



2 Kuwait, US sign declaration of intent on legal cooperation



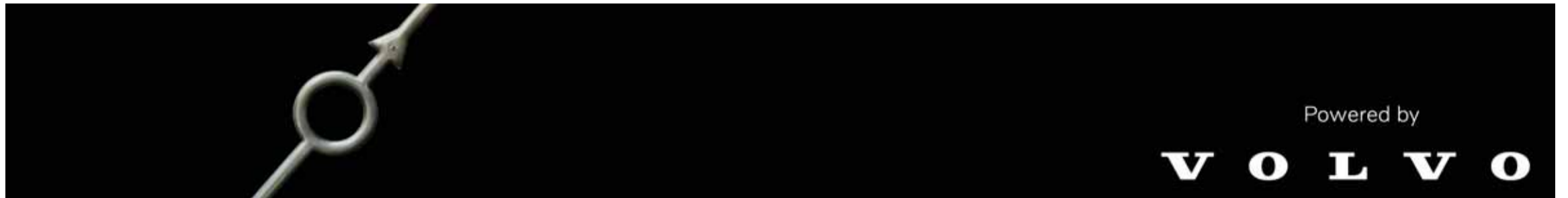
3 Al-Nasr SC inaugurates late Sheikh Abdullah Al-Sabah sporting complex



13 Swiss cheesed off over COVID threat to fondue conviviality



15 Elneny tests positive amid spike in EPL COVID cases



Candidates urge independent judiciary, slam govt meddling

Hopefuls also call for general amnesty, national reconciliation

Amir receives National Guard chief



KUWAIT: HH the Amir Sheikh Nawaf Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah receives Head of the National Guard HH Sheikh Salem Al-Ali Al-Sabah with the attendance of HH the Crown Prince Sheikh Mishal Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah at Bayan Palace yesterday. — KUNA

By B Izzak

KUWAIT: Candidates running in the Dec 5 general elections yesterday called for granting full independence to the judiciary and criticized what they called government interference in the National Assembly, as campaigning continues. Candidate Marzouq Al-Khalifa, contesting from the fourth constituency, said the independence of the judiciary is the guarantee for justice. He called on the next Assembly to approve a law to guarantee the independence of the judiciary, a second to allow challenging judges' verdicts and a third to Kuwaitize the judiciary.

MP Abdullah Fahhad, bidding for re-election from the same district, said attempts to politicize the judiciary must be totally rejected, adding that he backs the independence of the justice system. Other candidates claimed that the government has been strongly interfering in Assembly affairs, and in some cases setting its agenda and influencing its decisions.

MP Al-Humaidi Al-Subaei, running in the fifth constituency, said there are lawmakers who are under the government "umbrella and sponsorship", and as a result, "the government does what it wants whether it is right or wrong", and the victims are the Kuwaiti people. Candidate Khaled Al-Khamees from the third constituency said the government has been interfering in the Assembly, adding the Assembly is no more the house of the people and has become the

house of the government.

He said that if the opposition forms a majority, the Assembly is dissolved and snap polls are called, adding that if the Assembly passes a law that the government dislikes, the Cabinet rejects the legislation. MP Omar Al-Tabtabaei, bidding for re-election from the second constituency, called for appointing a commoner prime minister to end the decades-old tradition of appointing the prime minister from the ruling family.

Candidates also called for national reconciliation and for pardoning a number of leading opposition figures who have been living abroad to escape jail sentences over political cases. Candidate Mutlaq Al-Otaibi, contesting in the fifth constituency, called for issuing a pardon for opposition politicians and allowing them to return, saying this should lead to national reconciliation and end disputes.

Candidate Abdulaziz Al-Samhan said national reconciliation is needed in the new era, adding that most Kuwaiti politicians living abroad have been convicted for minor cases, including over tweets. MP Adel Al-Damkhi, running in the first constituency, said he will continue demanding a general amnesty and national reconciliation in the next Assembly if elected. Candidates have resorted to virtual election campaigns this year because of the coronavirus pandemic as authorities have banned rallies. Other candidates are also using television and the press to publicize their agendas.

News in brief

81K expats left till June

KUWAIT: Statistics show that the number of expats in the workforce dropped in the period from June 2019 until June this year, with a slight increase in the number of Kuwaitis (7,908), as new work visas are still not being issued, reported Al-Qabas Arabic daily. Statistics from the manpower authority show that nearly 81,000 expats left the workforce in this period - 37,000 domestic helpers and 43,000 other foreign employees from eight nationalities. Presently, the total number of domestic helpers stands at 724,432.

'Jetman' killed in Dubai

DUBAI: Frenchman Vince Reffet, part of the "Jetman" team which has performed groundbreaking stunts above Dubai using jetpacks and carbon-fiber wings, was killed in a training accident yesterday, a spokesman said. The accident, which happened at 36-year-old Reffet's Jetman base in the desert outside the city, is now under investigation. Reffet's exploits went viral earlier this year, with video of him taking off from the ground and climbing to 1,800 m over Dubai's waterfront, in a feat reminiscent of Marvel's "Iron Man" and hailed as a world first. — AFP



Vince Reffet

Twitter rolls out 'fleets'

SAN FRANCISCO: Twitter said yesterday it was rolling out tweets which disappear after 24 hours, joining rival social platforms in offering ephemeral messages. The new "fleets" which had been tested in several countries in recent months are "for sharing momentary thoughts" and aim to bring in users who want to avoid having their comments become permanent fixtures, according to a Twitter blog post. The move gives Twitter a new tool in competing with the likes of Snapchat, which made disappearing messages popular, and Facebook, which has also adopted the idea. — AFP

Trump mullied attacking main Iran nuke site

WASHINGTON: Two months before he is due to leave office, US President Donald Trump asked top aides about the possibility of striking Iran's nuclear facilities, The New York Times reported Monday. During a meeting at the Oval Office last Thursday,

95K sex abuse claims against US Boy Scouts

WASHINGTON: Almost 100,000 victims of sexual abuse that took place in the Boy Scouts of America (BSA) had come forward by Monday evening, the deadline to receive compensation from the organization, a lawyer for the victims told AFP. "As of today, 95,000 claims have been filed," attorney Paul Moses told AFP.

The figure, revealing the scale of alleged abuse committed over decades by scout leaders, dwarfs the

roughly 11,000 complaints believed to have been filed in recent years against the Catholic Church. "It's by far the largest sexual abuse scandal in the US," Moses said, adding that scouting has long offered a "perfect petri dish" for pedophiles: "Boys have taken an oath of loyalty, they are away from their parents, in the wilderness."

"We are devastated by the number of lives impacted by past abuse in scouting and moved by the bravery of those who have come forward," the scouting organization said in a statement. "We are heartbroken that we cannot undo their pain. We intentionally developed an open, accessible process to reach survivors and help them take an essential step toward

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Rocky road to recovery for street dog

FARIDABAD, India: An Indian street dog that lost its front legs after being run over by a train has found a new home in Britain after enduring a year of therapy and learning to walk again with prosthetic limbs. The three-year-old mutt was found "covered in blood" and her forelegs badly injured

by a Railway Protection Force constable at Faridabad in northern Haryana state last October, People for Animals India president, Ravi Dubey, told AFP.

The officer carried the wounded canine - now named Rocky - to one of PFA's shelters, where she was rushed to a hospital. "It is almost impossible to save such a badly injured dog," veterinarian Mahesh Verma said in a video shared by the shelter. "There was a lot of bleeding... we arranged a healthy dog and transfused blood." Doctors had to amputate her forelegs, leaving her with stumps. Her back legs were also badly injured.

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the outgoing Republican leader asked several top aides, including Vice President Mike Pence, Secretary of State Mike Pompeo and the chairman of the Joint Chiefs, General Mark Milley, "whether he had options to take action against Iran's main nuclear site in the coming weeks", the newspaper said.

The senior officials "dissuaded the president from moving ahead with a military strike", warning him that such an attack could escalate into a broader conflict in the last weeks of his presidency, the Times wrote. "He asked for options. They gave him the scenarios and he ultimately decided not to go forward," a US official said.

Iranian government spokesman Ali Rabieci said any military action would be met with a crushing response, but added that he personally found it unlikely Washington would want to create instability. "Our summarized response has always been that any action against the people of Iran will be met with a crushing response," Rabieci told a news conference yesterday. He said his "personal opinion, not that of the government spokesman" was that "there might be attempts" but he did not expect "that they would want to bring insecurity to the world and region".

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SAN GABRIEL, California: In this file photo taken on July 4, 2018, the US flag is carried by Boy Scouts during a parade to celebrate Independence Day. — AFP



FARIDABAD, India: Rocky, a female dog that lost her front legs in a train accident, rests at the People For Animal Trust yesterday. — AFP

Local

Kuwait's Amir congratulates Oman on national day, Saudi King on anniversary

Sheikh Nawaf receives Sheikh Nasser Al-Mohammad



KUWAIT: His Highness the Amir Sheikh Nawaf Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah meets His Highness Sheikh Nasser Al-Mohammad Al-Ahmad Al-Sabah. — Amiri Diwan photo

KUWAIT: His Highness the Amir Sheikh Nawaf Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah received His Highness Sheikh Nasser Al-Mohammad Al-Ahmad Al-Sabah at Bayan Palace yesterday. In other news, His Highness the Amir sent a cable of congratulations to Sultan Haitham bin Tareq of Oman expressing most sincere felicitations on the 50th anniversary of Oman's national day. His Highness the Amir, in his cable to the Sultan, lauded astounding development achievements that have been witnessed in various realms in the brotherly country. He wished that the Sultan would enjoy excellent health and wellbeing and hoped Oman would witness further promotion and prosperity under the Sultan's wise leadership. His Highness the Crown Prince Sheikh Mishal Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah and His Highness the Prime Minister Sheikh Sabah Al-Khaled Al-Hamad Al-Sabah addressed cables of similar content to the Sultan.

Separately, His Highness the Amir sent a cable

of congratulations to Custodian of the Two Holy Mosques, King Salman bin Abdulaziz, expressing heartfelt congratulations on the sixth anniversary of his ascension to office. His Highness the Amir, in the cable, lauded the depth of the solid and historic relations between the two gracious families, the two brotherly countries and peoples. He expressed deep pride of the remarkable developments in various sectors during the Saudi King's era. Moreover, His Highness Sheikh Nawaf wished King Salman full health and wellbeing so he may pursue development at the local level and serve issues of the Arab and Muslim nations. Furthermore, he hoped that the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia and its gracious people would witness greater progress and prosperity under the Monarch's sagacious leadership. His Highness the Crown Prince and His Highness the Prime Minister addressed cables of identical content to the Saudi King on the annual occasion. — KUNA

Kuwait, US sign declaration of intent on legal cooperation



KUWAIT: Kuwait's Deputy Foreign Minister Khaled Al-Jarallah and US Ambassador Alina Romanowski sign the declaration of intent. — KUNA

KUWAIT: Kuwait and the US signed yesterday a declaration of intent over legal cooperation, as part of preparations for the Strategic Dialogue to be held at a ministerial level in Washington later this month. The declaration of intent was signed by Kuwait's Deputy Foreign Minister Khaled Al-Jarallah and US Ambassador to Kuwait Alina

Romanowski, a foreign ministry statement said. Assistant Foreign Minister for Deputy Foreign Minister's office Ayham Al-Omar, Deputy Assistant Foreign Minister for Protocols Abdulmohsen Al-Zaid and Deputy Assistant Foreign Minister for Legal Affairs Salem Al-Shebli attended the signing ceremony. — KUNA

Kuwait, Qatar sign various MoUs in different fields

KUWAIT: Kuwait yesterday hosted the fifth online session of the Joint Kuwaiti-Qatari Higher Cooperation Committee, where various Memorandums of Understanding (MoU) were signed between the two sides. The Kuwaiti side was represented by the Foreign Minister and Acting Information Minister Sheikh Dr Ahmad

Nasser Al-Mohammad Al-Sabah, while Qatar's Foreign Minister Sheikh Mohammad bin Abdulrahman Al Thani chaired the Qatari side. Sheikh Dr Ahmad praised the Qatari authorities for hosting Kuwaiti citizens during the COVID-19 pandemic and facilitating their return procedures to Kuwait, stressing that these efforts were appreciated by the leadership and people of Kuwait. The two countries signed the final minutes of the session and a number of MoUs on encouraging direct investment, civil services and administrative development, Islamic Affairs and agricultural field. The number of agreements signed between the two countries reached 26 agreements from 1978 to 2018 in various fields. — KUNA



KUWAIT: Foreign Minister Sheikh Dr Ahmad Al-Sabah leads Kuwait's delegation during the talks. — KUNA



Qatar's Foreign Minister Sheikh Mohammad Al Thani leads the Qatari delegation.

Indian embassy to hold digital open house on Nov 25

KUWAIT: The Indian Embassy in Kuwait will hold a digital open house with the ambassador on November 25 at 3:30 pm. The regular weekly open house held at the embassy auditorium was discontinued in early September due to the evolving COVID-19 situation. It

has been decided to re-launch digitally the open house, a press release issued by the embassy said.

The theme of the open house on November 25 is 'Amnesty and Registration Drives at the Embassy'. The open house will be open to all Indian nationals in Kuwait. Those interested may register by sending their details including full name as in passport, passport number, civil ID number and contact number and address in Kuwait, along with a summary of the issues likely to be raised in the open house, through an email to community.kuwait@mea.gov.in. Those registered will be intimated on the meeting ID and other details, the release added.



LAWRENCEVILLE, Georgia: Gwinnett County election workers handle ballots as part of the recount for the 2020 presidential election at the Beauty P Baldwin Voter Registrations and Elections Building on Monday. — AFP

Trump mulled attacking main...

Continued from Page 1

Alireza Miryousefi, spokesman for Iran's mission to the United Nations in New York, said Iran's nuclear program is purely for peaceful purposes and civilian use and Trump's policies have not changed that. "However, Iran has proven to be capable of using its legitimate military might to prevent or respond to any melancholy adventure from any aggressor," he added.

Trump reportedly asked his aides for options after a report by the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) said that Iran was continuing to stockpile low enriched uranium above the limits set by a 2015 agreement with major powers that Trump has since abandoned. According to the Times, the most likely target of such a strike would have been the country's main nuclear fuel plant at Natanz in central Iran. Iran's

2.4 ton stock of low-enriched uranium is now far above the deal's 202.8 kg limit. It produced 337.5 kg in the quarter, less than the more than 500 kg recorded in the previous two quarters by the IAEA.

Trump's withdrawal from the nuclear agreement in 2018 was followed by the unilateral reimposition of crippling economic sanctions which prompted Iran to suspend some of its obligations under the deal. European governments who have battled to keep the accord afloat have been buoyed by the projected victory of Democrat Joe Biden in the US presidential election two weeks ago, which has raised the prospect of a renewed diplomatic approach from the White House. But the Trump administration, which has yet to concede defeat, has pledged to step up its punitive policy in what some analysts see as an attempt to build a "wall of sanctions" that a Biden administration would find difficult to dismantle after it takes office in January. Biden's transition team, which has not had access to national security intelligence due to the Trump administration's refusal to begin the transition, declined comment. — Agencies

95K sex abuse claims against...

Continued from Page 1

receiving compensation. The response we have seen from survivors has been gut wrenching. We are deeply sorry," the BSA added. The group, founded in 1910, has 2.2 million members between the ages of five and 21. Rocked by accusations of sexual abuse, the BSA filed for bankruptcy in February in an effort to block settlement claims from hitting the organization directly and instead funneled them to a compensation fund. The group, which is valued at more than \$1 billion, has not said how much they intend to spend via this fund. Revelations of misconduct in US scouting circles came to widespread attention in 2012 when the Los Angeles Times published internal documents spelling out details of decades of sexual abuse.

Some 5,000 "perversion files" were uncovered, identifying about as many alleged culprits among

scout leadership, including scout masters and troop leaders. Most incidents were never reported to authorities, and the BSA took it upon themselves to remove the accused offenders. Negotiations will now begin between victims, the BSA and their insurers to determine the amounts to be paid.

BSA "will have to sell some of their properties," Moses said, adding it was a "very complicated" process that could last one or two years. Moses in 2010 won \$20 million for a former Boy Scout abused by his leader. Multiple cases have been filed against the BSA since 2012, especially after several states extended the statute of limitations on allegations of child sexual assault.

And US Catholic Church leadership, also roiled by child sexual abuse claims, was set to meet virtually for its annual conference. The agenda has been updated to include discussion on a damning Vatican report released last week on defrocked Cardinal Theodore McCarrick and the silence of many of his peers. The 450-page document details several incidents in which young priests or seminarians reported allegations of abuse by McCarrick but investigations were never opened. — AFP

Rocky road to recovery for...

Continued from Page 1

But the mutt - although not named Rocky after the iconic movie character - nevertheless battled as hard as the underdog pugilist to recover. "She made it," Dubey said. "She's a fighter." As Rocky recovered - learning to use her chin for balance - the rescue organization released a video about her plight which went viral on social media, attracting the attention of the global dog rescue group Wild at Heart Foundation. They pledged to

find her a home, while an Indian national living in London paid for her new legs.

In July Rocky took her first steps on her new limbs, made by a leading doctor in Jaipur. Rocky will board a plane early today in New Delhi and head to London, where she will eventually settle down with an adopter, Dubey said. "Rocky is a very brave dog - even after going through trauma and losing both her legs, she's displayed incredible resilience, strength and spirit to live," he said. "Now she's ready to fly to her forever home."

An estimated 30 million stray dogs roam India's streets, with the mixed breeds often shunned in favor of pedigree pooches that confer societal status. "In India, pets are often abandoned and abused. We are very happy that Rocky will have a safe and open space," said Dubey. — AFP

Local

Al-Nasr SC inaugurates late Sheikh Abdullah Al-Sabah sporting complex



KUWAIT: Officials and guests pose for a group photo during the inauguration of the late Sheikh Abdullah Al-Mubarak Al-Sabah sporting complex. — Photos by Yasser Al-Zayyat



Sheikh Mubarak Al-Abdullah Al-Sabah with Ahmad Mubarak and Abdullah Mubarak at the inauguration.



Sheikh Mubarak Al-Abdullah Al-Sabah, Al-Nasr SC President Khaled Al-Dihani and other officials applaud during the inauguration.



