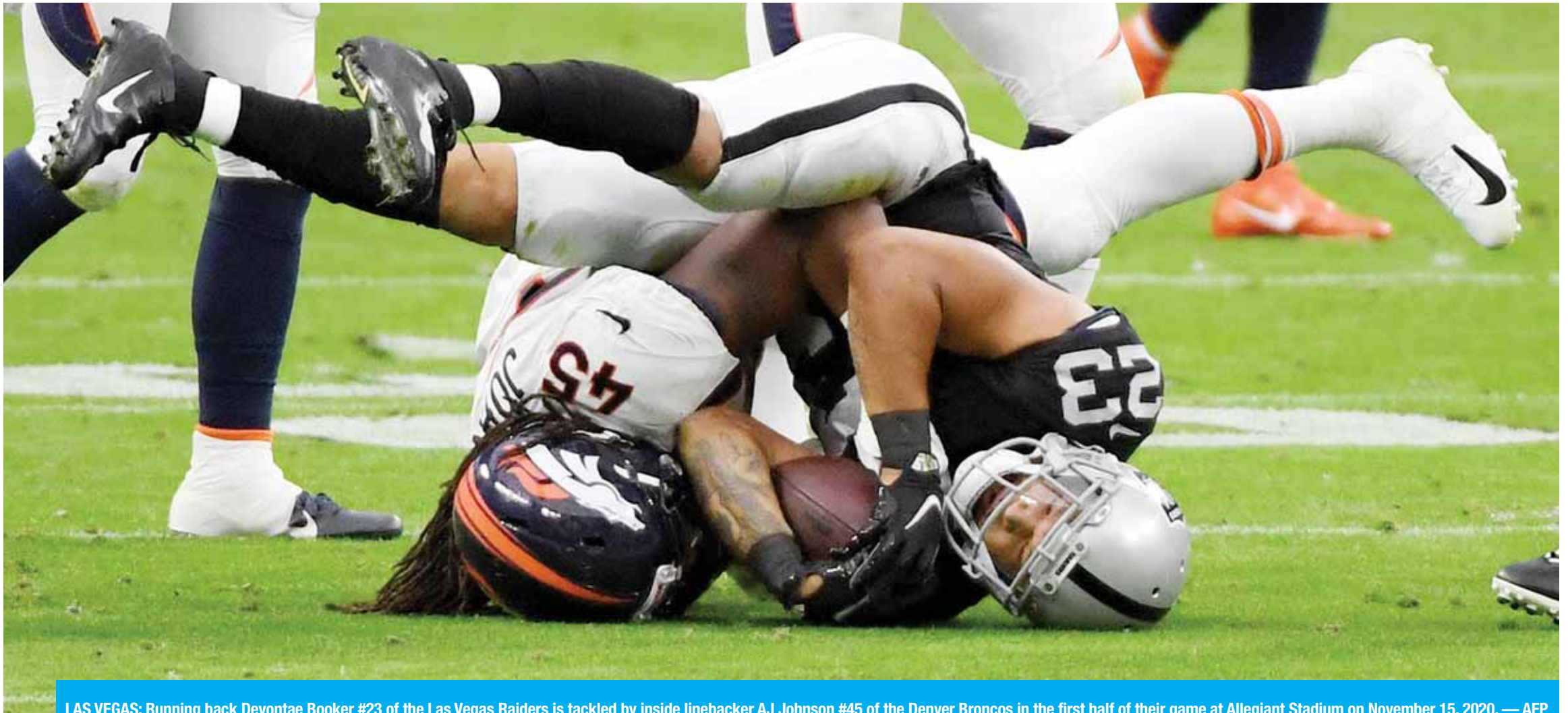


**15** Pedersen wins first ever women's  
golf tournament in Saudi Arabia



## Cardinals win on last-second Hail Mary

Steelers rout Bengals; Rams shut down Wilson, Seahawks



LAS VEGAS: Running back Devontae Booker #23 of the Las Vegas Raiders is tackled by inside linebacker AJ Johnson #45 of the Denver Broncos in the first half of their game at Allegiant Stadium on November 15, 2020. — AFP

**NEW YORK:** DeAndre Hopkins caught a 43-yard scoring pass from Kyler Murray with two seconds remaining to give the host Arizona Cardinals a stunning 32-30 victory over the Buffalo Bills on Sunday. Murray scrambled to his left and heaved the ball into the end zone. Hopkins made a leaping grab while surrounded by three defenders. Murray threw for 245 yards and one touchdown and rushed for 61 yards and two more scores on 11 carries. He became the fourth quarterback in NFL history to score a rushing touchdown in five consecutive games.

