

Friday Times

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A sugary mess



KAFFEEKLATSCH

By Shakir Reshamwala

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World Diabetes Day was marked on Nov 14. Kuwait, having one of the highest prevalence of diabetes in the world, observes this day religiously. Various seminars are held and many specialists dish out advice. After a few days, interest begins to die down or another ailment is highlighted.

But for those living with diabetes, the struggle is real - and a daily affair. Maintaining a healthy diet and exercising regularly - two key elements to control one's blood sugar - is extremely difficult. Temptations are everywhere - from fast food restaurants on every street corner to aisle after aisle of sugar-laden products in supermarkets. Combine this with a sedentary lifestyle where people jump into their cars to traverse walkable distances and searing heat most of the year that makes even a short foray outside unbearable, and you find it is nearly impossible to motivate yourself to cut those calories.

It has been said that as a country becomes more affluent, it becomes more susceptible to chronic lifestyle diseases like diabetes. But this is not necessarily true, as the rate of diabetes is exploding in many developing countries. Cheap unhealthy food, spending hours on the phone or desk instead of moving around and unwise aspirational choices are leading to all kinds of chronic diseases.

A heat map of fast food restaurants on the website of the Dasman Diabetes Institute is an eye-opener - the entire populated area of Kuwait is a deep burning red. This addiction to junk food is not only causing a rise in diabetes, but also obesity. So it's no surprise that Kuwait is one of the most obese nations in the world.

The coronavirus pandemic has made people more health-conscious, which was evident during the two-hour exercise window during the total curfew earlier this year, when scores of people took to the streets to stretch their legs. But there has been a downside to this new health awareness - as people were confined to their homes in the past few months due to the lockdown, prices of treadmills skyrocketed. Despite the steep prices, they were also out of stock in many places. They are now back in stores, but generally unaffordable for many.

Bicycle prices have also seen a jump as demand rose considerably, not only for exercising, but as a means of conveyance. During the lockdown when public transport was halted and taxis were taken off the roads, a lot of people cycled to work. With many facing financial difficulties in these trying times, paying more to buy a treadmill or bicycle is simply not an option, let alone paying hundreds of dinars to join fancy gyms or sports clubs.

But all is not lost. Nearly every area in Kuwait has a park and walking tracks. The weather is also pleasant these days, so slip on those sneakers and hit the trail - laziness is your only enemy!

Documents' hassle in Kuwait



JUST KIDDIN', SERIOUSLY

By Sahar Moussa

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Have you tried to apply or process documents in Kuwait after the spread of COVID-19? Anyone who is trying to finalize their documents at any government institution will tell you how frustrating, disappointing and irritating it is. Processing legal documents in Kuwait is pure hassle. No matter what documentation you are trying to complete - it will be a 'long, long and long' procedure, and you will be one of the blessed ones if you manage to finish it and get it done.

Speaking from personal experience, procedures before the pandemic were already bad, lengthy and annoying - but after the virus, it has gotten much, much worse and unbearable. After the coronavirus outbreak around March, Kuwait was in complete shutdown - it was only after several months that the country began to open up, including governmental institutions, but with conditions. Before visiting any government institution, there are steps you should follow:

1- You should book an appointment online for the concerned authority - you will be the luckiest person on earth if you find an appointment or what you are looking for.

2- You should be there at least two or three hours before your appointment - even before the doors open - because you will have to wait in line to be checked for your temperature and maintain social distancing, and because it is so hard to find parking in Kuwait City.

3- When your turn finally comes and you happily show your online booking to the security man, you will be shocked because you booked the wrong place. You then need to book another appointment for another place, which will lead you back to square one.

4- If you are fortunate enough and you came to the right place, there will be one phrase you will hear which will freeze the blood in your veins: "PEOPLE WE ARE SORRY BUT THE SYSTEM IS DOWN - WE ARE NOT ACCEPTING ANY MORE PROCEDURES." These phrases you hear mostly on Wednesdays, Thursdays and at the end of workdays. You are back to square one.

5- If everything goes right and your destination is correct, you are on time and the system is working, the employee will tell you to bring or photocopy one million documents, and will send you to another department for your papers to be stamped at another location. Yes, once again you are back to square one.

It is like a vicious circle - you run and run but can't seem to get anywhere. Kuwaitis and expats have been suffering a lot from these toxic and never-ending procedures that are wasting their time for nothing. So the question is - what is causing this dilemma in Kuwait, although it has the resources and means to have the best operation

and managerial processes? There are several factors that are causing these meaningless delays:

First, the terrible malfunction in the computer system, which is down most of the time. It is unacceptable in any governmental institution for the system to be down, and if this is the case, there should always be a standby IT team to fix the problem quickly in order not to waste anyone's time.

Second, the exaggerating demands of paperwork, asking to photocopy 10 documents which can be avoided by having a link between all the departments, divisions and institutes that have the personal information of every person in Kuwait. This will certainly save a lot of time, effort and stress. It is only recently that an app was made under the name of Hawiyati or Kuwait Mobile ID, which provides citizen and residents in Kuwait a digital ID which can be used for the following purposes: Portable mobile-based civil ID, authentication for government and non-government e-services and digital signature for electronic documents and transactions.

Third, to bring people who have high managerial skills and qualifications to organize the staff and make sure that everything is going smoothly and punctually.

Fourth, to exchange knowledge with people that have experience in

the same domain and who know how things work. Just to be fair, and speaking from personal experience, the Public Institution for Social Security and the Public Authority for Housing Welfare in Kuwait are really organized and know what they are doing. Other institutions can benefit from their experience to make things better in other departments.

Fifth, there must be a CLEAR website to state which papers you need to get and where they should be stamped from before going to your destination. Although some websites will inform you about paperwork requirements, when you reach there, expect that there might be a missing document not mentioned on the website.

Sixth, when it comes to employees, more discipline is expected and work should be distributed fairly among them, which will make the workflow easier. For example, not having three employees processing people's work while others are sitting doing nothing.

Seventh, which in my opinion is the most important point - to delete the word 'wasta' from every institution in Kuwait and treat everyone fairly.

To summarize, government institutions' procedures could be much better and faster if they just put more effort and make it a priority to fix these simple but essential problems. Maybe the government is doing its best, but there is always room for progress.

Have you have faced similar problems with your documents? Please share them with us!

“ It is like a vicious circle ”

Kuwait Times

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Local

THE HISTORICAL CEMETERIES OF KUWAIT CITY

By Nawara Fattahova

Although it has been closed for over 40 years, a few visitors still visit the Jaafariya Cemetery in Kuwait City that was in use from 1868 till 1973. After space at this and other cemeteries in the area ran out, burials were moved to the present cemetery in Sulaibikhat.

There are six cemeteries in this area and many others around Kuwait. In the past, all cemeteries were located in Kuwait City, as it was a vital area where the majority of the population lived. Hilal Al-Mutairi Cemetery was the first



graveyard in Kuwait, followed by Sawaber, Madwa North and South, Hasawiya, Jaafariya and Qibla. There are other cemeteries in Kuwait City too for non-Muslims, Jews and others.

Kuwait Times visited the Hasawiya and Jaafariya cemeteries that are located opposite each other after obtaining permission from the Municipality. Both were closed in 1973 to new burials. Out of respect for the deceased and their descendants, we did not take close up shots of headstones but were also to photograph the overall area to show Kuwait continues to care for the departed.



These photos show the old Hasawi cemetery in Kuwait City managed by the Kuwait Municipality and closed to new burials in 1973.





“Although being out of service and not witnessing any visits, cleaners still do the rounds of these old cemeteries twice or thrice a week. The guard of the cemetery gathers the waste in one corner, and when the cleaners come, they take it,” Akbar Al-Blushi from the funeral affairs department of the Municipality told Kuwait Times.

He added the Municipality is keen on taking care of cemeteries. “Dr Faisal Al-Awadhi, Director of the Funeral Affairs Department, wants to keep all cemeteries tidy and proper looking. Since these old cemeteries are located in strategic areas in the heart of Kuwait City between modern



towers, new walls have been built around them to improve the view,” added Blushi.

Currently, only five cemeteries in Kuwait are functional - for Sunnis, Shiites and non-Muslims - out of a total of 61 cemeteries. Fifty of these are fenced, while 11 are unfenced. Hilal Al-Mutairi Cemetery was the first registered burial ground, named after Hilal Fajhan Al-Mutairi, a Kuwaiti businessman who granted the land for a cemetery and was buried in it after he died in 1938.



These photos show the old Jaafari cemetery in Kuwait City managed by the Kuwait Municipality. Opened in 1868, the cemetery was closed to new burials in 1973.

— Photos by Yasser Al-Zayyat

Local

Proud to be Kuwaiti

By Hessa Tareq Al-Wagayan

The coronavirus pandemic is an international pandemic affecting everyone's lives. We can't even plan for next week, if we don't know what will happen to us tomorrow. Globally, countries are putting forward efforts to try and minimize this virus's gravity and its rate of transmission, as well as the number of affected individuals. Politically, people all over the world are looking up to their leaders, seeking help and a reality check, but even the leaders do not know what is going on, or when this outbreak might come to an end. COVID-19, the scientific term for the disease caused by the ongoing coronavirus, is the latest life changing event, topic discussed, and problem faced globally. This virus is the current source of all our current struggles.