Ahmad Mubarak Abdullah Al-Mubarak unveils the plaque.



The late Sheikh Abdullah Al-Mubarak Al-Sabah sporting complex.



Sheikh Mubarak Al-Abdullah Al-Sabah with Ahmad Mubarak and Abdullah Mubarak.

KUWAIT: The late Sheikh Abdullah Al-Mubarak Al-Sabah sporting complex was inaugurated Monday at Al-Nasr SC. In a statement on the sidelines of the opening ceremony, the Deputy Director-

General of the Public Authority for Kuwaiti Sports Affairs Dr Saqer Al-Mulla said that the new complex comes within a series of facilities, halls and stadiums sponsored by the authority. Mulla stressed that the

upcoming period will witness a boom in various sports facilities in order to serve sports and athletes. Meanwhile, Sheikh Mubarak Al-Abdullah Al-Sabah, in a speech delivered on behalf of the family of the

late Sheikh Abdullah Al-Mubarak, expressed his thanks to those in charge of Al-Nasr SC for their recognition of the late Sheikh Abdullah's efforts in serving the sporting field. — KUNA

Kuwait reports six COVID deaths, 556 new cases

KUWAIT: Kuwait registered 556 new COVID-19 infections in the past 24 hours, raising total infections to 137,885, the Ministry of Health announced yesterday. Deaths reached 848 with the addition of six fatalities, it added. Earlier, the ministry announced that 627 patients have recovered during the same period, bringing the total to 129,041. Official spokesperson of the Ministry of Health Dr Abdullah Al-Sanad said that there were 105 patients receiving treatment at intensive care units, while those still receiving treatment amounted to 7,996. Health workers conducted 6,521 swab tests in the past 24 hours, raising the whole count to 1,023,159, Dr Sanad added. — KUNA

Preparations to lift flight ban on some countries: Report

KUWAIT: Plans are ongoing for a decisive meeting with regards to restoring direct flights from some of the 34 countries where passengers are banned from flying directly to Kuwait, Al-Rai Arabic daily reported yesterday. It explained that the Directorate General for Civil Aviation completed preparations for various measures to welcome returning travelers - initially domestic helpers - according to the protocols health authorities have laid down. The government committee, headed by Social Affairs Minister and State Minister For Economic Affairs Mariam Al-Aqeel, will discuss the DGCA's plan that was reviewed during a meeting between State Minister for Services Affairs and State Minister for National Assembly Affairs Mubarak Al-Harees and DGCA officials.

Harees said "allowing the return of domestic helpers directly to Kuwait contributes to meeting the needs of Kuwaiti families," adding the return will be staggered, in preparation for the return of other workers needed by Kuwait in the near future. Informed sources said "lifting of the ban will be gradual, starting with countries providing domestic helpers, and may later include other workers needed by the government and economic sectors."

Stay safe. Stay home. Stay informed.

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Kuwait's Foreign Minister receives letter from Palestinian counterpart

Sheikh Dr Ahmad receives new Kazakh, Tunisian ambassadors

KUWAIT: Kuwait's Foreign Minister and Acting Information Minister Sheikh Dr Ahmad Nasser Mohammad Al-Sabah received yesterday a letter from Palestinian Foreign Minister Riadh Al-Malki on ways of boosting ties and issues of mutual interest. Palestinian Ambassador to Kuwait Rami Tahboob delivered the letter during a meeting with Sheikh Dr Ahmad, the foreign ministry said in a statement. Assistant Foreign Minister for Arab Affairs Fahad Al-Awadhi and Assistant Foreign Minister for Minister's office Saleh Al-

Loughani attended the meeting. In other news, Sheikh Dr Ahmad received copies of credentials of Azamat Berdybay as Kazakhstan's new Ambassador to Kuwait, and Al-Hashemi Ajeeli as Tunisia's new Ambassador to Kuwait. Sheikh Dr Ahmad wished the new ambassadors best of luck and for bilateral relations to further develop and prosper, a foreign ministry statement said. Deputy Foreign Minister Khaled Al-Jarallah, Assistant Foreign Minister for Protocols Dhari Al-Ajran and Loughani attended the meetings. — KUNA



KUWAIT: Kuwait's Foreign Minister Sheikh Dr Ahmad Nasser Mohammad Al-Sabah reads a letter from Palestinian Foreign Minister Riadh Al-Malki, while meeting with Palestinian Ambassador to Kuwait Rami Tahboob. — KUNA

Crimes

Man injured in Salmiya fight

KUWAIT: A Kuwaiti was injured during a fight with a compatriot in a Salmiya flat due to personal disputes. A security source said police received a call about the fight, so police and paramedics responded and transferred the injured man to hospital, while the other man disappeared. Detectives are investigating. Meanwhile, several youth were involved in a fight in Sulaibiya, so policemen intervened and broke up the fight and arrested a number of those involved, while others escaped. Investigations are underway.

Mugging

A Bangladeshi man told police that a person claiming to be a detective stopped him in Shuwaikh, then took KD 500 and a smartphone from him before escaping. The victim gave police the suspect's car's description. Another Bangladeshi resident in Nugra was mugged by three persons who approached him while he was in his taxi and took his wallet, which contained KD 50, his civil ID and ATM card.

Employee insulted

An officer at the fire force was sent for investigation for insulting a municipal employee who was removing a fence of a garden in a Jaber Al-Ahmad house. Police responded to a call from the municipality employee, who said he was insulted by the firefighter while removing the fence, though he was previously warned to remove it.

— Translated by Kuwait Times from Al-Rai

Kuwait, Australia hold first Senior Officials' Talks

KUWAIT: The governments of Kuwait and Australia held their inaugural Senior Officials' Talks (SOTs) yesterday, led by Kuwait's Assistant Foreign Minister Hamad Al-Meshaan and First Assistant Secretary Dr Angela Macdonald from Australia's Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade. Given the global COVID-19 pandemic, the SOTs were held virtually.

SOTs represent the realization of an MoU signed

Former Jordan deputy premier joins LOYAC board

KUWAIT: Dr Mawrwan Al-Muasher, the former deputy of prime minister of Jordan, joined the LOYAC Board of Trustees. Mohammed Jasem Al-Saqer, the president of LOYAC Board of Trustees, welcomed the joining of Dr Muasher, considering his joining is an enrichment for LOYAC. He noted that LOYAC Jordan plays important and great roles in the development of young Jordanian cadres. "The current stage calls for concerted Arab

efforts to give the youth a ray of hope in a better future," he said. The LOYAC Board of Trustees consists of Saqer, Derar Al-Ghanem, Fadwa Al-Hemedhy, Dr Saad Al-Barak, Omran Hayat, Fadya Al-Marzoq and Fareah Al-Saqqa. The board held its first meeting recently since the COVID-19 pandemic, in the presence of Dr Muasher and Rola Jardaneh, Chairperson of the Board of LOYAC Jordan, via Zoom.

Muasher expressed his happiness to join the board and his aspiration to contribute in providing opportunities to LOYAC which in turn provides opportunities for a large segment of Arab youth, which help develop their skills. "It also prepares them early for the labor market and empowers them in the economic sectors needed by their societies," he said. "LOYAC is an honorable model, and it

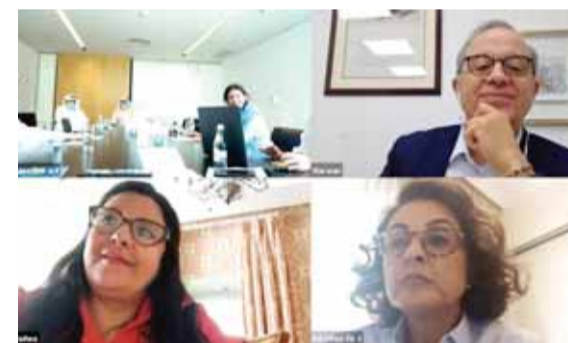
between Australia and Kuwait's then Foreign Ministers in February 2018 on the sidelines of the Iraq Reconstruction Conference. The talks focused on the key issues of food security, education and investment, as well as dialogue on common areas of foreign and strategic policy. As the first of its kind, a key outcome of the talks is a program of work that will underpin and drive the relationship for the coming years.

"The Australia-Kuwait relationship is a mutually beneficial partnership across a diverse range of fields, and of quiet achievement," said Australian Ambassador Jonathan Gilbert. "We want Kuwaitis to know that Australia is a key food security partner; that their students are receiving a world class education at our universities; and that we are a safe, secure and profitable destination for their invest-

ments. Australia is well positioned to meet the future needs of Kuwaitis, as the country grows and diversifies."



Australia is well positioned to meet the future needs of Kuwaitis, as the country grows and diversifies."



Muasher added. "We will collaborate together to help our countries to overcome the challenges of the current stage."

IWG organizes virtual presentation on managing stress during pandemic

KUWAIT: The International Women's Group held its first virtual meeting for the group's members recently, hosted by Kryssia Direcky, the wife of the Australian Ambassador. IWG President Ambreen Mustafaa, wife of the Pakistani Ambassador, gave a warm welcome to the participants; commemorated the late Amir and congratulated the new Amir HH Sheikh Nawaf Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah. In memoriam, a video was

shown highlighting HH Sheikh Sabah Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah's great international influence and achievements as a leader and a humanitarian.

Emilia Barr, International Consultant Psychotherapist and Coach, gave an enlightening and interactive presentation entitled 'Navigating balance and wellbeing on living with uncertainties and stress during COVID -19 times.' A question and answer session was held after the presentation where Barr's professional advice regarding how to deal with the inevitable psychological pressures caused by the pandemic and the need to achieve balance and implement lifestyle changes, was highly appreciated by the IWG members. The meeting ended with a raffle draw with beautiful gifts, and a video of the many activities, events and field trips IWG has organized over the past years. It was a great and safe opportunity to meet and renew bonds in these times of social distancing.



AmCham Kuwait, GIG, ABK distribute toys to BACCH, KACCH

KUWAIT: The American Business Council (ABCK-AmCham Kuwait) in close collaboration with its Chairman's Club members - Gulf Insurance Group (GIG) and Al-Ahli Bank of Kuwait (ABK) - recently organized an initiative to benefit Bayt Abdullah Children's Hospice (BACCH) and the Kuwait Association for the Care of Children in Hospital (KACCH). As part of this initiative, ABCK-AmCham Kuwait, Gulf Insurance Group (GIG) and ABK organized a day to visit KACCH. During the visit, the three organizations donated toys, coloring books and crayons to help children find healing through the power of play.

BACCH is the first-of-its-kind hospice in the Middle East providing the highest standard of multi-professional palliative care and family support to children with life-limiting and life-threatening illnesses. KACCH is a non-governmental charitable organization that helps children and their families cope with the stresses of hospitalization of their children. Gulf Insurance Group attaches utmost importance to its role in social responsibility, and the visit is an integral part of the Group's mission to benefit key segments of society with a focus on children and youth.

ABK's participation stems from its commitment to make a difference in the communities in which it operates and its devotion to being a force for good. Through its community-centric activities, the Bank advocates inclusive and social development to create an equitable society. ABCK - AmCham Kuwait consistently seeks strategic partnerships with Member companies and organizations driving engagement across various CSR activities and initiatives.



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Three arrested over Dresden museum jewelry heist

China praises UK diplomat for saving drowning woman



GADAREF, Sudan: Ethiopians who fled fighting in Tigray province are seen in a hut at Um Rakuba camp in this eastern Sudanese province on Monday. — AFP

Abiy vows 'final' push in Tigray

Ethiopia eyes Mekele as surrender ultimatum passes

ADDIS ABABA: Ethiopian Prime Minister Abiy Ahmed said yesterday military operations in the northern Tigray region would enter a "final" phase, as global pressure mounted to bring the two-week-old conflict to a swift end. Fresh air strikes hit the regional capital of Mekele on Monday as East African leaders called for an end to the conflict and for dialogue, which Ethiopia has so far resisted.

Abiy, last year's Nobel Peace Prize winner, announced a military campaign in the dissident region on November 4, saying it came in response to attacks by local ruling party, the Tigray People's Liberation Front (TPLF), on federal military camps. The fighting has left hundreds dead and prompted around 25,000 Ethiopians to flee across the border into Sudan, with many more refugees expected. On Friday Abiy declared the TPLF was "in the final throes of death" and gave troops in the region three days to "rise up" and side with the national army.

In a Facebook post yesterday morning, he said their

time was up. "The three-day deadline for the Tigray regional special forces and militia to hand themselves over to national defense forces instead of being a tool for the greedy junta has expired. Those Tigray special forces and militia who used the three-day deadline are appreciated," he said. "Since the deadline has been completed, in the coming days the final law enforcement activities will be done."

A communications blackout in Tigray has made it difficult to assess how the fighting is going. Federal forces claim to control Tigray's western zone, where fighting has been heavy, and over the weekend said they had seized the town of Alamata, 180 km south of the regional capital, Mekele. But Tigrayan leader Debretsion Gebremichael told AFP yesterday that "the government and people of Tigray" would hold their ground. "This campaign cannot be finished. As long as the army of the invaders is in our land, the fight will continue. They cannot keep us silent by military force," he said.

Abiy has resisted calls by world leaders to cease

hostilities and accept mediation. On Monday, his deputy prime minister Demeke Mekonnen flew to Uganda and then to Kenya to meet with the presidents of the regional heavyweights. "A war in Ethiopia would give the entire continent a bad image," Ugandan President Yoweri Museveni wrote on Twitter after meeting Demeke. "There should be negotiations and the conflict stopped, lest it leads to unnecessary loss of lives and cripples the economy."

But Museveni later deleted the tweet, and an Ethiopian official said Demeke made clear negotiations were not an immediate possibility. Kenya's President Uhuru Kenyatta later called for a "peaceful" resolution of the crisis. Abiy's government has said there can be no mediation until Tigray's leaders have been disarmed and brought to court. The TPLF dominated Ethiopian politics for three decades before Abiy came to power in 2018, and a bitter feud has grown as they have been sidelined from politics, becoming ever more defiant towards the central government.

Spreading conflict

A government statement yesterday said the army had carried out "precision led and surgical air operations outside of Mekele city based on information received of specific critical TPLF targets". Debretsion said there were civilian casualties, which the government denied. A resident of Mekele told AFP there was a low-flying warplane over the city Monday that was "very scary, very loud" and that at least one civilian died in a strike not far from a university campus. Details on the strike and any casualties could not be verified. In recent days the TPLF has fired rockets on airports in Ethiopia's Amhara region, south of Tigray, and in the capital of neighboring Eritrea. The TPLF accuses Ethiopia of enlisting Eritrean soldiers in the fight, which Ethiopia denies. The strikes on Asmara in particular have reinforced fears Ethiopia's conflict could draw in the wider Horn of Africa region. The Nobel Committee, which awarded its prestigious peace prize to Abiy for his efforts to heal divisions with Eritrea, said late Monday it was "deeply concerned". — AFP



ISTANBUL: US Secretary of State Mike Pompeo meets Ecumenical Orthodox Patriarch Bartholomew I at the Greek Orthodox Patriarchate yesterday. — AFP

Pompeo in Turkey for fraught visit with no official talks

ISTANBUL: US Secretary of State Mike Pompeo paid a fraught visit to Istanbul yesterday that included no official meetings and an agenda focused on religious freedoms that Ankara dismissed as "irrelevant". Ties between Washington and its strategic NATO ally have remained tense despite a personal friendship between US President Donald Trump and his Turkish counterpart Recep Tayyip Erdogan.

A group of 20 to 30 Turks shouted "Yankee go home!" as the evangelical Christian Pompeo headed in for a meeting with the Patriarch Bartholomew I of Constantinople - the spiritual leader of the Greek Orthodox world - to express his "strong position" on religious freedoms. Pompeo had publicly criticised Erdogan's controversial conversion of Istanbul's emblematic Hagia Sophia monument into a mosque in July. "An incredible privilege to be here," Pompeo told the patriarch. The foreign ministry declared ahead of Pompeo's arrival that the US should "first look in the mirror" before making an issue of the "completely irrelevant" subject of the freedom of faith in Turkey.

Preparing for Biden

Pompeo's seven-nation tour has been complicated by his unabashed support of Trump's unsubstantiated claim of election fraud - and attempts by US allies to position themselves for Joe Biden's incoming presidency. The US diplomat's two-night stay in Paris included a meeting with French President Emmanuel Macron but no press conference that usually follows such talks. Yet the Turkish leg seemed destined for problems from the start.

Officials said Pompeo wanted to visit Istanbul to see the patriarch and was only ready to meet Erdogan and Turkish Foreign Minister Mevlut Cavusoglu on the condition they come to him from the capital Ankara. A meeting seemed possible after intense negotiations before the talks fell apart. "This was a scheduling issue," a senior US official said. "President Erdogan's schedule shifted and made it impossible to fit the parameters that from the very beginning we had set out". — AFP

Hurricane Iota tears through Central America

BILWI, Nicaragua: Hurricane Iota was barreling through Central America yesterday, hours after making landfall as the strongest Atlantic storm this year along a stretch of Nicaraguan coast devastated by a powerful storm just two weeks ago. Authorities rushed to evacuate thousands of people from coastal areas of Nicaragua and Honduras in the immediate path of the storm. The weather system has already left one person dead after sweeping the Colombian Caribbean island territory of Providencia, where it caused widespread damage. US forecasters at the National Hurricane Center warned of "life-threatening storm surge, catastrophic winds, flash flooding, and landslides" in Central America. Iota became the only Atlantic hurricane this year to reach Category 5 status - the maximum level on the Saffir-Simpson wind scale - soon before it made landfall in Nicaragua on Monday evening. Hurricanes of that force destroy homes, wreck power supplies and most of the affected area is "uninhabitable for weeks or months," the NHC said.

The storm dropped to Category 4 before midnight and by 3:00 am yesterday (0900 GMT) the storm had slowed substantially with sustained winds of 165 km per hour. The NHC forecasts Iota to weaken rapidly as it moves further inland and to dissipate over Central America by today. Colonel John Frey Sepulveda, the police chief on Providencia, said the local hospital had lost part of its roof and the territory of around 6,000 people was without power.

Hundreds of people living in Nicaragua's coastal indigenous communities near the city of Bilwi were still waiting to be evacuated earlier Monday after enduring

the last devastating storm to hit the territory just weeks earlier. "With Hurricane Eta we didn't get out, but this one is more dangerous," said Marisol Ingram, whose wooden home was badly damaged by Eta and was at risk of being swept away by Iota.