Hopkins finished with 127 receiving yards on seven catches. Kenyon Drake added 100 rushing yards on 16 carries for the Cardinals (6-3). Josh Allen threw a 21-yard scoring pass to Stefon Diggs with 34 seconds remaining to put Buffalo on top prior to the Cardinals' Hail Mary pass. Allen threw for 284 yards and two touchdowns with two interceptions. He also led his team with 38 rushing yards on seven carries and caught a touchdown pass.

### Saints 27, 49ers 13

Alvin Kamara scored three touchdowns and host New Orleans overcame the loss of Drew Brees to defeat San Francisco. Kamara rushed for two touchdowns and caught Brees' final pass of the game for a second-quarter touchdown as the Saints (7-2) won their sixth consecutive game. Brees did not play in the second half because of a rib injury and Jameis Winston and Taysom Hill played in his place. Nick Mullens made his fifth start in place of injured Jimmy Garoppolo (ankle) for the 49ers (4-6) and completed 24 of 38 for 247 yards with one touchdown and two interceptions.

### Buccaneers 46, Panthers 23

Tom Brady threw for three touchdowns and scored on a run and running back Ronald Jones II burst free for a 98-yard touchdown scamper as visiting Tampa Bay bounced back for a victory against Carolina at Bank of America Stadium in Charlotte, N.C. The Buccaneers (7-3), who racked up 544 yards of total offense, swept the season series from Carolina, both times following a loss to the New Orleans Saints by beating the Panthers. Brady, who was coming off one of the worst performances of his 21-year career, was

28-for-39 for 341 yards. The Panthers (3-7) lost their fifth consecutive game despite quarterback Teddy Bridgewater's two touchdown passes. He was 18-for-24 for 136 yards and an interception before exiting with a knee injury on a fourth-quarter sack with about five minutes left.

### Patriots 23, Ravens 17

Rex Burkhead caught two touchdown passes, one on a throw from receiver Jakobi Meyers, as host New England recorded a victory over Baltimore at Foxborough, Mass. Cam Newton passed for one score and rushed for another as New England (4-5) won its second straight game. Newton completed 13 of 17 passes for 118 yards, and Damien Harris rushed for a career-best 121 yards on 22 carries as the Patriots prevailed in a heavy rainstorm. Lamar Jackson completed 24 of 34 passes for 249 yards with two touchdowns and one interception as the Ravens (6-3) lost for the second time in the past three games. Jackson added a team-high 55 yards on the ground on 11 rushes, while Willie Snead caught two scoring passes.

### Dolphins 29, Chargers 21

Tua Tagovailoa tossed two touchdowns and improved to 3-0 as a starter in leading host Miami past Los Angeles. Miami (6-3) won its fifth straight game as Tagovailoa completed 15 of 25 passes for 169 yards and no interceptions. Tagovailoa outdueled fellow rookie quarterback Justin Herbert, who was selected sixth in the 2020 NFL Draft-one spot after Tagovailoa. The Chargers (2-7) are in last place in the AFC West, and Herbert is 1-7 as a starter. Herbert completed 20 of 32 passes for 187 yards, two touchdowns and one interception.

### Rams 23, Seahawks 16

Malcolm Brown rushed for two touchdowns as Los Angeles moved into a three-way tie for first place in the NFC West with a victory against visiting Seattle in Inglewood, Calif. The Rams (6-3) pulled even with the Seahawks (6-3), who have lost three of their past four games, and the Arizona Cardinals (6-3), who defeated the Buffalo Bills. The Rams held Seattle to a season low in points. The Seahawks had scored more than 30 points in seven of their previous eight games, with 27

their low before Sunday.

### Packers 24, Jaguars 20

Aaron Rodgers threw for two touchdowns and ran for another to help host Green Bay defeat pesky Jacksonville at Lambeau Field. Marquez Valdes-Scantling and Davante Adams had scoring receptions for the Packers (7-2), who lead the NFC North. Rodgers finished 24 of 34 for 325 yards and one interception, his third of the season. Keelan Cole Sr returned a punt 91 yards for a score as the Jaguars (1-8) suffered an eighth straight loss. Jacksonville rookie Jake Luton, making his second career start in place of injured Gardner Minshew II (thumb), was 18 of 35 for 169 yards, with one touchdown and one interception in mid-30-degree weather.

### Steelers 36, Bengals 10

Ben Roethlisberger passed for a season-best 333 yards, including four touchdowns, as Pittsburgh remained undefeated by routing visiting Cincinnati. While the Steelers' run game sputtered, totaling only 44 yards, Roethlisberger was 27 of 46 with scoring passes to rookie Chase Claypool (two), Diontae Johnson and Juju Smith-Schuster. Pittsburgh (9-0) was not assured Roethlisberger would be available until Saturday because of COVID-19 contact tracing protocol. For Cincinnati (2-6-1), rookie quarterback Joe Burrow was 21 of 40 for 213 yards with a touchdown pass to Tee Higgins. Burrow played much of the game on what appeared to be a sore left ankle. The Bengals went 0-for-13 on third-down chances.