Trade, politics, and societies are all affected when it comes to this virus because, instead of combining these things, it separates them by not allowing normal life to resume. Everything related to the COVID-19 outbreak has the world crashing. In the beginning, countries thought it was a "China conflict," but it quickly became a global conflict. The spread of this infectious disease has killed hundreds of thousands, but what it also affects is our way of living. Locally, Kuwait's stock exchange closed numerous times because it would drop so low that there was no competition in the business sector. Businesses thrive by competing with one another.

The Kuwaiti government has adopted outstanding methods to help their people during this hardship. COVID-19 hit us by surprise, but luckily, our government is doing everything they can for our health and stability. They started with closing schools, and managed to approve online schooling techniques for private institutions, despite difficulties implementing it. For a while, they closed restaurants, shops, stores, malls, and any place that a group of people could congregate or possibly catch the virus. Kuwait has also updated its citizens about what is happening, by providing several websites where we can track what our country is doing for us, and how many people in Kuwait currently have the virus.

Furthermore, our government has created an app for all citizens (who are expected to be quarantined for 14 days) coming from foreign countries, to take a daily picture of



themselves and upload their health status to health specialists. Kuwait has been providing, and will continue to provide all resources and supplies for their citizens and residents, and this is only the beginning!

Our nation didn't look at what the first-world countries were doing, but rather created their very own plan, proving that they put their people first. They didn't focus too much on whether the economy was going down, or what their worldwide reputation was. Strangely, what I've realized is that the countries who are supposed to be experts

in dealing with this sort of thing, seem to care less about the well-being of their people, and more about their oil prices and political influencers. Kuwait has been taking the pandemic seriously since the beginning, and the strictest action they have taken so far is the implementation of a lockdown; this ensures people don't meet up or host events, therefore halting the spread of the virus, especially when Eid approached. Kuwait's strict government issued a lockdown after 5 pm, then after 4 pm when Ramadan started. After that, a full lockdown commenced for 20 days, with two hours being allotted during the afternoon to go out and walk, within a person's area.

I'm honored to call myself a Kuwaiti during this pandemic. My country has always taken care of me, but it is especially apparent during times like these. I am proud of every government agency whose employees are working long hours for the safety and well-being of this country. They are using schools, hospitals, and camps for people to stay in temporarily, whether they have the virus, or are coming from countries that have it, as well as providing them with countless services. Kuwaitis have also worked as cashiers and helpers at local co-ops, created quarantine regulations for everyone to stay home, and closed certain areas that have been hard-hit by the virus. Kuwait has been aiding everyone. It's a true way of showing who cares and who doesn't, whether it's from higher authorities or the general population.

When the full lockdown was implemented, everyone panicked; we were required to stay at home all day! The only gap we had was

from 4:30 - 6:30 pm, but people were allowed to walk outside just within their living area. No bikes, cars, or any sort of transportation was allowed to be used, and you were required to wear masks for protection. You could see the streets filling up by 5:30, because people wanted to walk, be free, and enjoy some fresh air. These two hours gave Kuwaiti and non-Kuwaiti residents a chance to get some peace of mind. To end this nightmare we call quarantine, we must take the precautions suggested by our government and not break any protocols that could severely affect our health or the health of others. Most Kuwaiti residents have demonstrated impactful efforts in trying to minimize the virus by following Kuwait's rules and regulations. Protecting myself from this virus consists of trying to be careful, and distancing myself from others. Everyone is susceptible to the virus and could be carriers of it, so we should continue to social-distance, even if the stricter regulations have been lifted off of us.

I am proud, and I will always be proud that Kuwait is my nationality. Never have I viewed such alertness, involvement, and guidance from a government, especially during the start of the coronavirus pandemic. Since day one, Kuwait has been determined to put an end to this crisis. Kuwait has displayed so many strengths during this time, and we, as its residents, should uphold that strength. To defeat this virus, we all need to work together toward this common goal. My advice to everyone is to stay healthy, stay safe, and most importantly, stay home.

**Written during the beginning of the pandemic, end of April*



Kuwait Times partners with BBS

Kuwait Times is delighted to collaborate with students from Bayan Bilingual School (BBS) to republish articles originally featured in the school's journal, Inkwell.

KUWAIT: This July 31, 2020 photo shows limited activity at the old market in Salmiya. — Photo by Fouad Al-Shaikh



Empathetic Digital Citizenship

By Reem Al-Marei

Did you know that author Dina Alexander had to change the title of her book from 'A Story about Digital Citizenship' to 'A Story about Using Technology for Good,' since no one knew what digital citizenship meant? There is no question that the majority of today's kids grow up with a digital device within their reach, which makes us all digital citizens. The world we live in faces a lack of empathetic digital citizens; more people should be aware of what a digital citizen is and spread its meaning.

Everyone is a citizen of two worlds - the physical world and the digital world. It is expected of people to abide by the laws of the physical world, however the lack of awareness about how to be a good digital citizen has become an issue. Stopbullying.gov (USA, 2018) conducted a research that showed that 95 percent of American youth aged 12-17 use the internet, meaning that they're on a device most of the day. Being on a device all day affects your physical well-being, which makes learning about digital health and wellness very important. We must protect physical and psychological well-being, which includes practicing how to sit correctly in a chair while using the computer and avoiding too much screen time.

Manufacturers such as Apple have been trying to help with these issues by adding a function to control the amount of time spent on each app, yet, after these efforts, not everyone understands digital citizenship. According to DigCitUtah.com, the meaning of digital citizenship is "the norms of appropriate, responsible, and healthy behavior related to technology use, including digital literacy, ethics, etiquette, and security" (Aubrey, 2017). The digital world has no rule book. To be a good

digital citizen, there are numerous elements, which include connecting with others, treating other internet users with respect, and avoiding inappropriate behavior. Like freedom of speech in the real-world, digital rights are the privileges people have over the internet (Aubrey, 2017). Using these privileges appropriately will ensure being a good digital citizen.

Simple actions can show if you're a good digital citizen. For example, an online post can give people a positive or negative opinion about someone or something, so think carefully about what you post before you post it. Here are some things to consider: Do you want a worldwide audience to see what you're about to post? Would you say the same thing in person? Would you say it if your family was watching? On average, 95 million photos are uploaded on Instagram each day (Dustin W. Stout, 2020). Make sure what you post is not based on an emotional reaction and be careful that what you post is not breaking the law or violating any policies. Lastly, reflect on whether your behavior represents your ego (Celestial Holmes, 2017). If everyone followed these simple guidelines, it could have a huge impact.

Many people have heard the word empathy, but do they know what it means? Empathy is the ability of one to share and understand the emotions of others (Pascal Molenbergs, 2017). What generally comes to mind are the negative emotions, but empathy also includes positive emotions. Understanding the emotions of others builds better communities and a more established bond. Commercial litigator, Matthew Showel, described empathy as "a trail winding through the woods, empathy connects people through shared experiences and emotions." It is a skill that can be educated and well-read with time (Jamil Zaki, 2019). Having empathy helps people understand how others are feeling so that they can respond appropriately to their situation. Years of studies have

proven that a doctor's empathy towards a patient's test results are just as important as the prescribed medicines given (Jean Decety, and Aikaterini Fotopoulou, 2015). This empathy gives the patient the peace of mind they need to focus on getting better.

Design thinking, a powerful thinking method pioneered by the design school at Stanford University, starts with empathy. The focus on empathy for innovation allows people to design products, services, and solutions that match the needs of humans, allowing them to solve some of the most complex global challenges. This shows how empathy is needed everywhere - from a patient's healing process to launching a successful business.

Social media platforms affect the way humans interact with each other because not being face to face with someone allows for the abandonment of empathy. In the study, "Effects of Anonymity, Invisibility, and Lack of Eye-Contact on Toxic Online Disinhibition," researchers found that lacking eye contact with others online is one of the main reasons for trolling and flaming (The empathy project, 2017). Stopbullying.gov (USA, 2018) found out that among US teens that use social media, 88 percent witness mean or cruel behavior. An empathetic digital citizen is a person who demonstrates empathy consciously online. According to Statistics Canada (Canada 2018), one in 10 adults living in a household with children reported a case of cyber-bullying against one of their children, showing the lack of empathetic digital citizens.

Digital citizenship, empathy, and empathetic digital citizenship should be discussed more often. Since the beginning of the coronavirus pandemic, everyone has been online more often due to worldwide quarantines. Communicating online has become the norm, so let's use screen time to help spread the word and demonstrate empathetic digital citizenship.