Eta made landfall in the same area as a Category 4 hurricane in early November before easing to a tropical storm, bringing widespread flooding and landslides that left 200 people dead. The Atlantic has seen a record storm season this year with 30 named storms and 13 hurricanes. Warmer seas caused by climate change are making hurricanes stronger for longer after landfall, scientists say.

Evacuations underway

Shelters in Nicaragua, already stretched by those made homeless by Eta, were being overwhelmed by new arrivals. Eufemia Hernandez, coordinator of a center at Uraacan University, told AFP. In Bilwi, residents spent the day desperately trying to secure roofs of flimsy wooden homes. "The wind is too strong, it took everything, the roof and the wooden windows of my house," said Jessi Urbina, a resident of the El Muelle neighborhood in Bilwi.

Prinsila Glaso, 80, told AFP that her community south of Bilwi had been "destroyed" in the wake of Eta, and the coming Hurricane Iota would leave little behind. "I haven't eaten. I don't know where I'm going to sleep here. I'm very sad," she said. Other local residents said that the wind blew the roofs off of houses "like they were made of cardboard."

El Salvador declared a "red alert" ahead of the hurricane's projected path through Central America. Neighboring Guatemala, with vast areas still recovering from Eta, was also on high alert. Iota had already caused strong gusts and heavy rainfall in parts of Honduras, according to disaster agency COPECO. Local media reported that more than 175,000 people had been evacuated since Saturday, mostly in areas previously flooded by Eta. — AFP



BILWI, Nicaragua: A girl is seen near a small house at the beach on Monday as Hurricane Iota moved over the Caribbean towards the Nicaragua-Honduras border. — AFP

Questions over Qaeda future after leaders' 'deaths'

PARIS: The reported deaths of Al-Qaeda's top two leaders in recent months have raised questions about the future strategy and strength of the terror network, already a shadow of the global force it was two decades ago. The New York Times reported last week that Al-Qaeda's deputy leader Abdullah Ahmad Abdullah, who went by the nom-de-guerre Abu Muhammad Al-Masri, was secretly killed in Tehran in August by two Israeli operatives at Washington's behest.

Meanwhile, prominent experts on Al-Qaeda have quoted sources as saying that Ayman Al-Zawahiri, who succeeded Osama Bin Laden as the chief of the group behind the Sept 11, 2001, attacks on the United States, is also dead. Iran has strongly denied the report over the killing of Abdullah, while Al-Qaeda has not issued any confirmation of the purported death of al-Zawahiri through its usual media channels. Yet the reports have come as questions grow over Al-Qaeda's future intentions, with the network radically different from the franchise that spread fear around the world under the leadership of the charismatic Bin Laden.

'Very typical of AQ'

The killing of the Saudi in a US operation in Pakistan in 2011 left the group in the hands of Zawahiri, an Egyptian veteran of jihad and the key Al-Qaeda ideologue, but without Bin Laden's ability to rally radicals around the world. Hassan Hassan, director of the US-based Center for Global Policy (CGP), said at the weekend that Zawahiri had died a month ago of natural causes.

And Rita Katz, director of the jihadist media monitor SITE, said unconfirmed reports were circulating that Zawahiri had died. "It is very typical of AQ to not publish news about the death of its leaders in a timely manner," she said. Nonetheless, this is not the first time there have been reports of Zawahiri's death, only for him to re-emerge on several occasions. "Intelligence agencies believe he is very sick," said Barak Mendelsohn, associate professor at Haverford College and author of several books on Al-Qaeda and jihadism. "Ultimately, if it did not happen now, it will happen soon," he told AFP. If either or both men are dead, the group they have left behind can in no way be compared to the network which planned and carried out the Sept 11 attacks, analysts say. — AFP

International

Three arrested over spectacular Dresden museum jewelry heist

1,600 officers deployed in the raids and arrests

BERLIN: German police yesterday arrested three suspects and raided properties over a spectacular heist a year ago in which more than a dozen diamond-encrusted items were snatched from a state museum in Dresden. Investigators were searching 18 properties in Berlin, including 10 apartments as well as garages and vehicles, in connection with what local media had dubbed one of the biggest art heists in modern history.

The main target of the probe was the so-called "Remmo clan", a family of Arab origin notorious for ties to organized crime whose members were in February convicted in another high-profile museum break-in in central Berlin. Prosecutors did not name the three detained, but said they are German citizens. They added however that they were hunting another two suspects of the Remmo family, Abdul Majed Remmo and Mohammed Remmo, both 21, over the Dresden heist.

All five are accused of "serious gang robbery and two counts of arson," said Dresden prosecutors.

The robbers had launched their brazen raid on the Green Vault museum in Dresden's Royal Palace on November 25, 2019. Having initiated a partial power cut and broken in through a window, they had snatched priceless 18th-century jewelry from the collection of the Saxon ruler August the Strong.

Items stolen included a sword whose hilt is encrusted with nine large and 770 smaller diamonds, and a shoulderpiece which contains the famous 49-carat Dresden white diamond, Dresden's Royal Palace had said. The director of Dresden's state art collection, Marion Ackermann, had refused to put a value on the stolen items, calling them "priceless".

Tuesday's raids in the investigation codenamed "Epaulette" after the glittering shoulderpiece were "focused on the search for the stolen art treasures and possible evidence, such as data storage media, clothing and tools," police and prosecutors said in a statement.

Experts have warned that the chances of recovering the haul are slim, with the precious stones likely re-cut in the year that has lapsed since the crime.

100-kg gold coin

Dramatic CCTV footage released at the time showed one of the robbers breaking into a display case with an axe. Bild daily said the robbers first drove off



DRESDEN: Police officers bring an arrested man into the building of the Higher Regional Court in Dresden, eastern Germany, yesterday after raids of properties in connection with a spectacular heist on Green Vault museum in Dresden's Royal Palace on November 25, 2019. — AFP

with the loot in an Audi before abandoning and setting fire to the vehicle. They then reportedly climbed into a Mercedes that they had been painted over in taxi colors, using it in their getaway race back to Berlin. Police hunting for the suspects had launched several appeals, offering up to half a million euros reward for information leading to their arrests.

Yesterday, around 1,600 officers were deployed in the raids and arrests, with special reinforcements called in from across the country to help.

The Remmos had been implicated in another high-profile museum robbery in the heart of Berlin in which a 100-kilogramme (220-pound) gold coin was stolen. Two out of three of the suspects convicted in February in that case belonged to the family.

Police have found no trace of the Canadian coin since the late-night heist in March 2017 from the Bode Museum, located close to Chancellor Angela Merkel's Berlin apartment. The "Big Maple Leaf", one of five

police chief Didier Lallement told reporters, adding that those migrants who were cleared to remain in France would be given accommodation but that those without bona fide asylum claims "were not destined to remain on French soil".

Many, mostly men, had travelled alone to Europe and who had been living on the streets in Paris for months, moving from one dismantled camp to another. The vast majority were Afghan but some came from Sudan, Ethiopia and Somalia. Some 70 buses were laid on to take them to 26 shelters.

'Locked down outdoors'

The head of the Paris branch of the Medecins du Monde NGO, Louis Barda, expressed concern for migrants living in squalid camps "where respecting barrier gestures is impossible". "These people are being locked down outdoors," he said. The medical charity Medecins sans Frontieres (Doctors without borders) carried out a sample test last month on 800 migrants living in different migrant centers in the Paris region where it provides assistance. One in two — 50.5 percent-tested positive for COVID in ten temporary shelters, the survey showed.

MSF blamed the situation on overcrowding. Many of the migrants who arrive in Paris see Britain as their final destination. From Paris, thousands have travelled north to the French port of Calais and attempted to stow away on a truck heading across the Channel to England. A small number attempt the crossing by boat. — AFP

2,000 migrants cleared from Paris camp amid COVID fears

SAINT-DENIS, France: French police yesterday cleared a migrant street camp outside the Stade de France stadium north of Paris where around 2,000 people, mainly Afghan and African, had been living in cramped tents. Dozens of police were deployed to carry out the operation, which took place in the midst of a nationwide coronavirus lockdown.

The occupants of the camp, which had mushroomed in size in recent weeks, were taken by bus to COVID-19 testing centers. Those who tested positive were to be placed in isolation while those who tested negative were to be taken to various shelters and sports halls around the French capital. Paris is a key stop-off point on the European migrant route, with tented camps repeatedly sprouting up around the city only to be torn down by the police a few months later. Over the past year, migrants have decamped to the suburbs to try avoid being moved on by the police.

During the first anti-COVID lockdown in March-April, a smaller camp housing around 700 migrants was cleared in the suburb of Aubervilliers, also close to the Stade de France. "These camps are unacceptable," Paris



PARIS: Migrants wait to be evacuated by French police at a makeshift camp set below the A1 highway in the north of Paris' popular suburb of Saint-Denis yesterday. — AFP

Experimental mRNA vaccines come to fore

WASHINGTON: The "messenger RNA" technology used by the Pfizer and Moderna COVID-19 jabs works by hacking into the machinery of human cells and turning them into vaccine factories.

This platform has never received approval-but the coronavirus pandemic might be its moment to shine. All vaccines work by training the body to recognize certain proteins, called "antigens," that are made by disease-causing viruses or bacteria-thus priming the immune system to mount a response. Traditional vaccines, like those for measles or the flu, do this by either injecting people with small amounts of the virus, or by giving them weaker

"attenuated" forms of the virus. But according to Drew Weissman, an immunologist at the University of Pennsylvania responsible for a key safety breakthrough in mRNA technology, "those take a lot of time to develop and to optimize."

It can take scientists months to develop vaccines based on weakened viruses grown inside, for example, chicken eggs. By contrast, this newer type of vaccine relies on messenger RNA, molecules that play a vital role in human biology, by putting DNA instructions into action and guiding cells on how to make proteins. The synthetic mRNA in both the Pfizer-BioNTech and Moderna-NIH vaccines carry instructions for a surface protein of SARS-CoV-2, called the "spike protein," which the virus uses to invade human cells.

The vaccines make human cells grow these proteins so that they resemble the virus-which in turn elicits the production of antibodies that will latch on to the real virus and stop it from doing harm. With mRNA vaccines, "the only thing you need is the sequence" of the antigen, said Weissman, which can take just a few weeks to find

and construct. The technology was first developed in 1990, but it wasn't until the mid-2000s that Weissman and Katalin Kariko-now a senior vice president at Germany's BioNTech-found a way to modify synthetic RNA to prevent it from triggering a dangerous inflammatory response that was killing lab mice. There are certain important differences between the two vaccines. Moderna has announced that its vaccine can remain stable at standard refrigerator temperatures of 2-8 degrees Celsius (36-46 degrees Fahrenheit) for 30 days.

It can be kept in long-term storage at standard freezer temperatures of -20 degrees Celsius (-4 degrees Fahrenheit) for up to six months. Pfizer's vaccine, on the other hand, needs to be stored in deep-freezer conditions of -70 degrees Celsius (-94 degrees Fahrenheit), which could complicate supply chain logistics, particularly in less developed countries. On the downside, Moderna's vaccine has about three times more genetic material per dose than its Pfizer counterpart, according to Zoltan Kis, a research associate at Imperial College's Future Vaccine Manufacturing Hub. —AFP

In recent years, so-called "clans" of primarily Middle Eastern origin have become a particular focus for police in Berlin. Investigators last year targeted the Remmos with the seizure of 77 properties worth a total of 9.3 million euros, charging that they were purchased with the proceeds of various crimes, including a 2014 bank robbery.

In another huge heist this month, robbers hit a German customs office, making off with 6.5 million euros (\$7.7 million) in cash. Investigators said they drilled through a basement cellar through to the vault, snatching bags of cash. Police have offered 100,000 euros in reward for information leading to the arrest and/or conviction of the suspects. — AFP



MOGADISHU: Fighting began yesterday in Mogadishu and hundreds of residents have been wounded in the Madina hospital. — AFP

6 dead after suicide bomber attacks Somali restaurant

MOGADISHU: Six people died yesterday in Somalia's capital Mogadishu when a suicide bomber blew himself up in a restaurant near a police academy, a police spokesman and a witness said.

It was unclear who was behind the attack. "A blast occurred at a restaurant near School Policio (police academy)," police spokesman Sadik Ali told reporters in a WhatsApp message group shortly after the blast went off. Later he told Reuters six people, including the perpetrator, had died in the bombing.

A witness, shopkeeper Mohamed Ali, told Reuters police opened fire after the blast went off. He said he could see huge clouds of smoke rising above the restaurant and ambulances trying to reach the site, in the city's Hamar Jajab district near Mogadishu port. Another witness, Mohamad Ahmed, told Reuters heavy rain had sent a lot of people into the restaurant to seek shelter. "As I was sipping tea and looking down, (a) blast occurred. From there I don't know what happened," he said. His legs, hands and head had been hit by shrapnel from the explosion, which he said had also given him concussion. Al-Qaeda-allied Islamist group al-Shabaab frequently carries out bombings in Mogadishu and elsewhere in Somalia as part of its campaign to topple the central government. The group wants to establish its own rule in the Horn of African country based on its own strict interpretation of Islam's sharia law. — Reuters

News in brief

Morocco's king warns Polisario

RABAT: Morocco's king warned Monday that his country would react with the "greatest severity" to any attack in Western Sahara, as the pro-independence Polisario Front said conflict would continue until Rabat ended its "occupation" of the disputed territory. The United Nations said that both sides had exchanged fire, and urged restraint. Moroccan King Mohammed VI, speaking after a telephone call with UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres, said Rabat remained committed to a ceasefire. But Morocco also "remains firmly determined to react, with the greatest severity, and in self-defense, against any threat to its security", the king said, quoted in an official statement. — AFP

Twitter CEO denies bias

WASHINGTON: Twitter chief Jack Dorsey said in remarks prepared for a Senate hearing that the social network's filtering during the US election campaign was not a sign of bias, despite claims to the contrary by conservatives. "In the lead up to the 2020 elections, we made significant enhancements to our policies to protect the integrity of the election," Dorsey said in his written remarks, obtained by AFP. "We applied labels to add context and limit the risk of harmful election misinformation spreading without important context because the public told us they wanted us to take these steps." — AFP

Nigeria protest response slammed

LONDON: Billionaire philanthropist Mo Ibrahim on Monday hit out at the Nigerian government for a crackdown on unarmed civilians at a protest against a hated police unit, that spilled over into wider calls for better governance. Human rights monitor Amnesty International has said security forces shot and killed 12 people during the protest in Nigeria's biggest city, Lagos, on October 20. But the military last week denied shooting live rounds, insisting that soldiers only fired blanks at the crowds who had gathered in defiance of a curfew. —AFP

HK judicial 'reform' calls

HONG KONG: A senior Chinese official yesterday backed calls to "reform" Hong Kong's judiciary, in a landmark speech signalling Beijing's determination to assert more control over the city's independent legal system. Semi-autonomous Hong Kong owes much of its success to a transparent and internationally respected common law legal system that stands in stark contrast with the opaque, party-controlled courts in authoritarian China. —AFP



UN General Assembly president Volkan Bozkir. —AFP

UN Assembly president assails Security Council

UNITED NATIONS: UN General Assembly president Volkan Bozkir on Monday criticized the Security Council, saying it was failing to respond to the world's biggest challenges due to "competing interests."

"The council has, on many occasions, failed to carry out its responsibility to maintain international peace and security," Bozkir, a Turkish diplomat, said at a debate on reforming the body. "Competing interests among its members and frequent use of the veto have limited the Security Council's effectiveness. Even in some of the most urgent humanitarian crises, the council could not provide a timely and adequate response." There has been growing criticism of the body, which has not been reformed in decades, with France's President Emmanuel Macron saying in a recent interview with Le Grand Continent that it "no longer produces useful solutions."

Bozkir said reform of the Security Council was "an unavoidable imperative-both challenging and essential." Since the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic, the Security Council has held few meetings devoted to the virus. It took more than three months to overcome friction between the United States and China to pass a resolution on July 1 calling for more international cooperation and to support a call by the secretary-general for a ceasefire in war-torn countries to help fight the disease. —AFP

International

NATO chief warns of 'high' price of hasty Afghan pullout

US Senate chief blasts Trump troop withdrawal plans

BRUSSELS: A hasty pullout of US and allied troops from Afghanistan could see the country become a "platform for international terrorists" again, NATO chief Jens Stoltenberg warned yesterday. His blunt message, given in a statement, was in response to reports that US President Donald Trump is planning to accelerate the withdrawal of American forces from Afghanistan, where they support a NATO mission, and from Iraq.

"The price for leaving too soon or in an uncoordinated way could be very high," Stoltenberg said. "Afghanistan risks becoming once again a platform for international terrorists to plan and organize attacks on our homelands. And ISIS (the Islamic State group) could rebuild in Afghanistan the terror caliphate it lost in Syria and Iraq," he said. The warning was unprecedented criticism by Stoltenberg of a Trump decision. Up to now, the NATO secretary general has been careful to not publicly contest statements by Trump relating to the Alliance.

But after his defeat in US elections this month by Joe Biden, Trump—who remains in power until January 20 next year—fired his defense secretary Mark Esper, replacing him with Christopher Miller, who said last weekend of American troops in conflicts abroad: "It's time to come home."

Trump reportedly wants to cut US troop numbers in Afghanistan to around 2,500, from more

than 5,000 currently, before his term ends. He also reportedly wants to pull out 500 soldiers from Iraq.

Stoltenberg in his statement repeated what he said in the past, that NATO troop levels in Afghanistan remained under continual review and that, "when the time is right, we should leave together in a coordinated and orderly way". He said there were currently fewer than 12,000 NATO soldiers in Afghanistan, "and more than half of these are non-US forces". Funding for their mission to train and assist Afghan security forces was allocated "through 2024," he added.

Meanwhile, US Senate Majority Leader Mitch McConnell warned President Donald Trump Monday against accelerating troop reductions in Afghanistan and Iraq, saying it would give extremists a "big propaganda victory." Addressing reports that Trump plans to announce within days sharp cuts to US forces in both countries, the Republican Senate chief said the US would be "abandoning" partners.