### Raiders 37, Broncos 12

Josh Jacobs rushed for 112 yards and two touchdowns and Jeff Heath intercepted two passes as host Las Vegas forced five turnovers en route to its third straight victory over Denver. It was the second 100-yard rushing game in the last three, and seventh in 22 career games for Jacobs. Las Vegas (6-3) closed to within two games of first-place Kansas City in the AFC West. Derek Carr completed 16 of 25 passes for 154 yards, Daniel Carlson added three field goals and Devontae Booker added two fourth-quarter touchdowns for the Raiders. Drew Lock completed 23 of 47 passes for 257 yards and a touchdown but was

intercepted four times for Denver (3-6).

### Browns 10, Texans 7

Nick Chubb and Kareem Hunt combined for 230 yards on the ground and Cleveland slugged out a victory over visiting Houston. Chubb and Hunt recorded 19 attempts each against the Texans' 32nd-ranked run defense. After Houston (2-7) closed to within three points on a 16-yard touchdown pass from Deshaun Watson to Pharaoh Brown with 4:59 remaining, Chubb sealed the win with a 59-yard, third-down run to the Houston 1, wisely running out of bounds so that Cleveland could exhaust the game clock. Chubb rushed for 126 yards in his first action since Week 4 due to a knee injury. Hunt added 104 yards for the Browns (6-3). Watson finished 20-of-30 for 163 yards and a touchdown. He was sacked twice. The Texans totaled only 243 yards.

### Giants 27, Eagles 17

Daniel Jones threw for 244 yards and rushed for a touchdown as New York tightened up the NFC East race with a win over Philadelphia at MetLife Stadium in East Rutherford, N.J. Jones completed 21 of 28 passes with no interceptions, marking the first time in his two-year career he has played consecutive games with no turnovers. Wayne Gallman added two short touchdown runs as New York (3-7) enters its bye week with consecutive wins. Carson Wentz hit on 21 of 37 passes for 208 yards with no touchdowns or interceptions as Philadelphia failed to convert a single third down (0 for 9). The Eagles (3-5-1) still sit atop the division but have a challenging schedule ahead.

### Lions 30, Washington 27

Matt Prater drilled a 59-yard field goal as time expired and Detroit posted its first home win after squandering a 21-point lead, edging Washington. Matthew Stafford passed for 276 yards and three touchdowns for the Lions (4-5), while Marvin Jones caught eight passes for 96 yards and a touchdown. D'Andre Swift had a combined 149 yards from scrimmage and hauled in one of Stafford's scoring tosses. Alex Smith threw for 390 yards for Washington (2-7), while Antonio Gibson rushed for 45 yards and two scores. — Reuters

## Sabalenka replaces Serena in the top 10

**PARIS:** Aryna Sabalenka returned to the WTA's top 10 yesterday at the expense of Serena Williams after the Belarusian captured her eighth career title in Linz at the weekend. The

22-year-old Sabalenka finished the season in style with a straight-sets victory over her doubles partner Elise Mertens in Sunday's final in Austria. She traded places with Williams, who dropped one spot to 11th and hasn't played since pulling out of the French Open with an Achilles injury.

Ashleigh Barty remains clear at the top despite skipping both the US and French Opens following the season's resumption after the

coronavirus shutdown. Her last match was at the Qatar Open in February. Belgian Mertens moved up one place to 20th, climbing above last year's Roland Garros runner-up Marketa Vondrousova.

WTA top 20: (1) Ashleigh Barty (AUS) 8,717 pts; (2) Simona Halep (ROU) 7,255; (3) Naomi Osaka (JPN) 5,780; (4) Sofia Kenin (USA) 5,760; (5) Elina Svitolina (UKR) 5,260; (6) Karolina Pliskova (CZE) 5,205; (7) Bianca Andreescu (CAN) 4,555; (8) Petra Kvitova

(CZE) 4,516; (9) Kiki Bertens (NED) 4,505; (10) Aryna Sabalenka (BLR) 4,220 (+1); (11) Serena Williams (USA) 4,080 (-1); (12) Belinda Bencic (SUI) 4,010; (13) Victoria Azarenka (BLR) 3,426; (14) Johanna Konta (GBR) 3,152; (15) Garbine Muguruza (ESP) 3,016; (16) Madison Keys (USA) 2,962; (17) Iga Swiatek (POL) 2,960; (18) Petra Martic (CRO) 2,850; (19) Elena Rybakina (KAZ) 2,696; (20) Elise Mertens (BEL) 2,650 (+1). — AFP