Local



KUWAIT: His Highness the Prime Minister Sheikh Sabah Al-Khaled Al-Hamad Al-Sabah receives a copy of the Capital Markets Authority's 9th annual report. —KUNA

Kuwait's Prime Minister receives capital markets' annual report

KUWAIT: His Highness the Prime Minister Sheikh Sabah Al-Khaled Al-Hamad Al-Sabah received at Bayan Palace yesterday Minister of Commerce and Industry and Acting Minister of State for Youth Affairs Khaled Al-Roudhan accompanied with Chairman of the Commissioners Board of the Capital Markets Authority (CMA) Dr Ahmad Al-Melhem, and board members. During the

meeting, they handed His Highness the Prime Minister the CMA's 9th annual report for the 2019-2020 fiscal year. His Highness praised the great and continuous efforts made by the CMA to accomplished more achievements, which enhances confidence in the Kuwaiti economy and contributes to achieving the desired reforms. —KUNA

Italy, Kuwait discuss boosting private sectors' cooperation

ROME: Representatives of the Italian businesses society said they are looking forward to boost partnership with Kuwait,

to enhance the role of the private sector in economic development and achieve the 2035 vision. In a statement to the press yesterday, Kuwait's embassy said that the society's delegation met with Kuwaiti Ambassador to Italy Sheikh Azzam Mubarak Al-Sabah and discussed developing cooperation between the Italian and Kuwaiti private sectors. Ambassador Sheikh Azzam hailed the Italian initiative to boost cooperation with Kuwait's private sector, adding that it is an opportunity to develop ties between the two countries and achieve national development. —KUNA



ROME: Kuwaiti Ambassador to Italy Sheikh Azzam Al-Sabah with representatives of the Italian businesses society. —KUNA

Al-Saad foundation hands awards to two Turkish winners

KUWAIT: Head of Al-Saad Foundation for Knowledge and Scientific Research Sheikh Fadia Saad Al-Abdullah Al-Sabah handed Turkish Ambassador to Kuwait Aisha Kuytak shields of excellence awards for two female Turkish winners yesterday. The awards are presented by the Middle East Women Inventors and Innovators Network. The meeting between Sheikh Fadia and Kuytak, held in the foundation's headquarters, was also attended by head of the network's IBTIKAR award Sheikh Nabeela Salman Al-Humoud Al-Sabah, where they discussed boosting Kuwaiti-Turkish cooperation in women activities. The attendants also discussed means of enhancing the role of women in society and enable them in the field of decision making, Sheikh Fadia Al-Saad said in a statement. Meanwhile, Ambassador Kuytak hailed the award's efforts in enabling women in different fields in the Middle East. Last year, the foundation signed a memorandum of understanding with the Global Women Inventors and Innovators Network (GWIIN) on sharing experience and allowing winners to market their projects on an international level. IBTIKAR initiative is a nonprofit award aiming to develop and support scientific research for women. —KUNA



KUWAIT: Sheikha Fadia Saad Al-Abdullah Al-Sabah hands Turkish Ambassador Aisha Kuytak shields of excellence awards for the Turkish winners. —KUNA

News in brief

Amir receives cables

KUWAIT: His Highness the Amir Sheikh Nawaf Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah received a cable from President of Philippines Rodrigo Duterte who congratulated him on assumption of office, wishing him luck, and expressed keenness to further boost bilateral relations. His Highness the Amir thanked Duterte and wished him good health, and commended the relations between Kuwait and Philippines. He wished Philippines further development and prosperity. His Highness the Amir also received a cable from Eritrean President Isaias Afwerki who congratulated him on assumption of office, wishing him luck. His Highness the Amir thanked Afwerki in a cable and wished him good health.

KJA holds assembly

KUWAIT: Kuwait Journalists Association invites its members who paid their fees by the end of working hours Thursday, March 12, 2020 (as per article 27 of the association's statute) to attend the general assembly at 3:30 pm on Monday, November 23, 2020 at KJA temporary premises. In case quorum is not met, the meeting will be postponed for 30 minutes then will be held with the number available as per article 29 of the statute. KJA's temporary address: Industrial Shuwaikh, Sahafa Road, Al-Balagh Building, Second floor.

Local

Cabinet approves return of domestic helpers to Kuwait

Court upholds disqualification of 7 candidates, cancels 8

By B Izzak

KUWAIT: The Cabinet gave its nod yesterday to allow the return of domestic helpers to Kuwait from all foreign countries in a move that could allow thousands of maids to return after they were barred by the coronavirus pandemic.

Health Minister Sheikh Basel Al-Sabah has meanwhile told the Cabinet that the number of deaths in the country from coronavirus has been increasing, but the number of cases at intensive care units has stabilized. During its extraordinary meeting, the Cabinet approved a plan put forward by the authorities to allow the return of domestic helpers and asked the concerned authorities to complete legal aspects and detailed procedures for their return, according to government spokesman Tareq Al-Mezrem. The plan should be carried out while implementing all necessary health precautions, the Cabinet said, stressing on the need that all returnees undergo compulsory quarantine in special houses for two weeks.

The plan consists of two parts; the first involves the procedures of travel which begin with the sponsors registering their helpers online and then managing their arrival at Kuwait Airport and transporting them to the quarantines. The second part involves the financial affairs of the quarantines and other logistical procedures including transportation, catering and medical tests.

The Cabinet statement did not provide details about the cost of repatriating the maids, but it asked concerned authorities to complete the necessary legal procedures and the details of the plan. Kuwait has barred tens of thousands of expats from some 34 countries to return to the country over concerns of spreading the coronavirus. Those countries include India, Egypt, Pakistan, the Philippines, Bangladesh and Sri Lanka which have the largest expat communities in Kuwait. In the meantime, the number of expats which was about 3.3 million before the outbreak of the coronavirus pandemic, has dwindled to just 2.65 million, Al-Rai newspaper reported yesterday, citing unnamed sources. The source said that the residences of at least 147,000 expats have expired during the pandemic and tens of thousands of expats departed for their home countries.

The sources added that as many as 365,000 expats who have valid residence permits in the country, are currently living abroad, adding that 132,000 expats are living illegally in the country and around 40,000 of them are expected to benefit from a new amnesty starting next month to legalize their stay.

The lower court meanwhile upheld the interior ministry decision to bar seven candidates from running in next month's election but scrapped similar decisions against eight candidates. The interior ministry two weeks ago disqualified 34 candidates from contesting the

general election on December 5 on various grounds, mainly over final court verdicts involving financial cases. A number of those were disqualified for receiving verdicts on political groups.

Those whom the court confirmed their disqualification include former Islamist opposition MP Bader Al-Dahoum and opposition activist Ahmad Al-Fiker, both for being convicted for storming the assembly building in 2011 following an opposition protest. Others include candidate Hani Hussein, Nadia Al-Othman, Fadhel Al-Dabous and others. Dahoum said after the verdict that he will challenge the ruling at the court of appeals. The courts must issue a final verdict on the case before the election date. Dahoum's lawyer Yousef Al-Harbash said the ruling was wrong because it was based on a law issued years after his client's conviction and the law does not apply to cases that happened in the past. He said he will file an appeal.

Those whom the court scrapped their disqualification include Salah Al-Hashem, the brother of MP Safa Al-Hashem. The two are contesting for seats in the third constituency.

They also include candidate Ayedh Bukhousa from the fifth constituency and Talal Dashti, the son of self-exiled former MP Abdulhameed Dashti. Head of the Judicial Council Ahmad Al-Ajeel Said yesterday that authorities are studying whether to ban those who were infected with the coronavirus from voting. The Cabinet was expected to decide on the issue.

Sheikh Ahmad Al-Nawaf named KNG Deputy Chief

KUWAIT: The Cabinet has approved a decree appointing Lt Gen Sheikh Ahmad Al-Nawaf Al-Ahmad Al-Sabah as Deputy Chief of the Kuwait National Guard. This came after the Cabinet reviewed a presentation made by His Highness the Prime Minister Sheikh Sabah Al-Khaled Al-Hamad Al-Sabah during the Cabinet's extraordinary meeting yesterday. The decree was referred to His Highness the Amir Sheikh Nawaf Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah for ratification. Sheikh Ahmad Al-Nawaf is a retired Interior Ministry official, and was most recently the Governor of Hawally.



Sheikh Ahmad Al-Nawaf Al-Ahmad Al-Sabah

US, Kuwait convene trade, investment working group

KUWAIT: Senior US and Kuwaiti officials convened the Trade and Investment Working Group of the fourth Strategic Dialogue yesterday to discuss bilateral cooperation in the fields of business climate improvement, healthcare sector development, data security, and foreign direct investment.

State Department Assistant Secretary for Economic and Business Affairs Manisha Singh and Director General for Kuwait Direct Investment Promotion Authority (KDIPA) Sheikh Dr Meshaal Al-Sabah co-chaired the meeting with participation from the US Department of Commerce, and the Kuwaiti Ministry of Health, among others.

Also present from the US side was Ambassador Alina L. Romanowski, Deputy Assistant Secretary for Arabian Gulf Affairs Tim Lenderking, and Health and Human Services Office of Global Affairs Director Garrett Grigsby.

The discussion focused on Kuwait's progress and next steps towards improv-

ing its business climate and intellectual property protection regime, the importance of Kuwait developing a reliable and trustworthy data security system, the signing of a memorandum of understanding between the US Department of Health and Human Services and the Ministry of Health of the State of Kuwait, and opportunities to increase bilateral trade and investment.

"The Trade and Investment Working Group is an essential forum for strengthening the bilateral trade and investment relationship between the United States and Kuwait," Ambassador Romanowski said. "We look forward to increased cooperation in key areas including cyber security, defense, energy, healthcare, and information technologies," Romanowski added.

The US-Kuwait Strategic Dialogue, first launched four years ago, is an annual high-level series of meetings which frames the two countries' work on issues of shared concern. The next working group on defense is scheduled for November 23.