He added that the move would leave room for the Taliban to take control of Afghanistan and the Islamic State group and Al-Qaeda to rebuild. "The consequences of a premature US exit would likely be even worse than president Obama's withdrawal from Iraq back in 2011, which fueled the rise of ISIS and a new round of global terrorism,"

McConnell said on the Senate floor.

"It would be reminiscent of the humiliating America departure from Saigon in 1975," McConnell spoke after media reports said the Pentagon had received directives to prepare to bring back another 2,000 US forces from Afghanistan and 500 from Iraq before Trump steps down on January 20.

That would leave only about 2,500 troops in each country, fewer than US military officials have said is enough to ensure stability. Before he was fired on November 9, defense secretary Mark Esper had insisted on keeping 4,500 troops in Afghanistan until the Taliban reduced its attacks on the Afghan government to show a commitment to peace talks. The Pentagon did not confirm the reports, which said Trump could announce the withdrawals this week. Trump entered office nearly four years ago pledging to end US wars abroad. He has appeared determined to get close to that before he steps down, following his November 3 election loss to Democrat Joe Biden.

He said last month he wanted US troops home "by Christmas" and his National Security Advisor Robert O'Brien refined that to mean the Afghan presence would fall to 2,500 as early as January.

McConnell, normally a close political ally of Trump, warned a rapid withdrawal would "delight the people who would wish us harm." "The specta-



BRUSSELS: A hasty pullout of US and allied troops from Afghanistan could see the country become a "platform for international terrorists" again, NATO chief Jens Stoltenberg warned yesterday. —AFP

cle of US troops abandoning facilities and equipment, leaving the field in Afghanistan to the Taliban and ISIS, would be broadcast around the world as a symbol of US defeat and humiliation, and a victory for Islamic extremism," he said.

"It would hand a weakened and scattered Al-Qaeda a big, big propaganda victory and a renewed safe haven for plotting attacks against America." —AFP

China praises UK diplomat for saving drowning woman

BEIJING: Beijing yesterday praised a British diplomat who was filmed diving into a river in southern China to save a drowning student, a rare warm moment between two countries at loggerheads over human rights. Britain's mission in the southwestern city of Chongqing said Monday that Consul General Stephen Ellison leapt into action at the weekend to save a woman who had fallen into a river coursing through a nearby tourist town.

The video on Chinese social media-viewed more than 170 million times in China—shows Ellison

pulling off his shoes and jumping in to rescue the woman, who was floating face down.

"I think he should be commended for his act of bravery. I'd like to give him a big, big thumbs up," said foreign ministry spokesman Zhao Lijian at a routine briefing yesterday. Ellison's actions also earned praise from British Foreign Secretary Dominic Raab, who tweeted: "His bravery and commitment demonstrates the very best of British diplomats around the world." The 61-year-old former engineer had only recently been appointed to the role in the southern metropolis after serving for years at the main embassy in Beijing, and is an accomplished triathlete, according to local media reports. The praise comes at a time of increased tension in the UK-China relationship, as Britain has frequently criticized China over its human rights record on issues including Hong Kong and Xinjiang, and barred Huawei from its domestic 5G networks. —AFP



Stephen Ellison, British consul-general in Chongqing, rescues a drowning student, who had fallen into a river in Chongqing, China on Nov 14, 2020, in this screenshot taken from video. —Reuters

Thai police fire water cannon, tear gas at rally

BANGKOK: Thai police yesterday fired water cannon and tear gas on pro-democracy protesters attempting to get close to parliament, where lawmakers were debating possible changes to the military-scripted constitution. Thailand has seen months of student-led demonstrations demanding reform to the constitution and monarchy, and for the current prime minister to quit.

Several thousand took to the streets around the parliament building yesterday, where riot police had blocked off roads with concrete and barbed wire. Police fired water cannon at protesters trying to dismantle a barricade, and later used water laced with irritant, sending demonstrators scrambling to wash their eyes.

Some sheltered behind giant inflatable rubber ducks which protesters had planned to float along the river behind parliament as lawmakers debated inside. "What are police thinking by firing water

cannon at people? The police are serving a dictator," one protest leader said over a loudspeaker.

At one point police were forced to retreat when protesters threw tear gas canisters back into their lines. Five people were taken to hospital for treatment, medical officials said.

Student-led rallies have rocked Thailand since July, demanding the removal of Prime Minister Prayut Chan-O-Cha—who took power in a 2014 coup—and reform of the military-scripted constitution. Some in the movement have also called for reforms to the monarchy—a once-taboo subject—sending shockwaves through the Thai establishment. As police and protesters clashed, lawmakers were considering whether to debate seven possible constitutional amendments.

They include a proposal to replace the present military appointments in the Senate with directly elected representatives. But any constitutional change in Thailand is expected to take a long time and the junta-appointed Senate is unlikely to vote itself out of power.

Protesters insisted they just wanted to listen to the parliamentary debate.

Several opposition lawmakers came out of parliament to observe the protest and try to urge the police not to crack down hard on demonstrators.

ters," said Gazerdier, dressed in a blue dress and white headscarf to protect her from the blazing sun. "When the shells started to rain down on our house, we all panicked and fled in the dark." The bombardment not only destroyed her house in the western Tigray town of Humera, the site of reportedly some of the heaviest fighting, but also separated her from her family. Everyone scattered, and she has yet to make contact with them. "I met some friends who were fleeing too, and I followed them," she added. "I looked around several times in search of my daughters, but to no luck."

She has found some help at Um Raquba, 80 kilometers (50 miles) from the border, but conditions are spartan, with so far only basic emergency relief set up at the isolated camp. She stops other Ethiopians to tell them her story, but no one pays attention. So many have terrible stories to tell. "I have a daughter who lives in Khartoum but I don't know her address," she said quietly. "How can I find her in this big city?"

Ethiopian Prime Minister Abiy Ahmed announced on November 4 he had ordered military operations in Tigray in response to attacks by the regional ruling party, the Tigray People's Liberation Front (TPLF).

The conflict has turned ethnic divides deadly, said



BANGKOK: A sticker of self-exiled Thai academic Somsak Jeamteerasakul is stuck on a police riot shield next to the Thai Parliament as pro-democracy protesters hold a rally in Bangkok yesterday. —AFP

Taopipop Limjitrakorn, an MP from the pro-reform Move Forward Party said police were ignoring pleas to de-escalate the situation. "Police should not be overly violent and threaten them," he told reporters. One group of protesters confronted several hundred ultra-royalist supporters who were staging their own rally, with the two sides throwing bottles and other objects at each other. —AFP



KHARTOUM: An Ethiopian refugee, who fled intense fighting in his homeland, sets up a tent in the Um Raquba camp in the town of Gadaref, east of Khartoum after being transported from the border reception center. —AFP

Gerdo Burhan. If you are Tigrayan and captured by government soldiers, you are in trouble, said the 24-year-old. "They ask you, with a gun pointed at you, if you belong to Tigrayan forces," he said. —AFP

accordingly" to ensure the protesters left peacefully. The Ministry of Religious Affairs would not give details about what it said were "successful talks" with the TLP, but the government released a statement ordering the release of all activists arrested over the past three days. The French embassy did not respond to requests for comment.

Adam Weinstein, a fellow at the Quincy Institute think tank said it was unlikely the government would move to cut ties with France, but that the episode had shown the TLP's "growing power to mobilize without warning." Phone services were restored late Monday after being suspended in both Islamabad and Rawalpindi for two days, a common tactic used by authorities to prevent communication between protesters and leaders. —AFP

Escape from horror: Ethiopians recall Tigray conflict

UM RAQUBA REFUGEE CAMP, Sudan: For Ethiopians who escaped intense fighting in their northern homeland of Tigray by fleeing into Sudan, they are now safe; but the terrifying nightmare of what they witnessed haunts them. "I saw bodies dismembered by the explosions," said Ganet Gazerdier, a 75-year-old sitting alone in the dust at Um Raquba refugee camp in the east of the country, newly opened to cope with a sudden influx into Sudan of over 27,000 people fleeing air strikes, artillery barrages and massacres in Ethiopia.

"Other bodies were rotting, lying on the road, murdered with a knife", she added. Distraught at having been forced to flee their homes, traumatized by becoming separated from family members in the mad rush, and horrified after witnessing killings, refugees wander as if dazed in the camp. "I lived with my three daugh-

Pakistani Islamists end anti-France protest after talks

ISLAMABAD: A Pakistani Islamist party yesterday called off an anti-France demonstration on its third day, after securing the release of protesters arrested following clashes with police. Ultra-conservative Pakistan has seen scattered protests since French President Emmanuel Macron defended the right to criticize Islam as part of freedom of

speech, triggering anger across the Muslim world. Up to 5,000 protesters on Sunday had attempted to reach the capital Islamabad from the nearby city of Rawalpindi, but authorities blocked their path with shipping containers. Hundreds of protesters remained at the roadblock throughout Monday and into yesterday morning.

The Tehreek-e-Labbaik Pakistan (TLP) which led the protest said it called off the demonstration after late night talks with the government, claiming officials had agreed to kick out the French ambassador and impose an official boycott of French products. But a senior government official who asked not to be named said that the "government has no intention of cutting diplomatic ties with any country." He added that the situation had been "handled

News in brief

Russia sees record virus deaths

MOSCOW: Russia reported yesterday a record high 442 new coronavirus-related deaths as the country's regions struggled to cope with overflowing morgues and medicine shortages. While Europe has reintroduced new restrictions in response to a second wave of coronavirus infections sweeping across the world, Russia has refused to enforce a new nationwide lockdown. Health authorities on Tuesday recorded 22,410 new infections making Russia's virus caseload the fifth-highest in the world with some 1.95 million registered infections. —AFP

Fauci lauds Moderna results

WASHINGTON: The United States' top infectious disease scientist on Monday hailed early trial results from Moderna's COVID-19 vaccine as "stunningly impressive," and said the findings were an emphatic validation of experimental mRNA technology that some had doubted. In an interview with AFP, Anthony Fauci said he would have settled for injections that protected 70-75 percent of people from falling sick. "The idea that we have a 94.5 percent effective vaccine is stunningly impressive. It is really a spectacular result that I don't think anybody had anticipated would be this good," he said. —AFP

Ghana anti-graft prosecutor quits

ACCRA: Ghana's special anti-corruption prosecutor has quit, accusing President Nana Akufo-Addo of "political interference" over a report into a controversial gold royalties deal. The move comes just three weeks ahead of a presidential election that sees Akufo-Addo facing a tight race against former leader John Mahama. Former attorney general Martin Amidu announced his resignation late on Monday, saying he had become convinced "that I was not intended to exercise any independence" in the job. Amidu was appointed by Akufo-Addo in 2018, sparking hopes that he could help curb graft in the country. —AFP

Extradition case of Huawei exec

VANCOUVER: Huawei executive Meng Wanzhou finished the first day of a new round of extradition hearings Monday in Vancouver, as the two-year anniversary of her arrest by Canadian authorities approaches. Meng, chief financial officer of the Chinese tech giant, has been fighting extradition to the United States, where she faces fraud and conspiracy charges related to alleged violations by Huawei of US sanctions on Iran. Her December 2018 Vancouver arrest plunged Canada-China relations into crisis. Days later, two Canadians were detained in China, accused by Beijing of espionage in what Ottawa has insisted was a retaliatory move, but which Beijing says was unrelated, while insisting Meng has violated no laws. —AFP

Gay marriage legal in Nevada

LOS ANGELES: Nevada has become the first US state to enshrine in its constitution the right of gay couples to marry, overturning an 18-year ban on same-sex marriage. The measure was put to voters during the recent presidential election on November 3 and the final results were published in recent days. Voters approved the "Marriage Regardless of Gender Amendment" by 62 percent, with 38 percent against, according to the Nevada secretary of state's office. "It feels good that we let the voters decide," advocacy group Equality Nevada president Chris Davin told NBC News. —AFP

Business

WEDNESDAY, NOVEMBER 18, 2020

Biden calls for new US stimulus package

President-elect meets business and labor leaders amid pandemic resurgence

WILMINGTON: President-elect Joe Biden on Monday called for a new stimulus package to help the United States recover from the damage caused by coronavirus pandemic. Biden renewed his plea for more aid following a meeting with business and labor leaders to lay out his plans for the world's largest economy.

The type of massive stimulus spending only Washington lawmakers can approve is regarded as key in getting the US back on its feet after the mass layoffs and sharp downturn in growth caused by COVID-19, but Republicans and Democrats have been unable to agree on a new package.

Biden, a Democrat who triumphed over Republican President Donald Trump in elections earlier this month, called for Congress to back a \$2.2 trillion measure approved by the Democrat-led House of Representatives. "It has all the money and capacity to take care of each of those things now. Not tomorrow, now," Biden said in a speech in his hometown Wilmington, Delaware, the state he represented for three decades in the Senate.

But Republicans in the Senate have refused to support a measure anywhere near that large, preferring to pass smaller bills targeted at specific needs, which Democratic leaders have rejected. Congress in March approved the \$2.2 trillion CARES Act, which included a program of loans and grants to aid small businesses as well as expanded payments to the workers who lost their jobs. Those programs were seen as crucial in helping sectors like retail sales recover from the downturn, but they expired over the summer, raising fears of a renewed slump in economic activity.

"This is about keeping Americans afloat. Get them

through this pandemic, get them through where they still—their businesses are able to come back," Biden said. "The money is there."

Two runoff elections in Georgia set for early January will decide if Democrats can take control of the Senate and give the party unified control of Congress, but Biden called for Republicans to overcome their opposition to a spending package in the weeks before the new Congress is seated.

"There ought to be at least a dozen of them have the courage to stand up and save lives and jobs now. We should be doing it now," he said.

Unprecedented transition

Trump's refusal to concede the election result, which is unprecedented in modern US history, is complicating Biden's planning. The president has launched a flurry of long-shot lawsuits against the election results in key states and prevented his officials from working with Biden's transition team.

Responding to a question from a reporter, Biden, a former vice president, warned "more people may die" of coronavirus if the administration refuses to coordinate with the incoming team, particularly on distributing potential vaccines. Biden has found easier recognition of his victory outside Washington politics, meeting virtually on Monday with heads of major American companies like Mary Barra of General Motors and Microsoft's Satya Nadella, as well as Richard Trumka, president of the AFP-CIO trade union federation.

The president-elect outlined his economic program, pledging his support for unions and for raising the national minimum wage to \$15 per hour, and invest



WILMINGTON: US President-elect Joe Biden (left) and US Vice President-elect Kamala Harris (right) meet virtually with business and labor leaders at The Queen in Wilmington, Delaware on Monday. —AFP

\$300 million into making the US competitive in emerging technologies, "creating three million good-paying jobs." He also repeated his plan to alter the US tax structure.

"We're going to have a fair tax structure that makes sure the wealthiest among us and corporations pay their fair share," Biden said. The president-elect spoke as the United States faces an increasingly grim

outlook for the coming winter months as COVID-19 infections hit levels unseen since the pandemic took off in March. "We're going into a very dark winter," Biden said. He said he agreed with union and corporate leaders that the world's largest coronavirus outbreak could be stemmed by "rallying the country behind a national strategy with robust public health measures, like mandatory masking." —AFP

US being left behind after Asia forms RCEP: US Chamber

WASHINGTON: The US Chamber of Commerce said on Monday it was concerned the United States was being left behind after 15 Asia-Pacific economies on Sunday formed the world's largest free-trade bloc, cementing China's dominant role in regional trade.

The Chamber welcomed the trade-liberalizing benefits of the new Regional Comprehensive Partnership Agreement (RCEP), saying US exporters, workers and farmers needed greater access to Asian markets. But it said Washington should not join the bloc. RCEP covers 30 percent of the global economy and 30 percent of the global population, joining for the first time Asian powers China, Japan and South Korea. It aims in coming years to progressively lower tariffs across many areas.

The United States is absent from both RCEP and the successor to the Trans-Pacific Partnership (TPP), leaving the world's biggest economy out of two trade groups that span the world's fastest-growing region. Myron Brilliant, executive vice president of the Chamber, said US President Donald Trump's administration had moved to confront unfair trade practices by China but secured only limited new opportunities for US exporters in other parts of Asia.

Trump in early 2017 quit the TPP agreement, which his predecessor, Barack Obama, had negotiated as part of a US pivot to Asia. Trump has not concluded any comprehensive new trade deals in Asia since then, Brilliant said. "Given the shortcomings of RCEP, we would not recommend the United States joining," Brilliant said, noting that recent US trade agreements had included stronger, enforceable rules on issues such as digital trade, non-tariff barriers and intellectual property protections.

"The United States should, however, adopt a more forward-looking, strategic effort to maintain a solid US economic presence in the region," he said. "Otherwise, we risk being on the outside looking in as one of the world's primary engines of growth hums along without us."

Brilliant noted that US exports to the Asia-Pacific market had increased steadily in recent decades but that the market share of US firms had declined. He underscored the importance of the Asia-Pacific market, citing forecasts that call for an average growth rate of over 5 percent in 2021 and a rapid expansion in the middle class. —Reuters

Report names and shames countries cosy with Big Tobacco

PARIS: The global tobacco industry has aggressively lobbied governments during the COVID-19 pandemic to expand markets and blunt measures designed to curb their business, a report from watchdog groups aligned with the World Health Organization claimed yesterday. A ranking of 57 countries based on their

UK airline EasyJet dives into historic loss on virus

LONDON: EasyJet yesterday posted the first annual pre-tax loss in its 25-year history, prompting it to seek more government help as the coronavirus pandemic hammers air travel. The British no-frills carrier suffered a pre-tax loss of £1.27 billion (\$1.7 billion, 1.4 billion euros) in its reporting year to September. That contrasted with a year-earlier profit of £430 million.

Passenger numbers halved to 48.1 million as Covid-19 travel restrictions slammed demand. Revenue slumped by a similar proportion to stand at £3.0 billion, EasyJet said in a results statement.

It added that it plans to fly no more than 20 percent of normal capacity during its current first quarter ending on December 31. But chief executive Johan Lundgren said the company was "well positioned and expecting to bounce back strongly" after responding "robustly and decisively" to the virus fallout.

The airline is in the process of axing up to 4,500 jobs or almost one third of its staff as it seeks to navigate the crisis, mirroring painful cost-cutting across the

world aviation sector.

It has raised more than £3.1 billion in extra liquidity since the start of the deadly pandemic, including £600 million from the British government's emergency Covid Corporate Financing Facility.