Manisha Singh



Alina Romanowski



Tim Lenderking



Garrett Grigsby

Kuwait COVID-19 recoveries cross 130,000 mark

KUWAIT: The number of coronavirus recoveries in Kuwait rose by 587 to 130,426 over the past 24 hours, the health ministry said yesterday. Kuwait meanwhile tallied 485 new COVID-19 cases over the past 24 hours to up the total to 138,822, while a pair of fatalities pushed its death toll from the outbreak to 859, the health ministry further revealed. The number of people hospitalized with the virus currently stands at 7,537, with 94 of them in intensive care units, according to ministry spokesman Dr Abdullah Al-Sanad, adding that some 6,758 swab tests were conducted over the last 24 hours out of a total of 1,035,985 so far. The spokesman went on to urge the public that abiding by health precautions, mainly following social distancing rules, is the only way to halt the spread of the virus. —KUNA



Virus-drained nurses hang up uniforms for other jobs

US coronavirus death toll passes 250,000, New York closes schools

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US Secretary of State Mike Pompeo (center) visits the Israeli-annexed Golan Heights, near Merom Golan on the border with Syria, yesterday. — AFP

Pompeo visits Israeli settlement in parting gift

US to label exports from West Bank settlements as 'Made in Israel'

SHAAR BINYAMIN, West Bank: Mike Pompeo yesterday paid the first visit by a US secretary of state to an Israeli settlement in the occupied West Bank, in a parting show of solidarity with Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu by the outgoing Trump administration.

Palestinians accused Pompeo of helping Israel to cement its control over West Bank land that they seek for a state after he made a trip to the Shaar Binyamin winery near the settlement of Psagot, just north of Jerusalem.

To Israel's delight and Palestinian dismay, Pompeo in 2019 broke with decades of American foreign policy to announce that the US under President Donald Trump no longer viewed Israel's settlements as "inconsistent with international law".

Palestinians and much of the world regard the settlements as illegal under international law. After meeting with Netanyahu yesterday morning Pompeo travelled to the West Bank to visit the settler winery, which has a blend named after him.

He also issued guidelines for Israeli products made in settlements to be labelled "Made in Israel" or "Product of Israel" when imported to the United States, removing the distinction between products made within Israel and those produced in occupied territory. The US will label exports from Jewish settlements in the occupied West Bank as Israeli. Secretary of Pompeo announced yesterday, in Washington's latest move backing Israel's authority

over the Palestinian territory.

"All producers within areas where Israel exercises the relevant authorities... will be required to mark goods as 'Israel', 'Product of Israel', or 'Made in Israel' when exporting to the United States," Pompeo said in a statement.

He said the new guidelines apply "most notably" to Area C, the large part of the West Bank where Israel retains full civil and military control and where much of the settler population lives.

Area C also includes the strategic Jordan Valley and many Palestinian communities, areas that Israel considers to be disputed territory. Pompeo's announcement seems to imply that even Palestinian exports from Area C should be tagged as Israeli products. "Area C producers operate within the economic and administrative framework of Israel and their goods should be treated accordingly," he said.

Pompeo's visit departed from past policy that had kept top US officials away from settlements, which Palestinians view as obstacles to a viable future state. Palestinian negotiator Hanan Ashrawi accused Pompeo of using Trump's final weeks in office "to set yet another illegal precedent, violate international law and perhaps to advance his own future political ambitions".

"Pompeo is intoxicated by apartheid wine stolen from Palestinian land. It is opportunistic and self-serving, and it damages the chances for peace," Ashrawi told Reuters.

Wasel Abu Youssef, a senior member of the Palestine Liberation Organization, also denounced his labelling announcement. "This is totally rejected. It reaffirms the partnership between President Trump and the occupation," he said. It is unclear whether Trump's decision on settlements would be reversed by a Biden administration, amid Israeli concerns he will take a tougher line on the issue.

Golan Heights

Before heading to the West Bank, Pompeo said he also intended to visit the Israeli-occupied Golan Heights.

In 2019 Trump formally recognized Israel's sovereignty over the area of the strategic plateau that it captured from Syria in 1967 and later annexed in a move not recognized by the United Nations and most countries.

"The simple recognition of this as part of Israel, too, was a decision President Trump made that is historically important and simply a recognition of reality," Pompeo said yesterday. The Palestinian leadership cut ties with Trump White House three years ago, accusing it of pro-Israel bias.

But many Israelis viewed Trump's election defeat with dismay, and his close ally Netanyahu waited 10 days after Joe Biden declared victory to speak with the Democratic candidate and refer to him as president-elect. — Agencies

International

7 dead in Uganda protests after arrest of presidential candidate

Situation in Kampala remains tense after violence, candidate arrest

KAMPALA: Seven people died in violent protests that erupted in Kampala on Wednesday after Ugandan presidential candidate Bobi Wine was arrested, police said. Security forces clashed with supporters of the pop star-turned-opposition leader who is President Yoweri Museveni's main opponent in presidential elections on January 14. "So far the dead are seven, as from late last evening. Those injured are 45," police spokesman Fred Enanga told AFP on Tuesday.

The singer, whose real name is Robert Kyagulanyi, remained in police custody yesterday for allegedly violating coronavirus measures at his rallies. Enanga said calm had returned to the capital "even after there were attempts by some gangs this morning to block roads by burning tyres and setting up barricades, which police stopped."

The Red Cross said late Wednesday it had treated more than 30 people following "scuffles involving the police and the rioting masses", including 11 people for gunshot wounds.

Wine, 38, has long been a thorn in Museveni's side, netting a widespread following through catchy pop songs about social justice and corruption. Many young Ugandans see him as their champion in a country mired in poverty and

youth unemployment.

Museveni, a 76-year-old former rebel who seized power in 1986, is one of Africa's longest-serving leaders. Wine has been repeatedly arrested—most recently on November 3 after he filed his candidacy for the elections—his concerts are routinely banned and his public rallies broken up with teargas.

Tension

The situation in Kampala remained tense early yesterday, with a constant military and police presence. Rocks, burned tyres and other debris littered many streets in the city center. A group of Wine supporters remained camped outside Nalufenya prison in eastern Uganda where he was being detained.

A leading supporter, Muhammad Ssegirinya, who is also an opposition parliamentary candidate, was detained after posted an audio message saying Kyagulanyi collapsed in detention over night and was to be flown out of the country for treatment. The US embassy published a tweet saying it deplored the violence and extended its sympathy to the victims and their families.

"We urge all parties to renounce violence, undertake good-faith measures to reduce tensions,



LUUKA, Uganda: Supporters of Ugandan musician turned politician Robert Kyagulanyi, also known as Bobi Wine, take cover from tear gas as police officers arrest Kyagulanyi during his presidential rally in Luuka, Uganda, on Wednesday. — AFP

and respect fundamental freedoms," it said. Patrick Oboi Amuriat, the candidate with the Forum for Democratic Change, was also detained on Wednesday but has been released. Two other presidential candidates, Henry Tumukunde and

Gregory Mugisha Muntu, have called off their campaigns until Uganda's electoral body prevailed over what they called police brutality against opposition candidates. Museveni made no immediate comment on the protests. — AFP

Ethiopia accuses WHO chief of backing native Tigray's leaders

ADDIS ABABA: Ethiopia's army chief yesterday accused WHO boss Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus—the country's highest-profile Tigrayan abroad—of lobbying for and seeking to arm leaders in the conflict-torn dissident region. Prime Minister Abiy Ahmed unleashed a military campaign against the northern region on November 4 with the declared aim of unseating its ruling party, the Tigray People's Liberation Front (TPLF), which he accuses of defying his government and seeking to destabilize it.

Army chief Berhanu Jula told a press conference that Tedros, who served as minister of health under TPLF leader Meles Zenawi, was "a part of that team", referring to the party. "He has worked in neighboring countries to condemn the war. He has worked for them to get weapons," said Berhanu.

He said Tedros had "left no stone unturned" to help the TPLF, the party Abiy says he is targeting in a military offensive in the region. "What do you expect from him? We don't expect he will side with the Ethiopian people and condemn them," he said. Tedros has yet to respond to the accusation.

The 55-year-old was appointed as the

first African head of the WHO in 2017 and has become a household name as he grapples with the Covid-19 pandemic. He has been ranked as one of Time magazine's most influential people. Abiy's government insists its target is the "reactionary and rogue" members of the TPLF and not average civilians in Tigray.

But observers have voiced concern about Tigrayans losing their jobs or being arrested for their ethnicity.

The TPLF led the overthrow of Mengistu Hailemariam, head of Ethiopia's military Derg regime, in 1991 and dominated politics for three decades until the arrival of Abiy who was appointed in 2018. The party has complained about being sidelined under Abiy, and scapegoated for the country's woes, and a bitter feud with the central government this year led them to hold their own elections in defiance of a postponement due to the coronavirus. — AFP



Ethiopian People's Revolutionary Democratic Front (EPRDF) reinforcements drive to the presidential palace in Addis Ababa following numerous anti-EPRDF and anti-US demonstrations in which at least six people were gunned down in this file photo. — AFP

The Tigrayan party at the heart of Ethiopia's conflict

NAIROBI: From spearheading the struggle against dictatorship to dominating government and then withdrawing from the national stage, the Tigray People's Liberation Front (TPLF) has shaped Ethiopia's history for decades.