The carrier yesterday said it is "planning to extend... borrowing" from the facility after talks with the Bank of England and UK Treasury department.

'Robustly and decisively'

"I am immensely proud of the performance of the EasyJet team in facing the challenges of 2020," Lundgren said in the statement. "We responded robustly and decisively, minimizing losses, reducing cash burn and launching the largest... restructuring program in our history." He also cheered "welcome news" on a Covid-19 vaccine that could potentially herald a longer-term return to normality.

"We retain the flexibility to rapidly ramp up when demand returns... We know our customers want to fly with us," he said. The carrier grounded its entire fleet on March 30 as Britain went into an initial lockdown, returning to the skies with only a very limited schedule in the middle of June. There was a modest recovery in summer demand—but "widespread quarantine measures introduced in September once again eroded demand and consumer confidence to travel", it noted.

US retail sales miss forecasts; Walmart shines

WASHINGTON: US retail sales increased less than expected in October and could slow further, restrained by spiraling new COVID-19 infections and declining household income as millions of unemployed Americans lose government financial support.

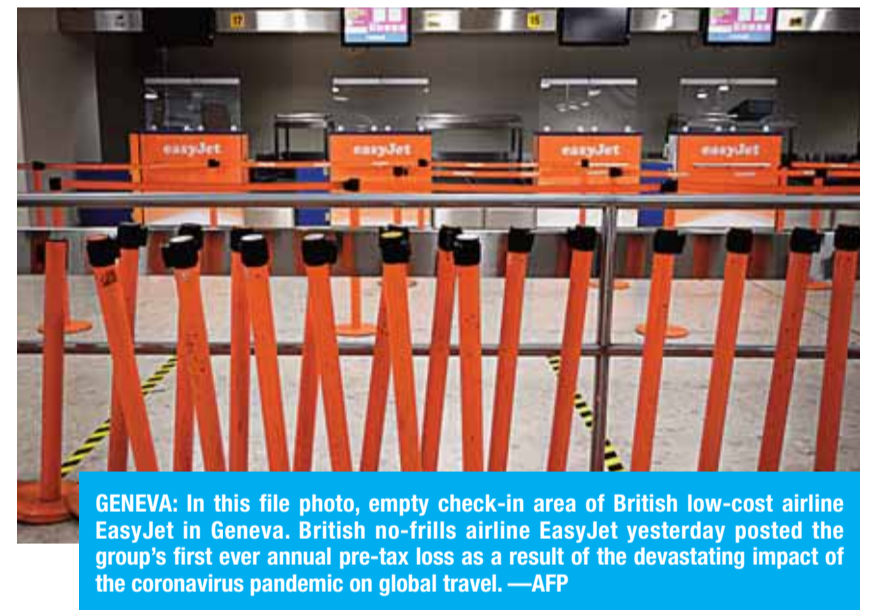
Retail sales rose 0.3 percent last month, the Commerce Department said yesterday. Data for September was revised down to show sales surging 1.6 percent instead of shooting up 1.9 percent as previously reported. Economists polled by Reuters had forecast retail sales would gain 0.5 percent in October. Excluding automobiles, gasoline, building materials and food services, retail sales nudged up 0.1 percent after a downwardly revised 0.9 percent increase in September. These so-called core retail sales correspond most closely with the consumer spending component

of gross domestic product. They were previously estimated to have risen 1.4 percent in September.

Daily new coronavirus cases have been exceeding 100,000 since early this month, pushing the number of infections in the United States above 11 million, according to a Reuters tally. Some state and local governments have imposed new restrictions on businesses. Restrictions and consumer avoidance of crowded places like bars and restaurants could undercut spending and trigger another wave of layoffs, further squeezing incomes following the loss of a government weekly unemployment subsidy.

The supplement, which was part of more than \$3 trillion in government coronavirus relief, has lapsed for millions of unemployed and underemployed workers. Millions more will lose benefits next month when a government-funded program for the self-employed, gig workers and others who do not qualify for the regular state unemployment programs expires.

Another government program providing benefits for people who have exhausted their six months of eligibility for state aid will also lapse at the



GENEVA: In this file photo, empty check-in area of British low-cost airline EasyJet in Geneva. British no-frills airline EasyJet yesterday posted the group's first ever annual pre-tax loss as a result of the devastating impact of the coronavirus pandemic on global travel. —AFP

The airline has been hit additionally by a second lockdown currently in force across much of Britain. In reaction to the results, EasyJet shares sank 4.0 percent to 746.20 pence in morning London deals. The stock is down by about 45 percent in 2020, mirroring sharp falls across the entire aviation sector.

Hopes of there being a vaccine as early as this year have however handed airlines

some big gains over the past week. "EasyJet shareholders will be hoping that the worst is now behind them," noted William Ryder, equity analyst at Hargreaves Lansdown stockbrokers.

"Although capacity is still expected to be down dramatically in the first quarter of EasyJet's 2021 financial year, positive vaccine news has promised light at the end of the tunnel." —AFP



In this file photo, a Walmart logo is seen outside a store in Washington, DC. —AFP

end of December.

A second rescue package is unlikely before President-elect Joe Biden takes office in January. Economists expect moderate retail sales growth for the rest of the year, which will contribute to slower economic growth after a historic rebound in gross domestic prod-

uct in the third quarter. A JPMorgan survey of credit and debit cardholders showed a broad decline in spending through Nov 9, with big drops in states where COVID-19 is spreading most rapidly. Growth estimates for the fourth quarter are below a 5 percent annualized rate. —Agencies

willingness to keep Big Tobacco at bay puts Japan and Indonesia at the bottom of the list, with Romania, China and Lebanon among the 10 worst offenders.

The United States is the lowest-ranked wealthy nation, with Malaysia, Spain, Germany and India also seen as too accommodating, said the report by non-profit groups based in France, England and Thailand. "The tobacco industry has a well-documented history of deception and of capitalizing on humanitarian crises, and it is using the pandemic to attempt to improve its deteriorating public image," commented Adriana Blanco Marquizo, head of the secretariat for the World Health Organization Framework Convention on Tobacco Control.

Tobacco claims some eight million lives each year from cancer and other lung diseases, a million in China alone. In several countries, stringent tobacco control measures were defeated or diluted.

Philip Morris International (PMI), for example, "lobbied for the promotion and sale of its heated tobacco product in a dozen countries", resulting in the lifting of bans, lower taxes, and a voice in government-led deliberations on regulating tobacco products, the report found.

Taxes on these new nicotine delivery devices are now lower than cigarettes in France, Germany and Japan. Costa Rica, Zambia and Bangladesh also eased the tax burden for tobacco firms.

During the pandemic, tobacco firms have been handing out personal protective equipment, ventilators and hand sanitizers in countries across the world. "While publicizing its charitable acts to resuscitate its image as being part of the solution, the industry was simultaneously lobbying governments not to impose restrictions on its business," the report said. In Kenya, the government listed tobacco products as "essential products" during the pandemic, and in Jordan cigarettes were delivered with bread and other foods directly to neighborhoods. In contrast, India and South Africa banned the sale of tobacco products during the pandemic. —AFP

Business

Public money guarantees 'risky' fossil fuel projects, say experts

Natural gas extraction projects jeopardizing efforts to curb global warming

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

Eight export credit agencies awarded loans to French oil giant Total in July, when the company signed a \$14.9-billion financing agreement for a liquefied natural gas (LNG) project in Mozambique.

The province where the sites are located, Cabo Delgado, has been grappling with a jihadist insurgency since 2017 that has killed more than 1,000 people. Certain energy projects have become "very risky in general, let alone in regions with unstable politics", said Dylan Tanner from Influence Map, which monitors the energy sector.

Beyond security issues, the think tank highlighted in a report last year the risk of "asset stranding" due to increasingly competitive renewable energy and tighter climate regulations. Credit export agencies use government-backed funds to shore up projects.

If the projects go sideways due to geopolitics or become obsolete as technology and environmental policy evolves, they end up costing the state, not private investors. "If there is a problem, taxpayers will pay for the damages, not the companies," Cecile Marchand, from Friends of the Earth France, told AFP. "Commercial banks would not take the risk of lending so much money on the long term without any insurance."

'Aware of climate concerns'

As well as the risk of financial loss and stranded assets, experts say projects such as Total's in Mozambique also call into question states' commitment to combat climate change. The 2015 Paris treaty enjoins nations to limit global temperature rises to "well below" two degrees Celsius (3.6 Fahrenheit) above pre-industrial levels through sweeping emissions cuts.

In order to meet a more ambitious cap of 1.5C of warming, the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) — the world's leading body on the



A general view of the French oil giant Total's refinery in Gonfreville-l'Orcher, northwestern France. —AFP

issue—says fossil gas use must decline from 132.95 Exajoules in 2020 to 112.51 Exajoules in 2030. "Such a decline cannot happen if the global gas industry continues to expand," Ted Nace from Global Energy Monitor told AFP.

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

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

A little over a month after Idai, northern Mozambique was hit by another devastating storm, Cyclone Kenneth. Scientists also warn of the consequences of methane leaks, inherent to LNG projects.

"Total is fully aware of climate concerns, has publicly recognized them for a long time, takes them into account in its strategies and develops concrete actions," a company spokesperson said.

'Not fair'

France put an end to hydrocarbon extraction in 2017, but has left the door open to continuing to

finance projects overseas until 2035. Analysts say this puts it on a collision course with the goals of a deal it midwived—the Paris accord requires each signatory to report only domestic emissions, not those it finances elsewhere. "This is clearly not fair, since in many cases... the gas will not be used domestically," Nace said.

"It would make more sense for responsibility for such projects to rest with the wealthy countries that will use the gas." Total said that in its initial phase the Mozambique project would see 100 million cubic feet of gas per day reserved for the domestic market. Separately, France's credit export agency Bpifrance is considering giving a guarantee of 700 million euros (\$827 million) to Total for a project in the Russian Arctic, an amount confirmed by the company.

Total has a 10 percent stake in the Arctic LNG 2 project, which aims to export the equivalent of seven billion barrels of oil — 12 times France's annual consumption. In a document obtained by AFP, Total said the "continued support" provided by the French treasury and Bpifrance has been "paramount to the success of Yamal LNG", the other major extraction projects in the Arctic. —AFP

Tesla to join S&P 500, shares surge

NEW YORK: Elon Musk's rising electric car powerhouse Tesla reached another landmark Monday when it officially qualified for the prestigious S&P 500. The California-based automaker will join the broad-based market index on December 21, S&P Dow Jones Indices announced Monday, prompting another wave of affection for Tesla stock.

Shares surged 11.5 percent to \$455.00 in after-hours trading. The stock has more than quadrupled this year as Tesla has built and delivered more electric autos, and Musk has wowed Wall Street with targets for further breakthroughs. The announcement marks Tesla's arrival as a consistently profitable company after building up losses in its first nine years as a public company. Tesla has reported \$451 million in profits through the first nine months of 2020.

Moving into the S&P is a marker of prestige and also boosts valuation because some mutual funds and other investment vehicles are linked to the benchmark.

With a market capitalization of almost \$387 billion, Tesla will be among the biggest companies in the index. As a result, the index is "seeking feedback through a consultation to the investment community to determine if Tesla should be added all at once on the rebalance effective date, or in two separate tranches," S&P Dow Jones Indices said. —AFP

Malaysia's AirAsia Group reviewing India investment

KUALA LUMPUR: Malaysia's flagship budget carrier AirAsia Group Bhd has given its strongest indication to date that it could exit India, saying yesterday it was reviewing its investment in a joint venture airline there. The group said in a statement that its operations in India, like those of its now-shuttered Japan business, have been draining cash and adding to the group's financial stress.

"Cost containment and reducing cash burn remain key priorities evident by the recent closure of AirAsia Japan and an ongoing review of our investment in AirAsia India," it said.

AirAsia shut its operations in Japan, the smallest of its foreign offshoots, last month. The airline owns 49 percent of AirAsia India, a joint venture with Tata Sons. The Times of India reported last month, citing sources, that Tata Sons' parent is in discussions to buy AirAsia Group's stake.

Group Chief Executive Officer Tony Fernandes told Reuters in September that the group intends to consolidate and strengthen its Asian foothold, which could mean one day exiting both Japan and India.

AirAsia Group said it remains confident of returning stronger, more robust and faster than many competitors, given strong signs of recovery



AirAsia planes are parked at Kuala Lumpur International Airport 2, during the movement control order due to the outbreak of the coronavirus disease (COVID-19), in Sepang. — Reuters

in its key domestic markets due to pent-up demand and numerous COVID-19 vaccines in near final stages of testing. "The general outlook is that air travel will be bouncing back real soon; we expect to get back to pre-pandemic levels on many routes across the Group by mid-2021, if not earlier," president for the group's airlines, Bo Lingam said.

AirAsia Group's share price touched its highest since June 29 yesterday in a second consecutive day of sharp gains, likely buoyed by news that US vaccine maker Moderna Inc's experimental vaccine is 94.5 percent effective in preventing COVID-19 based on interim data from a late-stage trial. Shares in its long-haul arm AirAsia X Bhd rose as much as 14 percent. — Reuters

creditors, as emergency credit guarantees and deferrals on companies' social security payments helped them through the early stages of the pandemic.

Switzerland is illustrative of the story playing out across Europe, with countries such as Britain, France and Spain also recording sharp falls in insolvencies this year. The German Institute for Economic Research (DIW) is also forecasting significant rise in insolvencies in Europe's largest economy next year after a decline this year.

"It's a Europe-wide situation where companies have been supported by such measures, but some of these are coming to an end. As a result there are now likely to be more insolvencies next year - Switzerland is not alone in reducing its measures," said Jan-Dominik Remmen at Deloitte.

In Switzerland, measures such as the temporary lifting of an obligation to report excessive debts have now expired. "The number of companies that have collapsed so far in Switzerland is just the tip of the iceberg," said Creditreform President Raoul Egeli. "There are lots of companies here which are just zombie companies," he added, referring to companies which would struggle to cover their debt payments in normal times.

Egeli expects higher-than-average Swiss bankruptcies next year, while Peter Dauwalder, head of restructuring at KPMG, said the number could double to 800 cases per month with the crisis accelerating structural change in many sectors. Sixty percent of Swiss companies were experiencing weaker demand a recent survey by the KOF Swiss Economic Institute showed, while 10 percent feared for their survival. — Reuters

Kuwait's connected future requires strengthening partnerships to build the local talent ecosystem

By Rico Lin, CEO of Huawei Technologies Kuwait

tech domains is key to the development roadmap of Kuwait.

Nurturing local talent as an integral part of Kuwait's overall ICT ecosystem is spreading advantages to all other sectors and industries in the country. A strong talent pool is therefore essential for Kuwait to reap the full benefits of digitalization, to unlock more opportunities for people and business, and to accelerate national recovery following the COVID-19 pandemic. A talent-focused and "innovation" mindset is the only way to address the requirements of a more digital-centric and sustainable future.

Today, the information and communications technology (ICT) sector forms the building blocks of more intelligent societies. This sector, and the people who work within it, are helping to drive Kuwait's industries and businesses forward. This provides the momentum for socio-economic growth while contributing towards achieving "New Kuwait" National Development Plan. The essential role of connectivity has never been more prominent than in the last year. Without fast connections provided by advanced telecom networks, video conferencing, cloud computing, and other technologies, the world would have ground to a halt during the lockdowns. Creating new value with synergy across these

In particular, the field of education was greatly impacted, yet also took advantage of connectivity and advanced technology solutions. New challenges arose in providing students with the means to advance their education without the use of physical labs, shared equipment, and traditional curriculums. Unfortunately, the digital divide might have widened during this period, setting back gains achieved in recent years.

While digital infrastructure has evolved to combat COVID-19 more broadly, Kuwait will need to simultaneously focus on equipping the country's youth with advanced technical skills to be the future leaders in achieving the targets of their country's ambitious national visions. That is easier said than done, of course. We have seen tremendous efforts made by the government and our partners towards growing talent in the ICT arena. Moving forward, continued work is needed as some clear priorities are identified.

For example, encouraging knowledge and experience sharing will create more open ecosystems. These provide more opportunities for technology to evolve in ways that are beneficial to society. Promoting the



value of public-private partnerships to nurture an innovation mentality and to foster ICT talent growth is also essential, particularly in terms of practical skills development. Universities must also strive to adapt their curriculum to meet the requirements of ICT talent cultivation in the future, with stakeholders such as government authorities, telecom operators, and ICT vendors making their own contributions through collaborative initiatives, programs, and other activities.

Huawei is continuously committed to provide our capabilities in Kuwait, so that people here can avail of the latest breakthroughs in vital areas like 5G, artificial intelligence, cloud, and more. Led by a new generation of talent, the rapid development of these technologies will have a significant impact on local economies, leading to business growth and social development. It is an ongoing journey as we collectively look to bring digital to every person, home, and organization.

Swiss liquidators ramp up hiring as zombie firms face bankruptcies

ZURICH: As employers shed and furlough staff in an effort to stay afloat during the COVID-19 pandemic, one employer in Switzerland has launched a recruitment drive - the Zurich liquidation service. In an ominous sign of what could lie ahead, the service has quadrupled the number of staff who visit shuttered companies, take inventory and collect assets which can be sold to pay creditors.

The Ascot Hotel and Swissotel in Zurich are among businesses which have already permanently closed after bookings evaporated. Other hotels, restaurants and bars are among those on the brink as government support measures wind down.

Beat Vogt, leader of the notaries service at the government-run Zurich liquidators service, said they were bracing for an expected increase in the number of liquidations next year, hiring 12 new staff who started training in November.

"It will be so significant that our system wouldn't be able to cope without the extra support. We have to be prepared." The number of bankruptcies in 2020 is, however, a fifth lower than in the previous three years, according to Creditreform, the Swiss association of

Business

Global Finance names KFH 'Safest Islamic Bank in GCC'

Prestigious status and robust position reflect the well-earned top global rankings



In this file photo, this illustration picture shows the logo of the online lodging service Airbnb displayed on a tablet in Paris. Airbnb posted a profit of \$219 million in the just-ended quarter as its home-sharing model proved resilient during the global pandemic, the platform said November 16, 2020 as it released its finances for its upcoming share offering. —AFP

Airbnb: Sharing model 'resilient' amid pandemic

SAN FRANCISCO: Airbnb said in its stock market filing Monday that its home-sharing model proved resilient during the global pandemic, as it posted a profit for the just-ended quarter. The San Francisco-based startup delivered a \$219 million profit in the three months ending in September, but nonetheless lost \$697 million in the first nine months of the year amid a 32 percent revenue drop as the Covid-19 outbreak crushed the travel sector.

In its first public release of its financial data, Airbnb said its home-sharing model has been "resilient" compared with others in the sector during the crisis. "People wanted to get out of their homes and yearned to travel, but they did not want to go far or to be in crowded hotel lobbies," the document said. "Our platform has proven adaptable to serve these new ways of traveling." Airbnb revenue slipped to \$2.5 billion in the first nine months of 2020 from \$3.7 billion a year earlier. Its losses for the nine-month period were roughly in line with last year's level.

The company has had mostly losing quarters, according to the filing, but has reported profits in the third quarter of each year from 2018. But Airbnb said its unique business model has proven to be valuable both for hosts and travelers seeking a safe environment during the global health crisis.

'Changing dynamic'

"We believe the stability in our active listings highlights the resilience of our business model, which does not require investment in fixed assets and real estate," the filing said. The 13-year-old company said the Covid-19 outbreak "has materially adversely affected our recent operating and financial results" and will continue to have an impact.

"However, we believe that as the world recovers from this pandemic, Airbnb will be a vital source of economic empowerment for millions of people," the filing said. It said the pandemic has "reinforced that travel is an enduring human desire, even in the face of challenges: and that people have been seeking travel options closer to their homes. —AFP

ABK partners with Visa to offer 3 Samsung Galaxy Watch3 weekly

KUWAIT: Al-Ahli Bank of Kuwait (ABK) announced its latest exciting 'Samsung Pay Visa Campaign', rewarding customers who use their Visa credit or prepaid card on Samsung Pay with a chance to win a Samsung Galaxy Watch3. The campaign will run through to 27 January 2021, awarding three lucky winners a Samsung Galaxy Watch3 every week when using an ABK VISA credit or prepaid card on Samsung Pay.

To enter the draw and win, customers must spend a weekly minimum of KD 20, locally or internationally using their ABK Visa credit or prepaid card through Samsung Pay on any POS terminal. Each KD10 spent automatically earns ABK cardholders one entry point for the Visa draw.

ABK's Samsung Pay offers users a better way to pay, offering a quick and contactless payment solution. The bank will continue to introduce innovative digital solutions, supporting a shift towards a cashless future.



KUWAIT: In its 29th annual ranking of the world's safest banks, the Global Finance Magazine has named Kuwait Finance House "KFH" as Safest Islamic Bank in the GCC - 2020. KFH has also been ranked fifth among all Islamic and conventional banks in the Middle East and 14th among the 50 banks ranked by Global Finance as the world's safest bank in the emerging markets.

KFH was selected through an evaluation of long-term credit ratings from Global rating agencies - Moody's, Standard & Poor's and Fitch and the total assets of the 500 largest banks worldwide.

The top rankings that KFH earned on the list of safest banks confirm its solid position thanks to prudent risk assessment, diversified products, geographical reach, stability and its high efficiency and ability to adapt to various economic conditions and volatility. The awards reflect the credibility and the prestigious position that KFH enjoys regionally and internationally, its solid financial positions, prudent procedures, feasible strategies and activities as well as diversified products and services. Furthermore, the awards confirm the sus-



Ranked 5th among all conventional, Islamic banks in ME

tainable growth KFH has achieved, its high valuable brand which boosts customer confidence, and its global leadership in Islamic finance industry.

KFH continues its strategy to lead the international development of Islamic financial services, and become the most trusted and sustainably most profitable sharia-compliant bank in the world, and to deliver superior innovation and customer service excellence while protecting and enhancing the interests of all its stakeholders. The innovation mentality has become an integral part of KFH's strategy and approach, which depend not only on enhancing the customer's banking experience, but also offers an exceptional and sustainable dimension in line with KFH's digital transformation strategy.

Founded in 1987 and headquartered in New York, Global Finance has readers in more than 191 countries and 33 years of experience in international financial markets.

The magazine is an international reference in the financial sector, covering topics of corporate finance, joint ventures, capital markets, currencies, banks and risk management.



Carmax Al Mulla opens express service center in Sulaibiya

KUWAIT: Al Mulla Carmax has inaugurated a new Carmax express service center in the Sulaibiya industrial area. The new service center was established to meet the rising demand for maintenance services following the successful opening of its first branch in Fahaeel.

Carmax provides superior service by experienced technicians who are able to service different car makes and brands. The center uses advanced tools and equipment to ensure delivery of quality services and highest levels of customer experiences by strictly adhering to the manufacturers' standards of repairs and maintenance. Al Mulla Group developed the Carmax concept as an independent service center that offers quality spare parts for all car brands and models at competitive prices. Carmax parts are designed and manufactured up to international standards. They are tested and verified to meet the highest standards of quality for the local market as well.

Carmax's services cover a wide range of products such as oil filters, coolants, lubricants, air cleaner parts, brake systems, batteries, and tires. The center is committed to providing a unique customer experience by introducing advanced features such as an automated notification to update vehicle owner of the status of the repair, online reservations, online payments, in addition to other customer-centric services that offer high standards of performance. Carmax also plans to launch a mobile maintenance service to better serve its customers.

Over the past seven decades, Al Mulla Group has become a pioneer in the automotive sector thanks to its focus on providing high-quality services using advanced technology to ensure customers receive an outstanding experience. With the launch of Carmax, Al Mulla Group enters a promising and growing market in Kuwait to service vehicles of all models.



The next cliff: Millions of jobless Americans risk losing aid

WASHINGTON: Millions of Americans will see their unemployment benefits disappear at the end of the year unless Congress extends pandemic-related programs that made the aid available to a wider swath of the workforce and for a longer period of time.

The looming expiration would spark the most substantial reduction to unemployment benefits since the end of July, when a \$600 weekly supplement - also added as part of the CARES Act - expired. And with coronavirus infections surging, some economists caution that job losses could rise during the winter, increasing the need for support.

Data released by the Labor Department last week showed the majority of people receiving unemployment benefits are now participating through pandemic-related programs created as part of the legislation passed by Congress in March. Meanwhile, the number of people receiving regular unemployment benefits is declining as people facing long stretches of joblessness exhaust their state benefits and move on to pandemic programs.

If nothing changes, more than 13 million people are at risk of seeing their benefits end, potentially leaving them with less money to pay the rent, buy groceries or cover other bills.

"The bottom line is that many workers will see a massive drop in living standards and increases in poverty," said Heidi Shierholz, director of policy for the Economic Policy Institute.

Lawmakers have to decide whether to extend two key programs. One known as pandemic unemployment assistance made unemployment benefits

available to freelancers and self-employed people who wouldn't normally be eligible.

Another program - pandemic emergency unemployment compensation - provided an additional 13 weeks of benefits for people after their state benefits ran out. More people are transferring to the pandemic emergency program as regular benefits expire.

Some may be able to receive another 13 to 20 weeks of benefits under a separate program that is not poised to expire, but it is not available in all states. Asked how he would help those facing long-term unemployment, President-elect Joe Biden on Monday called on Congress to pass the Heroes Act, a bill passed by the Democratic-controlled House of Representatives that would extend the two unemployment benefit programs, along with other assistance.

'We needed something stronger'

Some economists say the CARES Act programs patched up longstanding holes in America's safety net for the unemployed by making jobless benefits more generous and offering them to people who wouldn't normally qualify, including parents who cannot work during the pandemic because they have to care for children.

The benefits helped people to boost spending and pad savings and lifted millions out of poverty, even as unemployment surged, researchers found. "There was a recognition that we needed something stronger and broader than regular (unemployment benefits), and it actually worked," said Andrew Stettner, a senior fellow at The Century Foundation who is an expert on unemployment benefits. "Now we're about to end it way prematurely."

Vulnerable position

Regular unemployment benefits are typically available for up to 26 weeks in most states. Once



WASHINGTON: Data released by the Labor Department last week showed the majority of people receiving unemployment benefits are now participating through pandemic-related programs created as part of the legislation passed by Congress in March.

those benefits are exhausted, job seekers can move onto the pandemic emergency unemployment assistance, to receive a total of 39 weeks of benefits.

For people who have been out of work since mid-March, those emergency benefits could expire in mid-December. People who were out of work before the current crisis started, or who live in states such as Florida or North Carolina that offer fewer weeks of state benefits, may already be approaching the end of their pandemic benefits. Some job seekers may be able to receive what's known as extended benefits, a pre-pandemic program that provides up to 20 weeks of additional benefits, depending on the unemployment rate in that state. But those benefits are currently not available in 13 states, according to an analysis by the Center on Budget and Policy Priorities. —Reuters

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DR. FAHAD AL-MUKHAIZEEM
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Consultant Pediatrician-Canadian & American Board in Pediatrics-Canadian Board in Pediatric Emergency

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Tele:1802 555

daralshifa
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www.beautybeyond.com.kw

DR. WALEED S BUHAIMED
Consultant of General Surgery
Laparoscopic and Bariatric Surgery

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Mourners gather around a vehicle carrying the body of late Indian actor Soumitra Chatterjee during a funeral procession to a crematorium in Kolkata.



In this file photo actor Soumitra Chatterjee speaks after receiving France's highest national order of 'Chevalier (Knight) de la Legion d'Honneur' during an event in Kolkata.



The daughter of late Indian actor Soumitra Chatterjee in kisses his forehead during his vigil in Kolkata. — AFP photos

Tributes pour in for India acting legend **Soumitra Chatterjee**

Legendary actor Soumitra Chatterjee has been hailed as one of Indian cinema's leading lights after his death at the age of 85 from health complications after he contracted the coronavirus. Chatterjee appeared in around 300 films over six decades but was best known internationally for his work with Oscar-winning director

Satyajit Ray. He was admitted to a Kolkata hospital after testing positive for Covid-19 last month and was kept there as he suffered further ailments linked to the virus, according to local media. The acting icon's condition deteriorated and he died on Sunday, his daughter Poulami Bose wrote on Facebook. Prime Minister Narendra Modi said Chatterjee's

death was "a colossal loss to the world of cinema" and India's cultural life.

"International, Indian and Bengali cinema has lost a giant. We will miss him dearly," added West Bengal state chief minister Mamata Banerjee on Twitter. Bollywood megastar Amitabh Bachchan, who suffered his own bout of Covid-19 earlier this year, tweeted that

Chatterjee was "one of the mightiest pillars" of India's film industry and "a gentle soul". Chatterjee appeared in 14 of Ray's films and made his debut in the third installment of the director's acclaimed Apu Trilogy. He was in 2012 presented with Indian cinema's highest honor, the Dadasaheb Phalke, and France awarded him the Legion of

Honor three years ago. Thousands of mourning fans gathered in Kolkata near the crematorium where his body was taken late on Sunday, carrying candles and photographs of the actor. — AFP



Taylor Swift says back catalog sold without her knowledge

Taylor Swift has confirmed that the rights to her first six albums have been sold to a private equity firm without her knowledge, in the latest dispute over the pop megastar's lucrative back catalog. The 30-year-old singer has become one of the most bankable musicians in the world after more than a decade of chartbusting hits including "Shake It Off" and "I Knew You Were Trouble". But last year she began sparring publicly with music mogul Scooter Braun, who manages rival popstars Justin Bieber and Ariana Grande, after his company's decision to purchase a majority stake in the bulk of her recordings.

Swift said she had been trying to actively regain control of her master recordings for the last year in a late Monday post on Twitter, following a report by entertainment magazine Variety that Braun had sold the assets for \$300 million. But despite attempting to negotiate with Braun, she said her team had "received a letter from a private equity company called Shamrock Holdings" announcing they had purchased her music, videos and album art. "This was the second time my music has been sold without my knowledge," she wrote, adding that she had begun re-recording her earlier songs. Braun is yet to respond to Swift's tweet.

Swift had vowed last year to regain command of her first six albums by making her own new masters. She said at the time that she was contractually allowed to do so from this month. The dispute between Swift and Braun simmered for months last year after the industry mogul purchased Big Machine, the singer's label of more than a decade.—AFP

'Let women cook': Lebanese mock minister over sexist comment

Lebanese have poked fun at outgoing interior minister Mohamed Fahmi after he suggested the solution to a ban on deliveries during a coronavirus lockdown was for women to start cooking. Lebanon started a two-week partial lockdown on Saturday to try to stem the spread of the Covid-19 virus as cases topped 100,000 and intensive care hospital departments became overwhelmed. When a journalist asked Fahmi what Lebanese should do on Sunday when a day-long curfew suspended popular food deliveries from restaurants and supermarkets, he quipped: "Let women cook a little."

Appalled women reacted by lambasting the minister's sexist comment on social media, and vowing they were #Not_cooking_on_Sunday. "#Sexism results in deep rooted repression & discrimination against us women, national 'leaders' disgracefully support inequalities," associate professor Carmen Geha responded on Twitter. "I will cook happily the day they pick up and recycle garbage," she added, referring to oft-criticized public services. Award-winning journalist Dalal Mawad slammed what she called a "sample of the level of discourse and awareness among this country's politicians".

Lebanese men joined in posting images of themselves dicing up vegetables or shaking pans on the stove, as they took on the #Fahmi_challenge-to be a man and cook. "I apologize, honorable minister, that today I cooked for my sons," one user, a divorced man raising his sons on his own, wrote beside a picture of him serving a meal on Facebook. "I apologize because their mother is a doctor like me and the head of a department in France, and I and my children are very proud of her." Lebanon is also reeling from a devastating blast at Beirut's port in August that killed more than 200 people, and a raging economic

crisis that sparked mass protests last autumn against entrenched politicians viewed as incompetent and out of touch.

"Gender equality Mr Fahmi, have you ever heard about it? Or too busy ruining our country with your bunch of friends?," wrote another Lebanese man on Facebook in English. Another one made a video to the tune of the "Mission: Impossible" soundtrack, encouraging others to follow suit, and finishing with the revelation: "Men... also do the washing up." — AFP

Kim Kardashian enlists daughters Chicago and North to model 'first ever' skims line for kids

Kim Kardashian West's daughters North and Chicago modeled her new SKIMS Cozy Kids collection. The "Keeping Up with the Kardashians" star - who also has sons Saint, four, and 18-month-old Psalm with husband Kanye West - got the sisters, who are seven and two respectively, and some of their friends to showcase the loungewear pieces from the upcoming line, which launches on November 19, in a new shoot. And the kids' pieces even come in matching sizes for adults. Alongside a series of snaps from the photo shoot, including Kim wearing the same grey knitted top, trousers and slippers as North, which come in five shades, she announced on Instagram: "The drop you've been waiting for: NEW @SKIMS Cozy styles and our first ever sets for KIDS! Launching on Thursday November 19 in 5 colors, sizes XXS - 5X, and children's sizes 2T - 14 at 9AM PT / 12PM ET exclusively at SKIMS.COM. Preview the full collection now and join the waitlist to receive early access to shop. (sic)"

The 40-year-old businesswoman also took to her Instagram Stories to show off more of the line, which also includes shorts, robes and hoodies. She shared: "We're doing hoodies that zip up, with the little tank. I can't wait for you guys to see this photo shoot, first of all - North and all her friends and Chicago and all her friends." She

added: "Look at these little robes. 'I've been cutting these up for North, and these are official [now]. Pants, we're doing shorts, robes, hoodies and tanks.'" Meanwhile, Kim recently hit back at criticism of her SKIMS maternity collection, after she was accused of trying to pressure women to hide their natural figures. The mother-of-four



wrote on Twitter: "To anyone who has an issue with maternity solutionwear, and if you haven't been pregnant before you may not know the struggle of what it's like carrying all of this weight the way I did along with millions of strong women, @skims maternity line is not to slim but to support. (sic)"

The brunette beauty subsequently explained how and why her maternity line has been designed as it has. She wrote on the micro-blogging platform: "The belly part doesn't slim your belly, it's actually sheer and a thinner layered material compared to the rest of the garment. It provides support to help with the uncomfortable weight being carried in your stomach which affects your lower back - "and the compression on the leggings helps with pain relief caused by swelling. It is also worn after you have given birth and provides the comfort and support that most women need after delivery especially if you are recovering from a cesarean. "We launched this category in response to the tens of thousands of pregnant women who wrote us requesting it and because it was something I personally needed when I was pregnant myself. (sic)"

— Bang Showbiz



Richard Schiff hospitalized after testing positive for COVID-19

Richard Schiff has been hospitalized as he continues to battle COVID-19. The 65-year-old star and his spouse Sheila Kelley tested positive for the virus two weeks ago and were both "recovering" at home, where the pair found their symptoms to change "radically" from hour-to-hour. But in an update, the former 'West Wing' star announced he's currently being treated with anti-viral medication, oxygen and steroids, whilst his wife remains "fairly ill" at home. In his original post on Twitter, Richard wrote: "On Election Day I tested positive for Covid-19. This has been the most bizarre week of our lives. @thesheilakelley is also positive. — Bang Showbiz

Lifestyle | Features



Spanish flamenco dancer Miguel Fernandez Ribas known as El Yiyo poses during an AFP interview at the Teatro Real (Royal Theatre) in Madrid. — AFP photos



Spanish flamenco dancer Miguel Fernandez Ribas known as El Yiyo poses during an AFP interview.



Spanish flamenco dancer Miguel Fernandez Ribas known as El Yiyo performs next to dancer Jose Escarpin (right) during a rehearsal of "Flamenco Real" at the Teatro Real (Royal Theatre) in Madrid.

Meet Spain's new flamenco prodigy 'El Yiyo'

"El Yiyo", a flamenco dancer whose real name is Miguel Fernandez, honed his skills by watching YouTube videos. Now, aged just 24, he made his debut at Spain's main opera house with a show he developed during the country's virus lockdown. Spain's new flamenco prodigy was born into a Roma family in Badalona, near Barcelona, who are from the southwestern region of Andalusia, the birthplace of the art form which incorporates poetry, singing, guitar playing, dance and rhythmic hand-clapping and foot-stomping. "El Yiyo" recalls catching the attention of flamenco dancer Manuel Jimenez, alias "Bartolo", as a child while dancing at a family wedding.