As Prime Minister Abiy Ahmed's army wages an offensive against the TPLF leaders in their northern bastion of Tigray, here is a brief history of the group:

The years underground

The TPLF emerged from a feverish and radical student movement, steeped in Marxist-Leninism, which shook an imperial Ethiopia dominated by the ethnic Amhara elite in the 1960s and 70s. In a country that is home to some 80 different groups, Stalin's writings on the nature of nationality bringing together people of the same culture, language and territory, inspired several Tigrayan students to form the TPLF in February 1975.

One of these, Aregawi Berhe, wrote that the TPLF was born as a small guerrilla squad filled with "an ethno-nationalist consciousness generated by the cumulative grievances of Tigrayans against successive central governments of Ethiopia." The group "aimed to secure the self-determination of Tigray within the Ethiopian polity."

Emperor Haile Selassie had been overthrown the previous year and the new military Marxist regime known as the Derg brutally crushed the demands of ethno-nationalists. — AFP

International

One year on, grief and anger over Iran protest crackdown

Tehran imposed 'a near-total internet blackout' from Nov 16, 2019: Amnesty

PARIS: One year after protests that were harshly suppressed by the Iranian authorities, grief over the hundreds of mainly young lives lost is matched by anger over the lack of accountability for a crackdown whose scale is only now beginning to emerge. The protests, of a magnitude rarely seen in Iran following the 1979 Islamic Revolution and the biggest since 2009 rallies over a disputed election, erupted nationwide in November 2019 after a sudden hike in fuel prices.

Activists say the authorities managed to impose control only after a ruthless crackdown that, according to Amnesty International, left at least 304 people dead in a deliberate policy to shoot at demonstrators. The harshness of the crackdown and size of the toll were concealed by an internet shutdown that activists denounced as a bid to prevent information from filtering out.

Meanwhile, not a single official in Iran has faced justice over the repression, amid allegations that families who lost loved ones have been pressured into keeping silent. Those arrested during the protests, however, have faced sentences including the death penalty. "Iranian authorities have avoided any measure of accountability and continue to harass the families of those killed during the protest," said Tara Sepehri Far, Iran researcher at Human Rights Watch.

'Unlawful and excessive force'

According to a report published by Amnesty this

week, Iran implemented "a near-total internet blackout" from November 16, the day after the protests began, by ordering internet service providers to shut down, with access restored only gradually from November 21. It said the shutdown prevented people from seeing shocking videos of the crackdown taken by Iranian citizens with their phones, in what the group describes as a "web of impunity."

Even now the scale of the suppression is still unclear, and Amnesty warns the toll is likely to exceed its figure of 304 verified deaths. The group had posted online what it says are more than 100 verified videos taken in 31 cities in November 2019 revealing the "repeated use of firearms" against unarmed protesters and bystanders.

At least 23 of those killed were under the age of 18, Amnesty said, including teenagers like 15-year-old Mohammad Dastankhah, who was shot by security forces stationed on a roof while on his way home from school in Sadra, a city in the Shiraz region. Another innocent bystander to die, it said, was Azar Mirzapour, 49, a nurse and mother of four who according to Amnesty was shot dead in Karaj, outside Tehran, as she was about to arrive home from work.

"The Iranian security forces used unlawful and excessive force against unarmed protesters and bystanders," said Raha Bahreini, Iran researcher for Amnesty International. "In most cases security forces used live ammunition aimed at the head or bodies, indicating they were implementing a shoot-



TEHRAN: In this file photo taken on November 17, 2019 an Iranian man checks a scorched gas station that was set ablaze by protesters during a demonstration against a rise in gasoline prices in Eslamshahr, near the Iranian capital of Tehran. —AFP

to-kill policy," she added. Activists say that rather than helping relatives of the victims seek justice, authorities have been prosecuting protesters, with Amnesty alleging that those arrested were subjected to torture, including water-boarding and sexual abuse. Death sentences imposed in June against three young men were halted only after a campaign to spare their lives both outside and inside Iran.

Manouchehr Bakhtiari, whose 27-year-old son Pouya was shot dead, was jailed after he criticized the authorities, according to Persian-language media based outside Iran. The refusal of Iran to prosecute any officials—and the lack of response to calls for a UN-led international inquiry—has prompted activists to set up their own "tribunal" to determine whether crimes were committed under international law. —AFP

Pakistani Islamist found guilty on two more charges

LAHORE: A Pakistani court yesterday sentenced Islamist leader Hafiz Saeed, founder of Lashkar-e-Taiba (LeT), the militant group blamed by the United States and India for the 2008 Mumbai siege, to 10 years in prison on two charges of terrorism financing, his lawyer said. The sentences for the two charges – five years each – will run concurrently. Saeed is already in jail serving two sentences of five-and-a-half-years each, handed down to him in February this year, which means he will not serve any extra jail time.

"An anti-terrorism court in Lahore sentenced ten-and-a-half years imprisonment to chief of Jamaatud Dawa Hafiz Saeed, his deputy Zafar Iqbal, and spokesman Yahya Mujahid on charges of terror financing," Saeed's lawyer Imran Fazal Gill told Reuters.

Jamaat ud-Dawa is a charity run by Saeed. "Since the convict has already been convicted ... by this court vide judgment dates 12.02.2020, so the punishment awarded to him in this case shall also run concurrently with punishment in said cases," said the court order which was seen by Reuters. Appeals have been filed against previous sentences, Gill said. Saeed has been arrested and released several times over the past decade. He denies any involvement with militancy, including the 2008 Mumbai siege in which 160 people were killed, including Americans. —Reuters

A group of villagers, a migrant boat and a deadly end in Senegal

MECKHE, Senegal: Seven neighbors from a village in western Senegal boarded a fishing boat crammed with migrants just after midnight on Oct. 26. Their destination: Europe, 1000 miles away over open ocean. Two of them are now missing, presumed dead, after the boat carrying dozens of people capsized in a collision with the Senegalese coastguard.

One can barely walk from his injuries. Another is haunted by the memory of clinging to a piece of flotsam while others around him flailed and sank into the black ocean. "You see people die in front of you and you cannot do anything," survivor Sidi Gaye told Reuters before pausing and lowering his head. Driven by economic hardship during the coronavirus pandemic that has forced thousands to seek a better life, around 17,000 migrants have arrived on the Canary Islands this year, an over 1,000% increase from 2019, according to Spanish Interior Ministry data.

The surge in migrants to Spain's autonomous community off the coast of northwestern Africa alarms observers who say thousands could be dying en route without detection. Unlike the Mediterranean Sea route from Libya to southern Europe, the wooden fishing boats on the choppy Atlantic do not carry satellite phones, and people cannot make distress calls. Alarm Phone, a hotline service for migrants stranded at sea, said reports indicate that over 400 from Senegal are known to have died since the beginning of October alone.

"Invisible shipwrecks must occur ... due to the lack of possibilities for boats to communicate once they are far from the coast," said Paola Arenas from Alarm Phone. There is no cell phone reception for at least 70% of the two-week trip, she said. Spanish security forces said they will deploy at least three boats, a plane, a helicopter and a submarine to slow the flow. However, it is unclear how the deployment will drastically cut departures from Senegal's long coastline where thousands of identical looking fishing boats trawl the waters daily – or if it will be a deterrent for those desperate to leave.

Foreign Minister Arancha Gonzalez Laya is expected in Senegal on Nov. 21 to discuss the issue.

Thrown overboard

In all, 21 men departed the village of Meckhe, in north-west Senegal, together before dawn on Oct. 25. Only seven made it on the boat, which left in a hurry when it heard the coastguard was near.

"I have always dreamed of ... working in Senegal, creating jobs," said Abdou Aziz, a 22-year-old shop owner from Meckhe who scraped together \$700 for the boat. "Since COVID, everything changed. Everything has become more expensive." Soon after leaving, the Senegalese coastguard ordered the boat to stop, said four survivors, but the captain sped up. During an hour-long chase, the patrol boat fired tear gas at the migrants and passed in front of the boat to create waves to slow it down.

Eventually, the coastguard rammed the fishing boat, causing it to capsize, throwing about 80 passengers into the water, the survivors said. When people cried for help, the coastguard waited for 15 minutes before it picked anyone up, they said. "I was in the place where the boat hit us and I was thrown into the water. I cannot swim, I didn't have any help," said Mohamed Diop, 30. Traumatized, and now needing crutches to walk, Diop spends his days in a windowless bedroom watching music videos with the lights off. —Reuters

International

Britain unveils defense spending splurge for post-Brexit, Biden era

Johnson vows 'to end the era of retreat'

LONDON: Prime Minister Boris Johnson vowed yesterday "to end the era of retreat" as he unveiled Britain's biggest program of military investment since the end of the Cold War, as the country positions itself for a post-EU future. The extra spending of £16.5 billion (\$22 billion) over four years was welcomed by Donald Trump's outgoing US administration and comes as Johnson bids to build bridges to the incoming presidency of Democrat Joe Biden. But with Britain's finances under severe strain from the coronavirus pandemic, the government indicated it is likely to raid the legally enshrined budget for overseas aid to pay for other priorities.

The cash boost is intended in part for emerging defense needs such as space and cyber-warfare and Johnson said it showed "our commitment to NATO, the transatlantic alliance and the security of our friends and allies around the world".