"He told my parents that he wanted to give me free lessons, because I was a diamond he wanted to polish," he told AFP at Madrid's Teatro Real before his debut performance there on Friday night. "In our family, we celebrated good news by singing. Children sang and danced, it was very normal for

them, a reflex that I absorbed at a very young age without being aware of it." He was just seven when he first began performing for the public at a hall in Barcelona. At the age of 11 he was already the headline act during a tour of Taiwan. And before Spain went into a nationwide lockdown because of the pandemic in March, he danced for four months at the legendary Corral de la Moreria flamenco venue in Madrid.

'Dance of strength'

"El Yiyo", who has modeled clothes for Armani and IKKS and even featured in Vogue, used the lockdown to choreograph the show which he performed at the Teatro Real. He appeared on the stage alongside his brother Ricardo in a performance that displayed his ability to improvise. While he was performing a "zapateado", which is marked by a rapid rhythmic stomping of the floor, one of his heels broke. "El Yiyo" swiftly took off his shoes and continued the performance in his socks to the applause of the audience. "My dance is a state of

mind," he said, before adding it is "a dance of strength, of intensity".

While he was happy to be invited to perform at the two-centuries-old Teatro Real, he said there was still "a lot of ground to cover" before flamenco has the "weight" it deserves in august institutions such as the Madrid opera house. Slender and with shoulder-length hair, "El Yiyo"—a diminutive form of Miguellillo (little Miguel) — said he gets his inspiration from the great names of flamenco. "I try to learn something from all of them," he said.

Eclectic education

"El Yiyo" said he bolstered his formal dance training by watching YouTube performances of legendary flamenco stars who have passed away, such as Antonio Gades who he admires for his "elegance" and Carmen Amaya who performed in several Hollywood films at the peak of her career in the 1940s and who he called a "genius". The contemporaries he admires are Antonio Canales and Joaquin Cortes, who fuses

various styles with flamenco, and "Farruquito", hailed by critics for his entrancing, rapid foot-tapping turns who he is proud to have danced with.

While "El Yiyo" is more of a flamenco purist, he said he sees nothing wrong with fusing it with other genres like the blues, jazz or rock, a trend that has become more popular following the success of Grammy-winning Spanish singer Rosalia who mixes flamenco with reggaeton, trap and R&B. Rosalia, who is not Roma, has been accused by some of appropriating an art form with Roma origins. "I am in favor of variety, that way there is a wide range of purists, of non-purists, and that way flamenco is always talked about," said "El Yiyo". — AFP



Spanish flamenco dancer Miguel Fernandez Ribas known as El Yiyo performs during a rehearsal of "Flamenco Real".



A couple enjoy a fondue, the beloved Swiss national dish of cheese melted in a "caquelon" pot heated by an open flame in a former ski gondola at Restaurant Marzilbruecke in Bern. — AFP photos



A waiter wearing a protective face mask brings to a couple a fondue.

Swiss cheesed off over Covid threat to fondue conviviality

As Switzerland contends with one of the worst coronavirus surges in Europe, the Swiss are gripped by one melting-hot question: is it still safe to share a fondue? The beloved Swiss national dish consists of cheese melted down with white wine in a "caquelon" pot heated by an open flame. By tradition, Swiss cheese fondue is eaten by dipping in bread with long-handled forks, with several friends or relatives joining in and sharing the same pot. But can the convivial Swiss culinary experience still be done safely in the midst of a pandemic? Internet

question closely and has concluded: "The risk of contracting Covid-19 while enjoying a fondue with other diners is negligible." Put simply by Professor Christian Ruef, a Zurich-based infectious disease specialist: "In the fondue pot, the cheese reaches a sufficient temperature to kill any virus."

Whether it's a classic half-and-half mix of Vacherin and Gruyere cheeses, or a fondue done with tomatoes, morels or other variations, dipping in and eating therefore presents no risk in itself. However, Ruef recommended sticking to small groups, or even a fondue just

senting the country at the 1939-40 World's Fair in New York. While the first Swiss fondue recipes date back to the 17th century, fondue truly established itself as a national dish in the 1950s, when the famously neutral country's army put it in its cookbook. Even though fondues can be enjoyed at home or on an Alpine mountainside thanks to mass-produced kits and ready-to-use mixes, sharing a fondue with friends in a restaurant remains the heart of Swiss social life.

But now restaurants are shut in many parts of the country and the 10th Fondue Festival, which was to be held on October 31, was cancelled because of the restrictions on large gatherings. Could Covid-19 add fondue to its list of victims? "Absolutely not!" insisted Arnaud Favre, president of Les Compagnons du Caquelon, which runs the festival. "The Swiss national dish, as well as the love that all Swiss have for cheese, are stronger than any health measures," he told AFP. "Fondue mix sales have gone up by 10 percent since the start of the year. It goes to show that the restrictions have reinforced conviviality between family and friends," he said.

Lorenz Hirt, head of the Swiss Fondue Cheese Industry Association, also insisted he had "no worries", saying spring sales figures this year were even higher than in 2019. Indeed, Bertrand Gabioud, co-manager of La Fromatèque cheese boutique in Martigny, reckons fondue could be just the thing to help see the nation through the pandemic. "Fondue is a Covid-compatible dish which lends itself very well to the current situation because we greatly need good humor and conviviality," he told AFP. "It's the dish par excellence to get through these times." — AFP

for two. "The problem arises if you are seated together in a small space for an evening, and are talking loudly, laughing or even singing," he said. "These are ideal conditions for spreading the virus." Gerald Bongioanni, manager of Geneva's historic Cafe du Soleil, which normally serves up to 300 fondues a day during winter, put it succinctly: "The risk is not in the fondue pot but in the gathering."

Cheesy love story

Each region of Switzerland has its own favorite fondue cheese, be it Vacherin, Gruyere, Emmental or Comte. The iconic Swiss dish rose to international fame and popularity since repre-



A cooker wearing a protective face mask prepares a fondue.

sages are piling in on the hot topic. "Eat your fondue with a fishing rod", reads one suggestion for maintaining physical distancing. Another—with a touch more realism—proposes: "Each guest takes two forks and a knife, and it's fixed: one fork to dip in the fondue, the knife to help remove the bread and the second fork to eat it."

The press has called experts to the rescue, even dragging in Geneva's celebrated infectious disease specialist Didier Pittet. "A risk linked to fondue? Certainly not," said the man considered the godfather of alcohol-based hand rub. Switzerland Cheese Marketing is also making reassuring noises. The industry body insists it has studied the

Designer Isabel Marant apologizes for Mexican appropriation

French fashion designer Isabel Marant has apologized after the Mexican government criticized her for appropriating and selling clothes based on traditional indigenous patterns. Marant heads the latest fashion brand to be condemned by the Mexican government for copying indigenous designs, with similar complaints leveled against Spanish retail giants Zara and Mango. Culture minister Alejandra Frausto Guerrero published an open letter earlier this month demanding an explanation as to why her Paris-based company was selling garments based on motifs with documented origins in Mexico. One includes a cape that appears to copy a pattern used by the Purepecha community of northwestern Michoacan state, which retails on the fashion house's website for 490 euros (\$580).

Marant acknowledged to Frausto that Purepecha textiles had influenced her latest collection and said future designs

would properly "pay tribute to our sources of inspiration". "If the Isabel Marant house and the designer have disrespected the Purepecha community... they implore you, and the country you represent, to accept their most sincere apologies," said a letter from Marant, dated November 6 but made public on Frausto's Twitter feed late on Monday. In recent years Mexico has sought to publicly shame multinational brands that it has accused of ransacking the cultural heritage of poor villagers. Some of the country's leaders have also pushed to toughen a copyright law that already protects traditional patterns to punish "plagiarism that different indigenous peoples have suffered". — AFP



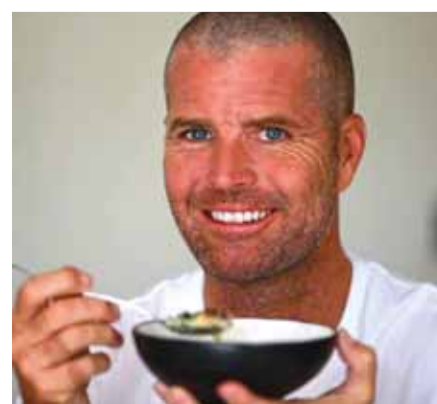
Designer Isabel Marant

Aussie celebrity chef axed after posting Nazi symbol

Australian celebrity chef and conspiracy theorist Pete Evans was ditched by several companies and had his books pulled from shelves yesterday after he posted a Nazi symbol to social media. Major Australian retailers said they would remove Evans' books and products from stores following a public backlash over his Instagram post that included a "Black Sun" symbol, an image associated with Nazi Germany and used by neo-Nazis. Publisher Pan MacMillan was among those publicly distancing themselves from Evans, telling retailers they could return his books.

Kitchenware brand Baccarat said it would stop producing and selling a line of products carrying his name. "In our view, the images and views expressed by Mr Evans are abhorrent, unacceptable and deeply offensive," Baccarat Australia said in a statement. His upcoming appearance on Australia's "I'm a Celebrity... Get Me Out of Here" reality television show was also reportedly cancelled. The since-deleted post features an image of a caterpillar wearing a "Make America Great Again" cap speaking with a butterfly that has the "Black Sun" symbol on its wing.

In a later video to his 1.7 million social media followers, Evans-stroking a horse as meditative music played in the background—said allegations made against him were "untrue, unfactual and a load of garbage". He also claimed he had to "Google what neo-Nazi meant". Since the coronavirus pandemic began, Evans has routinely used his platform to promote conspiracy theories about the outbreak. He is also known for promoting pseudoscientific dieting ideas such as the palaeolithic diet, earning him the nickname "Paleo" Pete. — AFP



Chef Pete Evans

Sports

Photo of the day



MTB freerider Remy Morton relaxes before riding in New Zealand. —Photo taken from www.redbullcontentpool.com

News in brief

La Liga slashes wage cap

MADRID: La Liga has slashed spending limits for its clubs by 610 million euros (\$724.25 million) for the 2020-2021 season due to the financial impact of the COVID-19 pandemic, Spain's top soccer league said yesterday. Barcelona's salary cap has been cut to 382.7 million euros from last season's 671 million euros, while defending champions Real Madrid can spend 468 million euros, down 172.5 million euros from last season's spending limit. Barcelona, who posted an after-tax loss of 97 million euros for the 2019-20 financial year, initiated a fresh round of pay cuts last month despite opposition from several players. The club had earlier imposed a temporary pay cut of 70% lasting from March to June, and got rid of several high earners, including striker Luis Suarez and playmaker Ivan Rakitic, in the close season. —Reuters

Option to use 5 substitutes

LONDON: England's Premier League must reconsider its position on limiting clubs to making only three substitutions per match as injuries mount amid a congested schedule, national team boss Gareth Southgate has said. Soccer's rule-making body, the International Football Association Board (IFAB), gave leagues the option of continuing to use five substitutes per match in the 2020-21 campaign after introducing the system earlier this year, with games coming thick and fast after the COVID-19 pandemic truncated the length of the season. While other top European leagues have taken up that option, Premier League clubs voted against it, though Southgate's call echoed complaints from a chorus of club managers asking for a change following injuries to England internationals Jordan Henderson, Raheem Sterling and Ben Chilwell. "We were able to make five changes against Belgium, we made four in the end and clubs don't have that option," Southgate told reporters. —Reuters

Ronaldo 'break my record'

TEHRAN: Former Iran striker Ali Daei has said he would be honored to see Cristiano Ronaldo break his record for the most goals in international soccer as the Portugal forward moves closer to his tally of 109. Ronaldo, the only other centurion in the men's international arena, has scored 102 goals in 168 appearances since his debut in 2003. "I would congratulate him directly," Daei was quoted as saying by Tasnim news agency. "Ronaldo has scored 102 goals with Portugal so far and will beat my record, I'm sure, but he still has seven goals to go. "It would be a real honor for me if a player of his caliber could beat my record. Ronaldo is one of the best players not only of this era, but ever. He's an absolute phenomenon." Daei, who captained Iran and retired in 2006, reached his mark in 148 appearances. —Reuters

All Blacks slip to third

LONDON: Three-times world champions New Zealand have slipped to third in the World Rugby rankings after their shock defeat by Argentina in the Tri-Nations over the weekend, with England moving up to second behind current world champions South Africa. The All Blacks, who were number one in the rankings between 2009-2019, briefly dropped to third after last year's World Cup semi-final defeat by England but moved up to second after beating Wales for the bronze medal. Argentina, who beat the All Blacks for the first time in 30 attempts, were the biggest climbers in the top 10, moving up two places to eighth. Wales and Japan dropped to ninth and 10th respectively as a result. South Africa remained on top despite not having played a test since last year's World Cup final. England moved up to second after Eddie Jones' squad thumped tier-two side Georgia 40-0 in their opening fixture of the Autumn Nations Cup. —Reuters

Better visuals for VAR calls

LONDON: FIFA has asked technology companies to develop ways to improve visuals to help its officials with close video assistant referee (VAR) decisions on offside, the global soccer governing body said yesterday. The current system, which involves the use of dotted lines to determine whether a player is offside, has come under fire following a string of controversial calls in Europe's top leagues. In a bid to improve the system, FIFA said companies would be provided with "anonymised datasets" of offside decisions based on which they should present possible solutions. FIFA also said that three technology providers have expressed an interest in developing semi-automated technology to improve the review process for offside incidents. "The aim of this development phase is to further improve the algorithms of the systems based on a collection of datasets from hundreds of different offside incidents," the governing body said. —Reuters

Hamilton fired up to resist the 'new generation' again

Success means nothing without change, says Hamilton

ISTANBUL: Lewis Hamilton and his Mercedes team will face a ferocious new challenge from their rivals next season when he begins his pursuit of a record eighth world title. After a dismal season that has seen them fail to register a win, Formula One's most famous team, Ferrari, will invest heavily in bouncing back while Red Bull, who have been closest to matching Mercedes, seek more consistency and speed to close the gap.

For the newly crowned seven-time champion, who has taken strength from his noisy support for human rights and global welfare, it will mean a rigorous tussle for his crown with the "new generation" of drivers led by Max Verstappen and Charles Leclerc. On Sunday, both younger men fell prey to their relative youth and made mistakes while Hamilton, making full use of his experience and maturity, produced a flawless drive for a remarkable triumph that brought him to tears.

"When I came across the line, it really hit me and I just burst into tears," he told reporters. "I didn't want the visitor to come up and people to see the tears because I always would say you will never see me cry. "I remember watching other drivers cry in the past and I was like 'I am never going to do that', but it was too much..." Hamilton's old rival and friend, four-time champion Sebastian Vettel, may also emerge as a threat with his new team, Aston Martin, if the potential shown this year by the former Racing Point outfit can be realized.

Sergio Perez, who is due to relinquish his seat to Vettel next month, finished second ahead of the German's Ferrari on Sunday. The most likely scenario, however, is a repeat of the Briton's supremacy with Mercedes on top and team-mate Valtteri Bottas mounting another bid for the title. Their rivals may run them hard and close, but with a package of new regulations due in 2022, next season is unlikely to offer the same opportunity for a reset.

Mercedes will also have one eye on the future when the racing restarts in Melbourne in March and they may be vulnerable, but in Hamilton, as the Turkish Grand Prix proved again, they have the ace in the F1 pack, regardless of age. Since he recovered from losing the 2016 title to then-team-mate Nico Rosberg, Hamilton has reeled off four consecutive title triumphs to become the sport's most successful driver in terms of numbers.

'Just getting started'

His victory in treacherous conditions from sixth on the grid at Istanbul was one of his very best and brought him another record formerly held by Michael Schumacher: most wins by a driver with the same team - 73. The German won 72 times with Ferrari, but



ISTANBUL: Mercedes' British driver Lewis Hamilton celebrates on the podium after winning the Turkish Formula One Grand Prix at the Intercity Istanbul Park circuit in Istanbul. Lewis Hamilton won the race to seal his 7th World Championship. —AFP

Hamilton passed that mark on the same day he equaled his titles total and did so in 26 fewer races. He also holds records for most wins, poles, podiums and points finishes.

Verstappen, hailed as the sport's next mega-star, acknowledged that weight of evidence in a tribute to the Englishman after his own error-strewn weekend confirmed he remains a work in progress. On Sunday, however, Hamilton warned that he felt like he "is only just getting started", explaining that the Black Lives Matter movement has given him energy and purpose. At 35, as his sport's first and only black champion, he has become the face, voice and conscience of F1 and is using that platform to support the issues that have ushered in promises of change this year.

"When I was younger, I didn't have anybody in the sport that looked like me so it was easy to think that it's not possible to get there because nobody of your color has ever been there. You don't see any black people in F1," Hamilton said. "Hopefully, this sends a message to the kids that are watching ... that it doesn't matter where you come from, whatever your back-

ground, it is so important for you to dream big. "You can create your own path and that is what I have been able to do-and it has been so tough."

Hamilton has said becoming the most successful Formula One driver of all time means nothing unless he can help tackle racism and push for change. The Mercedes driver became world champion for the seventh time in Turkey on Sunday, equaling the record previously held by Ferrari great Michael Schumacher. The 35-year-old Briton now has more career wins, pole positions and podiums than the retired German, however, and plans to add to those records.

"Competing and winning championships is a great thing, but what does it really mean? It doesn't mean anything unless you can help push for change," he told the Guardian newspaper in an interview published on Tuesday. "I cannot keep silent during this time." The interview was conducted by Michael Eboda, chief executive of Powerful Media, whose annual Powerlist on Tuesday named Hamilton as Britain's most influential Black person. —Agencies

Athletes will not be forced to get COVID vaccinations: Bach

TOKYO: International Olympic Committee President Thomas Bach said yesterday that athletes would not be forced to get COVID-19 vaccinations ahead of the Tokyo Olympics, but he said they should as a "demonstration of solidarity" with the Japanese. Bach visited the Athletes' Village yesterday before concluding his two-day Tokyo trip with a visit to the National Stadium. "We will encourage athletes that whenever possible they have the vaccination because it is better for their health, and it is also a demonstration of solidarity with their fellow athletes and also the Japanese people," said the German. Bach's trip, his first to Japan since the decision to postpone the Games in March, has been up-beat throughout and he has spoken about the great impact a vaccine could have on Tokyo's ability to host the Olympics next year. More than 11,000 athletes are expected to descend upon Tokyo for the Olympics, which are due to begin on July 23, with thousands more coming for the subsequent Paralympics. However, when pressed whether athletes were going to jump the queue to get any potential vaccine before the Games, Bach was adamant this wouldn't be the case. "We made it clear from the



TOKYO: International Olympic Committee (IOC) president Thomas Bach (center) wears a face mask as he visits the National Stadium in Tokyo yesterday. —AFP

very beginning that the first priorities are for the nurses, medical doctors and everybody who keeps our society alive, despite the coronavirus crisis," Bach told reporters at the National Stadium.

"These are the people who deserve to be the first ones to be vaccinated." Tokyo 2020 organizers are holding a project review meeting this week and hope to decide on a range of COVID-19 counter-measures, including whether spectators will be allowed in venues next year. A small group of anti-Olympics protesters gathered outside the stadium during Bach's visit, and their chanted slogans could be heard as he walked alone down the running track and looked up at the empty seats surrounding him. —Reuters

Hamilton: World champion some find hard to like

PARIS: Lewis Hamilton has joined Michael Schumacher as the most successful driver in Formula One's history - yet despite all the acclaim, the seven-time world champion divides opinion. With 20.6 million Instagram followers Hamilton is by a country mile the most popular member of the Formula One grid, supported by an army of loyal fans known as "Team LH". "The greatest sportsman this country has ever produced - no doubts," tweeted former Manchester United and England defender Rio Ferdinand after Hamilton crossed the finish line in Istanbul on Sunday.

Yet Hamilton's rise to F1 legend status has been accompanied by articles in his homeland exploring the same question - 'why is he disliked?' Just as in Schumacher's all-conquering era with Ferrari, Hamilton and Mercedes have become victims of their own success. Mercedes are accused in the court of public opinion of being too good and turning the sport into a tedious procession-they have won the last seven



ISTANBUL: Mercedes' British driver Lewis Hamilton (front) leads a pack of cars during the Turkish Formula One Grand Prix at the Intercity Istanbul Park circuit in Istanbul. —AFP

constructors titles and Hamilton has won the last four world drivers titles.

Hamilton tackled the issue last season. "It's not how F1 should be, but it is what it is right now and it has been like that in the past," he said. "But it is not our fault these guys are good at their jobs." For The Times' Rebecca Clancy, Hamilton's decision to move to first Switzerland and then Monaco in part to pay less tax-was at the heart of any anti-Hamilton sentiment. Another obstacle for some British F1 fans was the support of the once mighty McLaren team which powered him to his first title in 2008. "Britons like underdogs," explained The Sun. —AFP

Sports



KUWAIT: An athlete practices wakeboarding at a cable park at the Green Island off the coast of Kuwait City yesterday. — Photo by Yasser Al-Zayyat

Elneny tests positive as international break sees spike in EPL COVID cases

16 positive in latest Premier League COVID-19 tests

LONDON: Arsenal and Egypt midfielder Mohamed Elneny has tested positive for COVID-19, his agent said as figures published by the Premier League showed a sharp increase in cases coinciding with the international break. Already unpopular with Premier League clubs because of the risk of injury to key players, the mood among the likes of Arsenal's Mikel Arteta and his fellow top-flight bosses is unlikely to be improved by figures from the November 9-15 latest round of weekly tests showing the Premier League returned 16 positive coronavirus cases from 1,207 players and staff tested.

This compares with four positives from 1,646 tests during the week of November 2-8 and a previous weekly high of 10 positives. And while players who were away on international duty at the time would not have been included in the Premier League's latest figures, there may now be concerns that the knock-on effects of players returning from long-distance trips have led to a surge in reported cases.

Those who tested positive will now self-isolate for 10 days. As has long been its policy, the Premier League refused to name the clubs or individuals involved. But Alan Nazmy, Elneny's agent, tweeted: "Elneny Positive Cov19 get well soon."

Meanwhile, the Egyptian Football Association confirmed in a Facebook post that Elneny was isolating in line with medical protocols. His COVID-19 result came just three days after it was announced that Liverpool's Mohamed Salah had also tested positive while on international duty with Egypt.

"The results of the medical swabs conducted by the national team upon arrival in Togo showed negative all except for Arsenal player Mohamed Elneny, whose result appeared positive without any symptoms," the EFA said. "The player immediately began to implement the special medical protocol for people infected with COVID-19." An Egypt side without Salah beat Togo 1-0 in Cairo on Saturday in the first of two back-to-back 2021 Africa Cup of Nations qualifying matches between the countries. Salah has scored eight Premier League goals for Liverpool already this season.

If he is sidelined, it would be a blow for Premier League champions Liverpool, who were deprived of Senegal forward Sadio Mane earlier in the season when he too tested positive for coronavirus, although he has since returned to the team. Liverpool manager Jurgen Klopp has already lost defender Joe Gomez to a

knee tendon injury he suffered while on England duty last week. The club say Gomez is likely to be sidelined for months. And the Reds are counting the cost of being deprived of key central defender Virgil van Dijk for what is expected to be most of the season after he tore knee ligaments in a clash with Everton goalkeeper Jordan Pickford last month.

Meanwhile, the Premier League said that 16 people had returned positive results in its latest round of COVID-19 tests conducted on players and staff last week, the highest number of cases in a single round since the new season began in September. The league said the individuals who had tested positive for the novel coronavirus would now self-isolate for 10 days. "The Premier League can today confirm that between Monday 9 November and Sunday 15 November, 1,207 players and club staff were tested for COVID-19. Of these, there were 16 new positive tests," the league said in a statement. A total of 68 people have tested positive for the virus in 11 rounds of testing this season. There have been more than 1.3 million COVID-19 infections and over 51,000 deaths in the United Kingdom, according to a Reuters tally. — Agencies



Mohamed Elneny

Dustin Johnson breaks a curse, Im on the rise: Golf talking points

HONG KONG: Masters records, emerging talent and the LPGA Tour's return feature in AFP Sport's golf talking points this week:

Top rank, major hindrance

Dustin Johnson secured his second major with a record-breaking 20-under-par total at the Masters, also breaking a cursed run for world number ones in majors. Incredibly, Johnson was the first world number one to win any major since Rory McIlroy's victory at the US PGA Championship in 2014. He was also the first player who was top of the rankings to win the Masters since Tiger Woods in 2002.

In fact, down the years being world number one has been almost a disadvantage in majors. Johnson is only the fifth player since the world rankings began in 1986 to win a major while on top, joining Ian Woosnam, Fred Couples, Woods and McIlroy. But while Woods managed it as number one for 11

of his 15 major victories, the others have only done it once each. That means just 15 majors out of 139 since the rankings began have seen the world number one lift the trophy. And just four out of 128 if your name doesn't happen to be Tiger Woods.

Im makes Asian history

Im Sung-jae at just 22 years old crowned a remarkable debut at Augusta National with Asia's best finish in the US Masters, as the South Korean finished joint runner-up alongside Australia's Cameron Smith. Im, the 2019 US PGA Tour Rookie of the Year, eclipsed countryman KJ Choi's third place in 2004 after closing with a final round of three-under-par 69 to finish 15-under, five strokes behind winner Dustin Johnson. Im, who won The Honda Classic for his first PGA Tour victory in March, now has his sights set on becoming Asia's second major winner, after South Korea's YE Yang who lifted the US PGA Championship in 2009. Yang's best finish in the Masters was tied eighth in 2010. "Finishing tied for second is unbelievable, and I'm proud of my game," said Im, who has broken into the world's top 20 for the first time. He also joined some illustrious company in becoming the third-youngest player in history, after Jordan Spieth and Tiger Woods, to finish in the top five at the Masters. — AFP



AUGUSTA: Dustin Johnson of the United States reacts with Sungjae Im of Korea after winning the Masters at Augusta National Golf Club on November 15, 2020. — AFP

Mahrez scores; Algeria qualify for Africa Cup of Nations

JOHANNESBURG: Manchester City winger Riyad Mahrez scored as title-holders Algeria drew 2-2 in Zimbabwe Monday and became the third country to book a place at the 2021 Africa Cup of Nations. Cameroon qualify automatically as hosts while Senegal secured a spot Sunday by winning in Guinea-Bissau thanks to a Sadio Mane goal. Andy Delort and captain Mahrez gave the Desert Foxes a two-goal advantage in Harare that was halved just before half-time when Knowledge Musona netted.

Algeria coach Djamel Belmadi took off Delort and Mahrez as he made five second-half substitutions within 12 minutes, but the bold move backfired when Prince Dube equalized eight minutes from

time. Drawing ended the perfect three-win record Algeria took into a match played behind closed doors because of the coronavirus, but it guaranteed them a top-two finish in a section including Zambia and Botswana. Zambia, hoping for a resurgence under Serb coach Milutin 'Micho' Sredojevic, suffered a blow to hopes of accompanying Algeria from Group H when they fell 1-0 away to Botswana.

Mosha Gaolaolwe scored what proved the only goal in Francistown after just six minutes and it lifted Botswana to third, one point behind Zimbabwe. This was the third loss in four group matches for 2012 African champions Zambia, who will host Algeria and visit Zimbabwe during the final two matchdays next March. Uganda suffered a shock loss 1-0 away to South Sudan and Burkina Faso drew 0-0 in Malawi to miss out on chances to qualify from Group A. Uganda-born Tito Okello condemned his country of birth to a first defeat in the section when he converted a first-half penalty in a qualifier marred by two red cards. — AFP

Ireland star prepares to tackle the 'beast' that is England

DUBLIN: James Lowe made a try-scoring debut for Ireland in the victory over Wales but he says a tougher challenge awaits in Saturday's Autumn Nations Cup clash with England as they are a "completely different beast". The 28-year-old New Zealand-born wing will definitely be occupying England minds as he lived up to his pre-match hype against an out-of-form Welsh side. Lowe provided an element of unpredictability to the Irish backline which they have been lacking and was equally strong in defense.

However, as refreshingly direct in speaking as he is on the pitch, Lowe is expecting a tougher day at the office at Twickenham even if it is behind closed doors. "This is going to be a completely different

beast," he said at a press conference on Monday. "Don't get me wrong, Wales are obviously a very strong international team but haven't had the form of late. "But this is a whole new beast. To play England at Twickenham... it's huge. "Emotionally, physically and mentally if we get all our ducks in a row I can't see why we can't go over there and knock them over."

Ireland, though, will be without captain and playmaker Johnny Sexton who has been ruled out with a hamstring problem. Lowe, who has previously referred to his Leinster team-mate Sexton as the 'bad cop' due to his outspoken criticism of under-performing team-mates, said the 35-year-old fly-half would still make his presence felt during the week. "Who?" replied Lowe, joking about whether Ireland would miss Sexton. "We're grand. He didn't die, he's still in the building, he's going to be barking at us all week as he always does but that's because he really cares. "He's so emotional about this team."

Lowe, who was blooded by Ireland head coach Andy Farrell as soon as he qualified under the three-year residency rule, said he would be listening closely to any advice Sexton had to offer. — AFP

14 Athletes will not be forced to get COVID vaccinations: Bach



14 Hamilton fired up to resist the 'new generation' again



15 International break sees spike in Premier League COVID cases



Vikings overpower Bears 19-13

Thielen at the double as Vikings down Bears; Cousins ends skid



CHICAGO: Dalvin Cook #33 of the Minnesota Vikings tackled by Danny Trevathan #59 of the Chicago Bears at Soldier Field on November 16, 2020. — AFP

CHICAGO: Kirk Cousins threw for 292 yards and two touchdowns, both of which went to Adam Thielen, and the Minnesota Vikings notched a 19-13 win over the host Chicago Bears on Monday night. Minnesota (4-5) held off a late fourth-quarter drive by the Bears to pick up its third victory in a row. Cousins, who completed 25 of 36 passes and was intercepted once, won for the first time in 10 career starts on Monday night, snapping his record drought. Nick Foles connected on 15 of 26 passes for 106 yards and an interception for Chicago (5-5), which lost its fourth straight. Foles was

carted off the field with 37 seconds to go due to an apparent right leg injury. Thielen put the Vikings on top for good with a 6-yard touchdown reception with 10:06 remaining in the fourth quarter. The play was his second touchdown catch of the evening and his ninth of the season, which tied him for the league lead with Green Bay's Davante Adams and Kansas City's Tyreek Hill. An interception by Vikings safety Harrison Smith on the Bears' first possession opened the door for Minnesota to grab an early lead. Cousins capitalized on a short

field as he engineered a six-play, 41-yard drive that ended with a 17-yard touchdown pass to Thielen. Chicago pulled within 7-6 before halftime thanks to a pair of field goals by Cairo Santos, who connected from 23 yards late in the first quarter and hit from 42 yards late in the second quarter. Bears kick returner Cordarrelle Patterson started the second half with a 104-yard score as he tied for first place in NFL history with his eighth career kickoff return for a touchdown. The 29-year-old pulled even with Josh Cribbs (2005-14) and Leon Washington (2006-14).

Patterson's milestone touchdown, which put the Bears ahead 13-7, came against the team that drafted him in the first round (No. 29 overall) out of Tennessee in 2013. It also was the longest kickoff return in Bears history, eclipsing a 103-yard touchdown by Gale Sayers against Pittsburgh on Sept 17, 1967. A 37-yard field goal by Dan Bailey cut the Vikings' deficit to 13-10 early in the third quarter. Bailey made another field goal, this one from 43 yards, to make it 13-13 with 1:52 left in the third quarter. — Reuters

Qatar learns lessons for Asian Champions League Part II

HONG KONG: Qatari officials are confident that refinements made to health protocols for the resumption of eastern half of the Asian Champions League will prevent novel coronavirus infections from again influencing the outcome of the competition. The continent's premier club competition has been delayed and heavily disrupted by the global health crisis this year, not least when the western half was completed in a biosecure bubble in Doha in September and October. A rash of positive tests played havoc with team selections and title holders Al Hilal were unable to complete their fixtures after infections left the club with only 11 fit players, two of them goalkeepers. Fifteen teams from east Asia have arrived in the Qatari capital to complete the group and knockout stages to determine who progresses to the final against Iran's Persepolis at Al Janoub Stadium on Dec. 19. Dr Abdul Wahab Al Musleh, the adviser to the minister of public health of Qatar on sports affairs, believes amendments made to arrangements for the biosecure bubbles will limit the chance of infections. "This time we are doing the testing more often. We will do it for all the teams on match day minus-one or minus-two before they compete with others," Al Musleh told Reuters by video call from Doha. "And there are several other public measures that we have undertaken. For example, we limit their interactions with others, including their own team in the hotel, so we encourage strongly all their

technical meetings are happening online or outdoors." Health officials believe the infections in Al Hilal's squad were picked up when the players attended a party to celebrate winning the Saudi title - after completing coronavirus testing in Riyadh but prior to their departure for Qatar. As a result, protocols that were in place at the beginning of the tournament for west Asian teams were tweaked to prevent players from sharing hotel rooms, while they were also encouraged to eat in their quarters rather than communally. Those stricter regulations remain in place for the start of the east Asian portion of the competition and Al Musleh believes there will be fewer issues the second time around. "I don't think there has been any similar experience for anybody, so it was definitely a learning curve," he said. "We learned so many lessons that we have applied for the next tournament and hopefully we will be able to reduce the number of people infected and prevent big clusters of infections among any of the teams." Al Musleh has also held online meetings with technical and medical representatives of all the clubs travelling to Qatar to inform them of the protocols but concedes that it is impossible to offer any guarantees. "There is always going to be remaining some risk," he said. "Our duty is to minimize the risk with the ability to conduct the event. "If you want to be totally 100% risk free then you don't play sport." — Reuters

Djokovic off to a flying start at the ATP Finals

LONDON: Novak Djokovic produced a masterclass on Monday to launch his campaign for a record-equaling sixth title at the ATP Finals as Daniil Medvedev outfought former champion Alexander Zverev. The world number one crushed Argentine eighth seed Diego Schwartzman 6-3, 6-2 in the opening round-robin match in Group Tokyo 1970 before Russia's Medvedev triumphed 6-3, 6-4. Djokovic, who has already sealed the year-end number one spot for a record-equaling sixth time, is aiming to match the absent Roger Federer, who holds the record of six ATP Finals wins. The Serbian, 33, has enjoyed another sparkling season despite the coronavirus interruption, winning four titles including the Australian Open. He came into the match at an empty O2 Arena with a 5-0 record against the diminutive Schwartzman but the debutant started impressively, breaking Djokovic in the third game. However, the top seed broke back immediately and took his game up a notch, breaking again and converting his first set point with a powerful serve down the T. Two more breaks in the second set were enough to take Djokovic to a comfortable win against his outclassed opponent. The Serbian admitted he had started slowly but said he was pleased with his game as the match wore on. "In the second set I started swinging through the ball a bit more, bit less hesitation from both corners and I was very pleased with the way I played in the second set especially," he said.



LONDON: Serbia's Novak Djokovic serves against Argentina's Diego Schwartzman in their men's singles round-robin match on day two of the ATP World Tour Finals tennis tournament at the O2 Arena in London. — AFP

Empty stands

The five-time champion said he was missing the fans, who usually pack the cavernous O2 Arena for the elite eight-man event. "I've been playing the ATP Finals in this arena for many years and I've been blessed to experience some incredible matches and atmospheres and it feels very strange to play in front of empty stands," he said. The evening contest between Medvedev and Zverev was a rematch of last week's Paris Masters final, where the Russian came out on top. Both players struggled to hold serve in an intense start to the contest on Monday, swapping breaks as they struggled to catch their breath. Fifth-seed Zverev hit four double faults in his first two service games to set the tone and struggled to find a rhythm behind his second serve throughout the

whole match, losing 15 out of 19 points. Medvedev, who lost all three matches on his first appearance at the ATP Finals last year, broke again in the sixth game to take the first set. The pair settled into more of a rhythm on serve in the second set but 2018 champion Zverev blinked first, broken in the seventh game as his shoulders slumped. Medvedev, spotting the German far back behind the baseline, slipped in an underarm serve in the following game, holding serve before closing out the match to love, completing his triumph with a leaping backhand winner. There were 15 break points in the match, Medvedev saving five of the six he faced. The Russian fourth seed said his win at the Paris Masters had given him confidence, describing Monday's battle as exhausting. — AFP