"I have done this in the teeth of the pandemic, amid every other demand on our resources, because the defense of the realm and the safety of the British people must come first," he told parliament.

"The international situation is now more perilous and intensely competitive than at any time since the Cold War," Johnson said the new funding would come to 2.2 percent of British gross domestic product—exceeding a US-mandated NATO target and more than any European peer—and was "our chance to end the era of retreat".

Commentators said the prime minister had exempted defense from cost-cutting measures planned to be announced next week by his finance minister, Rishi Sunak, who has splurged more than £200 billion to shore up the economy during this year's pandemic. The plan was also read as a calculated message to the new Biden administration, harmonizing transatlantic priorities on defense after Johnson also put climate change front and center of his post-pandemic rebuilding policy. "Which European country has the potential both to project military power and a history of supporting American leadership?" wrote Paul Goodman, a former Tory MP who is editor of the political blog ConservativeHome. "France has the first but not the second, Germany the second but not the first. Only Britain ticks both boxes," he said.

'Threats'

Britain's military upgrade comes at a pivotal moment for the coun-

As COVID toll among Kenyan doctors jumps, one widow shares her grief

KHUMUSALABA, Kenya: When Daniel Alushula began gasping for air after contracting COVID-19 last month, all the intensive care beds in his home town hospital were taken and he had to travel around 50 km (30 miles) to secure one. The 60-year-old orthopedic surgeon died a week later on Oct. 30, his family said, one of nine Kenyan doctors to have succumbed to the virus in the past four weeks, according to the Kenya Medical Practitioners, Pharmacists and Dentists Union.

He was active in the union's campaign to better protect doctors and their families from the risk of catching while at work, fellow medic Anthony Akoto said.

Four of the nine doctors who have fallen victim to the pandemic died over the past weekend, and the Union has threatened a national strike from Dec. 6 if the government fails to provide protective equipment and medical insurance for its members, and compensation for



LONDON: The extra spending of £16.5 billion (\$22 billion) over four years was welcomed by Donald Trump's outgoing US administration and comes as Johnson bids to build bridges to the incoming presidency of Democrat Joe Biden.

try. After formally leaving the European Union in January, it will end the 11-month Brexit transition period at the end of the year and begin a new era in international trade and relations. Biden will meanwhile take power in late January, with allies hoping his presidency marks a more stable period for NATO after the tumult of the Trump years.

US acting defense secretary Christopher Miller hailed the UK announcement. "The UK is our most stalwart and capable ally, and this increase in spending is indicative of their commitment to NATO and our shared security," he said in a statement. "With this increase, the UK military will continue to be one of the finest fighting forces in the world."

Johnson announced a new agency dedicated to military artificial intelligence, the creation of a National Cyber Force and a new "Space Command", capable of launching its first rocket by 2022.

The Space Command follows a similar US force pushed by Trump and is meant to protect British satellites' critical role in modern life, from defense to communications. Scotland will host the rocket launches and much of a new program of naval shipbuilding, Johnson said, as he pushes back against a resurgent campaign for independence by the Scottish National Party.—AFP

health workers who die from COVID-19. "We are not going to be sacrificial lambs," its secretary-general, Chibanzi Mwachonda, told Reuters.

The Health Ministry did not respond to requests for comment. Up to mid-October, COVID-19 had killed just one Kenyan doctor, as travel restrictions and mandatory mask wearing spared the country the worst of its first wave.

However, the disease has spread faster in the general population too since the government eased the curbs in late September, with compliance with mask wearing and social distancing also dropping. As of Wednesday, the country had reported 1,313 deaths, about a quarter of which have occurred in November, and hospital beds are filling up across the country.

Before he died, Alushula tried to keep his colleagues' spirits up. "No need to panic, daktari", Alushula wrote in a text message from his ICU bed to Akoto, a younger doctor he mentored at the hospital in the western district of Busia where they both worked. "You take care of the others, but I will pull through." Akoto said Alushula's health insurance as a public doctor did not cover his COVID treatment, which his family had to pay for his treatment themselves. His wife and two children were also infected but recovered. Alushula had not been treating COVID patients, his colleagues said, and it was unclear how he was infected.—Reuters

Virus-drained nurses hang up uniforms for other jobs

BRUSSELS: One is a pastry-cook. Another dreams of becoming a bookseller. All have slammed the door on the hospitals where they used to work, exhausted by wave after wave of Covid-19 patients. Nolwenn Le Bonzec, a former nurse who moved from her native Brittany to the Belgian capital Brussels, recounted how she hung up her surgical uniform six months ago and hasn't looked back.

Now she makes little colored cupcakes. A radical shift that "saved my mental health", she says.

"I worked for five years in a hospital. Little by little I saw the working conditions go downhill, and health became a mere product. Initially, it was a profession we did to be humane," the 27-year-old says, as she wears the black apron of the "Lilicup" shop where she now works. Thomas Laurent, another former nurse, wanted to work in a hospital since he was 15 — it was an "old dream," he explains. In January he will start training as a bookseller.

The 35-year-old Frenchman has just left the hospital emergency ward in Lyon, central France. Conditions there, he says, "were no longer tolerable". Despite a desperate plea by European authorities for medical staff to treat wave after wave of COVID-19 patients, these former nurses speak of disillusionment and disappointment with public health systems they say fell far short of what they were designed for. "We have demanded better conditions for years. But the (Belgian) government simply doesn't take us seriously," Le Bonzec says. "If I kept on, I think I would have fallen into depression. We protested. We stood up. But it didn't change anything."—AFP



Nolwenn Le Bonzec, a former nurse who quit her job at the Saint-Luc hospital during the first wave of the novel coronavirus COVID-19, holds a tray with cupcakes at Lilicupcake, her new job where she creates cupcakes. — AFP

International

US coronavirus death toll passes 250,000, New York closes schools

Europe remains hardest-hit region, accounting for 46% of new global cases

WASHINGTON: US coronavirus deaths passed a quarter of a million people Wednesday as New York announced it would close schools to battle a rise in infections and anti-restriction protests in Europe turned violent. America has now registered 250,426 fatalities, according to a running tally by Johns Hopkins University, by far the highest reported national death toll.

US states and cities were imposing a raft of new restrictions, including home confinement, the closure of indoor dining and a limit on gatherings as cases soar across the country, with more than 157,950 new infections recorded over the past 24 hours on Wednesday. New York Mayor Bill de Blasio said the city's 1,800 public schools would revert to remote learning beginning yesterday after the Big Apple recorded a seven-day average positivity rate of three percent.

"We must fight back the second wave of COVID-19," he said. The toughened measures in America's most-populous city came despite pharma giant Pfizer boosting hopes of a possible end to the pandemic by announcing improved results for its vaccine. Europe meanwhile remains the hardest-hit region, accounting for 46 percent of new global cases and 49 percent of deaths last week, according to the World Health Organization (WHO). Its figures additionally showed the only region where

cases and deaths declined last week was South-east Asia.

Worldwide, the novel coronavirus has killed at least 1,350,275 people since the outbreak emerged in China last December, according to a tally from official sources compiled by AFP yesterday. In Switzerland, one of the worst-hit countries in Europe, the Swiss Society for Intensive Care Medicine (SSMI) warned that intensive care units "are practically all full."

More beds have been added, and the Swiss military has been called in to support efforts in several areas.

Water cannon fired in Berlin

Many European countries are extending heavy restrictions on daily life in attempts to curb the spread of the virus. A French government spokesman said authorities are unlikely to lift a partial lockdown any time soon while Portugal's government was preparing to extend measures for two more weeks.

In Hungary, a state of emergency that enables partial lockdown measures has now been extended until February. In Berlin, police fired water cannon to disperse thousands of unmasked protesters demonstrating against tightened restrictions.

The protesters, who have equated the restrictions to Nazi-era rules, responded by



NEW YORK: A school bus drives down a street in Brooklyn on Wednesday in New York City. Public schools in New York City, the largest school district in the nation, closed again yesterday. —AFP

chanting "Shame! Shame!" The protest came a day after clashes with police at a similar demonstration in the Slovak capital Bratislava attended by thousands of far-right supporters.

Despite the impact of the virus, efforts to tackle the pandemic were expected to be sidelined at yesterday's EU summit due to a row stemming from Hungary and Poland's opposition to

Brussels' oversight over the rule of law.

In Russia, President Vladimir Putin voiced alarm at his country's rising fatality rate but stopped short of introducing strict measures seen in many European countries. Meanwhile, Iranian President Hassan Rouhani said he would impose "severe restrictions" in many areas of his country from Saturday. —AFP

Facebook moderators press for pandemic safety protections

SAN FRANCISCO: More than 200 Facebook content moderators demanded better health and safety protections Wednesday as the social media giant called the workers back to the office during the pandemic. A petition signed by the contract workers living in various countries said Facebook should guarantee better conditions or allow the workers to continue their jobs from home.

"After months of allowing content moderators to work from home, faced with intense pressure to keep Facebook free of hate and disinformation, you have forced us back to the office," said the open letter released by the British-based legal activist firm Foxglove. The letter called on Facebook to "keep moderators and their families safe" by maintaining remote work as much as possible and offering "hazard pay" to those who do come into the office. When the pandemic hit, Facebook sent home most of its content moderators—those responsible for filtering violent and hateful images as well as other content which violates platform rules.

But the social platform discovered limits on what remote employees could do and turned to automated systems using artificial intelligence, which had other shortcomings. —AFP

AstraZeneca vaccine shows promise in elderly, trial results by Christmas

LONDON: AstraZeneca and Oxford University's potential COVID-19 vaccine produced a strong immune response in older adults, data published yesterday showed, with researchers expecting to release late-stage trial results by Christmas.

The data, reported in part last month but published in full in *The Lancet* medical journal yesterday, suggest that those aged over 70, who are at higher risk of serious illness and death from COVID-19, could build robust immunity. "The robust antibody and T-cell responses seen in older people in our study are encouraging," said Maheshi Ramasamy, a consultant and co-lead investigator at the Oxford Vaccine Group. "We hope that this means our vaccine will help to protect some of the most vulnerable people in society, but further research will be needed before we can be sure."

Late-stage, or Phase III, trials are ongoing to confirm the findings, researchers said, and to test whether the vaccine protects against infection with SARS-CoV-2 in a broad range of people, including people with underlying health conditions. Results of those trials should definitely be known by Christmas, the Oxford Vaccine Group's director Andrew Pollard said, adding it was too early to know whether and how well the vaccine works in preventing COVID-19 disease.

"We haven't quite got to that point yet. We're obviously not going to rush that," he told BBC radio. "We're getting close, and it's definitely going to be before Christmas, based on the progress."

The Oxford-AstraZeneca COVID-19 vaccine candidate, called AZD1222 or ChAdOx1 nCoV-19, had been among the front-runners in



An illustration picture shows vials with COVID-19 Vaccine stickers attached and syringes, with the logo of the University of Oxford and its partner British pharmaceutical company AstraZeneca. —AFP

global efforts to develop shots to protect against infection with the novel coronavirus, or SARS-CoV-2. But rival drugmakers Pfizer Inc, BioNTech and Moderna Inc have in the past 10 days edged ahead, releasing data from late-stage COVID-19 vaccine trials that shows more than 90% efficacy.

Unlike the Pfizer-BioNTech and Moderna shots, both of which use new technology known as messenger RNA (mRNA), AstraZeneca's is a viral vector vaccine made from a weakened version of a common cold virus found in chimpanzees. The Phase II trial reported in *The Lancet* involved a total of 560 healthy volunteers, with 160 aged 18-55 years, 160 aged 56-69 years, and 240 aged 70 or over. —Reuters

International

Options dwindling, Trump faces setback in Georgia poll recount

Barring a series of unprecedented events, Biden to be sworn in on Jan 20

WASHINGTON: The US presidential election battleground state of Georgia was expected to affirm Joe Biden's victory over President Donald Trump after a painstaking recount, which would deal another setback to Trump's efforts to cling on to power. Georgia's top election official, a Republican, has said the manual recount of almost five million votes is unlikely to erode Biden's initial 14,000 winning margin by enough to hand Trump victory in the state.

That would leave Republican Trump with a dwindling number of options to overturn the results of an election in which Democrat Biden won 5.8 million more votes nationwide. Barring a series of unprecedented events, Biden will be sworn in on Jan 20.

In the state-by-state Electoral College that determines the winner, Biden has captured 306 electoral votes to Trump's 232, well ahead of the 270 needed for victory. The winner in each state is awarded that state's electoral votes, a number roughly proportional to the population.

Flipping Georgia's 16 votes would still leave Trump at least two closely contested states away from overturning Biden's victory. Georgia officials say they expect to release results before a certification deadline today. In Pennsylvania, where Biden won by 82,000 votes, the Trump campaign is asking a judge to declare him the winner there, saying its Republican-controlled

legislature should choose the state's slate of 20 Electoral College voters.

In Wisconsin, the Trump campaign has paid for a partial recount, even though election officials there say that will likely only add to Biden's 20,000-vote advantage in a state that carries 10 electoral votes.

'A deeper problem'

Trump's campaign has filed lawsuits in a number of other states, including Michigan, with scant success so far. Those legal motions, sprinkled with factual errors, have been dismissed by Biden's campaign as "theatrics" that are not based on sound law.

Several prominent law firms have pulled out of the operation, leaving Trump's personal lawyer Rudy Giuliani to spearhead the efforts. State and federal election officials, as well as outside experts, say Trump's argument that the election was stolen from him by widespread voter fraud has no basis in fact. However, it does appear to be affecting public confidence in American democracy. A Reuters/Ipsos opinion poll released on Wednesday found about half of Republicans believe Trump "rightfully won" the election.

Arizona's top election official, Democrat Katie Hobbs, said she and her family had been getting violent threats and urged Trump to stop



ATLANTA, GA: A man riding a Segway dressed as Uncle Sam taunts Biden supporters during a "Stop the Steal" rally against the results of the US Presidential election outside the Georgia State Capitol on Wednesday in Atlanta, Georgia. — AFP

casting doubt on the result, in which he lost by just over 10,000 votes. "(The threats) are a symptom of a deeper problem in our state and

country - the consistent and systematic undermining of trust in each other and our democratic process," Hobbs said in a statement. — Reuters

Will Biden be a one-term president?

WASHINGTON: Joe Biden, the oldest person ever to win the US presidency, will celebrate his 78th birthday today. If he were to run and be reelected in 2024, he would be 86 at the end of a second term in 2029. With two months to go before he even gets the keys to the Oval Office, Washington insiders are already asking: will he be a one-term president?

Throughout his campaign against Donald Trump, Biden—a "lion of American history," according to his former boss, Barack Obama—has remained purposefully vague about his future plans.

When asked by ABC News in August if the idea of serving for eight years was on his internal radar, Biden replied: "Absolutely."

But before that, in April, at a fundraising event, he told donors that he saw himself as a "transition candidate"—a phrase that raised eyebrows and fueled speculation. Was he trying to say he was the best placed to shut the book on Trumpism, because of his decades of political experience and his empathetic nature, but would



then pass the torch to a new generation of Democrats in 2024?

It goes without saying that many of the party's new, bright faces were not even alive when Biden was first elected to the US Senate in 1972. Or was he simply talking about transition in a broader sense, without meaning to offer any outlook on the future?

A few days after securing the presidency over Trump, Biden's sister Valerie—who has played a key role in his political career but generally remains out of the public eye—expressed confidence he would seek reelection. So, what did he mean by "transition candidate" then?

She told "Axios on HBO" that he was "transitional in that he's bringing in all these young people and bringing (us) back again (so) we're not a divided country." — AFP

Biden team anxious over escalating war in ally Ethiopia

ADDIS ABABA: US President-elect Joe Biden's foreign policy adviser yesterday urged an end to fighting and protection for civilians in north Ethiopia, where federal troops are battling rebels in a war rocking the Horn of Africa and sending refugees fleeing. "Deeply concerned about the humanitarian crisis in Ethiopia, reports of targeted ethnic violence, and the risk to regional peace and security," tweeted Antony Blinken.

The conflict in Tigray region has killed hundreds and possibly thousands, sent 30,000 refugees into Sudan and called into question whether Prime Minister Abiy Ahmen, Africa's youngest leader and last year's Nobel Peace Prize winner, can hold together the nation together. Ethiopia is a federation of states run by separate ethnic groups, and the war pits the central government against one of the most heavily militarised regions. The northern Tigray People's Liberation Front (TPLF) effectively ruled Ethiopia for

decades as the strongest force in a multi-ethnic coalition, until Abiy took power two years ago. Refugees from the fighting say militias from neighboring Amhara state, which has a border dispute with Tigray, are also backing government troops. The country is a major US ally whose soldiers serve in peacekeeping missions in South Sudan and Somalia. Its military and intelligence services are among the most capable in Africa and regularly work alongside US personnel.

"The TPLF and Ethiopian authorities should take urgent steps to end the conflict, enable humanitarian access, and protect civilians," added Blinken, a veteran diplomat and longtime Biden confidant. He is expected to play a senior role as the incoming US administration looks to jettison President Donald Trump's "America First" agenda and build up relations with allies.

On the ground, Ethiopia accused Tigrayan forces of atrocities. The TPLF leader said his soldiers were still holding the important town of Axum, though they had lost Shire as federal troops sought to close in on the state capital Mekelle. "Shire has fallen three days back but Axum is with us, but there is an army sent to control Axum ... there is a fight," Debretsion Gebremichael said in a text to Reuters. There was no immediate response from the government. Assertions by all sides have been impossible to verify because internet and phone connections to Tigray have been suspended and the government has restricted access. — Reuters

International

Thailand PM threatens to use all laws against protesters

Protesters fear use of royal insult laws

BANGKOK: Thai Prime Minister Prayuth Chan-ocha threatened yesterday to use all laws possible against protesters, as demonstrations escalate for his removal and for reforms to curb the powers of King Maha Vajiralongkorn.

Activists voiced concern that this could mean the resumption of prosecutions under some of the world's harshest royal insult laws. "Prayuth has declared a battle against the people," said rights lawyer and protest leader Arnon Nampa. "For civil servants who have not chosen sides, you need to decide whether to live in the past or to build a future with us."

The protests since July have become the greatest challenge to Thailand's establishment in years and have broken a longstanding taboo by criticizing the monarchy, which can carry a jail term of up to 15 years. Prayuth's announcement came a day after thousands of protesters threw paint at the headquarters of the police in what they said was a response to the use of water cannon and teargas that hurt dozens on Tuesday, the most violent day of protests since July. Some protesters also sprayed anti-monarchy graffiti. "The situation is not improving," Prayuth said in a statement. "There is a risk of

escalation to more violence. If not addressed, it could damage the country and the beloved monarchy.

"The government will intensify its actions and use all laws, all articles, to take action against protesters who broke the law."

He did not specify whether this included Article 112 of the criminal code, which forbids insulting the monarchy. Prayuth said earlier in the year that it was not being used for the moment at the request of the king. Police have been collecting evidence since July for possible prosecutions for violating the article but had not taken further steps, one police source said.

Outraged by the anti-monarchy graffiti at Wednesday's demonstration, some royalists called for the application of Article 112 in posts on social media. Dozens of protesters, including many of the most prominent leaders, have been arrested on a variety of charges in recent months, though not for criticizing the monarchy.

There were nearly 100 prosecutions for violations of the royal insult laws under the junta that Prayuth led after seizing power in a 2014 coup, but there have been none since 2018, according to data from rights group iLaw. Pro-



BANGKOK: Large inflatable ducks are passed around the crowd as pro-democracy protesters gather for an anti-government rally at a major intersection in Bangkok on Wednesday. — AFP

testers accuse Prayuth of engineering an election last year to keep stay on in power as a civilian prime minister. He says the ballot was fair.

A major protest is planned at the Crown Property Bureau on Nov. 25 over the manage-

ment of the palace fortune, which the king has taken into his personal control. The fund is valued in the tens of billions of dollars. Protesters said there would be seven more days of demonstrations after that. — Reuters

Japan on 'maximum alert' after record coronavirus cases

TOKYO: Japan is on "maximum alert" after logging a record number of daily coronavirus infections, its prime minister said yesterday, though no immediate restrictions are planned. The comments came as Tokyo raised its alert level to the top of its four-tier system, with local media saying the capital would report a record number of infections for a second day running.

More than 2,000 cases were recorded nationwide on Wednesday, with nearly 500 in Tokyo. While these figures are comparatively low globally speaking, they represent a sharp rise in cases for Japan, where testing is often less widespread than in other parts of the world.

"We are now in a situation of maximum alert," Prime Minister Yoshihide Suga told reporters. "I ask you, the Japanese people, to fully implement principles such as wearing masks," Suga added, urging people to wear them even while talking during meals in restaurants. The country has taken a relatively relaxed approach to virus restrictions so far—even a nationwide state of emergency in the spring carried no obligation for businesses to close or for people to stay home.

National broadcaster NHK said Suga had asked expert advisers to meet today to examine the growing number of infections, before the government brings in any new measures. Suga said he would support regional administrations if they asked businesses to close early, and that restrictions such as limiting groups at restaurants to four people should be considered. Even though Tokyo has now raised its alert level to the highest tier, the move does not come with auto-



TOKYO: Tokyo Governor Yuriko Koike explains measures against the COVID-19 during a press conference at the Tokyo Metropolitan Government Office in Tokyo yesterday. — AFP

matic restrictions. Local media said the capital was unlikely to request early business closures for now.

"We are in a phase where infections are expanding rapidly, we need to be vigilant," said Norio Ohmagari, director of Japan's Centre for Disease Control and Prevention, speaking at a top-level meeting to discuss the virus situation in the capital. He warned that traditional end-of-year parties and dry air in winter could both be risk factors for the spread of the disease.

While Japan has ramped up testing, rates are still comparatively low. In metropolitan Tokyo, home to nearly 14 million people, around 5,000-6,000 people are tested a day. Still, Japan has seen a relatively small outbreak so far, with close to 121,000 recorded infections and just over 1,900 deaths since the virus was first detected in the country in January. — AFP

Kashmir to enact India's forest rights law 14 years on

SRINAGAR: Authorities in Jammu and Kashmir will implement a law to grant land rights to forest dwelling communities 14 years after the legislation was enacted nationwide, a long-awaited move that may better protect nomadic tribes, human rights activists said.

The Forest Rights Act (FRA) of 2006 aimed to recognize the rights of at least 150 million indigenous and rural people to inhabit and live off about 40 million hectares of forest land. It was not implemented in Jammu and Kashmir as the northern state had special status that exempted it from several federal laws until October 2019 when the government introduced direct rule from New Delhi.

"This central act ... became applicable to J&K only after 31st October, 2019, hence recognizing the rights of forest dwelling communities for the first time in the Union Territory," said B.V.R. Subrahmanyam, Jammu and Kashmir's chief secretary.

Authorities will complete a survey of claimants under FRA by Jan 15, and approve all eligible claims by March 1, he said. While FRA was hailed by land rights activists as a progressive legislation that would improve the lives of impoverished indigenous people, states have been slow to implement it, with about half of all claims rejected.

The law is being challenged in India's Supreme Court, with the top court ordering a stay on evictions of millions of forest dwelling people whose land claims had been rejected.

"We welcome the decision to implement FRA in Jammu and Kashmir after all these years. It will give tribal people more legal rights," Rahi, General Secretary of Tribal Research and Cultural Foundation, told the Thomson Reuters Foundation. — Reuters

International

Abandoned by Trump, can battered Afghans pin their hopes on Biden?

US troop pullout could unleash fresh wave of violence

KABUL: Donald Trump's plan to slash US troops in Afghanistan could unleash a fresh wave of violence by an emboldened Taliban, analysts say, but a more measured approach by Joe Biden could take the sting out of the insurgent group's bid for power.

The latest move would see another 2,000 US troops exit Afghanistan by January 15 — less than a week before Biden is due to be sworn into office-leaving just 2,500 behind. The Pentagon announced the plans on Tuesday, after Trump pledged to end a war that has killed about 2,400 American service members and cost over a trillion dollars.

"The hope is that the US (under Biden) would not rush to the exit, would apply more coercive pressure on the Taliban," said Nishank Motwani, deputy director at the Afghanistan Research and Evaluation Unit (AREU). "The emphasis on withdrawal does not help President Ashraf Ghani much-or Afghan forces—because the Taliban know they can wait out the US and push for total power," he told AFP.

Still, drawing down troop levels to 2,500 by January is something the incoming Biden administration might already be comfortable with, said Vanda Felbab-Brown of the Brookings In-

stitution. "If the US wants to stay a few months, the Taliban can swallow that," she told AFP, but difficulties would emerge if he plans to keep the force beyond May 2021. The US being around for another five years or more "is not palatable to the group", she added.

'Irresponsible'

Any drawdown—either by Trump or continued by Biden—will have a considerable impact on the battlefield, according to Afghan political analyst Atta Noori. "This is very irresponsible because the war on terrorism has not ended in Afghanistan yet," he said. Ideally, Washington would maintain a small but capable residual force and intelligence assets, said the AREU's Motwani.

Violence has surged in recent months despite the Taliban and Afghan government engaging in peace talks in Qatar since September 12. Despite the negotiations, the Taliban have launched offensives targeting Afghan forces across the country, and officials also blame them for two brutal attacks on education centers in Kabul that killed dozens of students in recent weeks.

But it is not just the bloodshed that worries Afghan officials. The drawdown has also hard-



KABUL: In this file photo taken on November 28, 2008, US Army soldiers from 1-506 Infantry Division set out on a patrol in Paktika province, situated along the Afghan-Pakistan border. The Pentagon yesterday announced plans to slash troop levels in Afghanistan to its lowest levels in nearly 20 years of conflict. — AFP

ened the Taliban position at the negotiating table in Doha where peace talks have remained deadlocked for weeks. "The Taliban know the

Americans are leaving, and leaving behind a besieged and weak ally that has limited political and military options," Motwani said. — AFP

Australian forces 'unlawfully killed' 39 in Afghanistan

CANBERRA: Australia's elite special forces "unlawfully killed" 39 Afghan civilians and prisoners, including summary executions as part of initiation rituals, according to evidence in a searing military inquiry now being referred to a special war crimes prosecutor.

A years-long internal investigation into military misconduct was released yesterday, prompting the Chief of the Australian Defense Force to admit a "destructive" culture of impunity among special forces leading to a string of alleged murders and cover-ups spanning years. "Some patrols took the law into their own hands, rules were broken, stories concocted, lies told and prisoners killed," General Angus Campbell said, apologizing "sincerely and unreservedly" to the people of Afghanistan.

"This shameful record includes alleged instances in which new patrol members were coerced to shoot a prisoner in order to achieve that soldier's first kill, in an appalling practice known as 'blooding'." The report also reported evidence that troops were engaged in "body count competitions", and covered up unlawful killings by staging skirmishes, planting weapons and adding names to target lists retrospectively.

The military's own inspector general produced



CANBERRA: Chief of the Australian Defense Force (ADF) General Angus Campbell delivers the findings from the Inspector-General of the Australian Defense Force Afghanistan Inquiry, in Canberra yesterday. —AFP

the harrowing 465-page official inquiry into events between 2005 and 2016 that detailed dozens of killings "outside the heat of battle". It recommended 19 individuals be referred to Australian Federal Police, compensation be paid to the families of victims, and the military makes a slew of reforms. Campbell went a step further, saying those involved had brought a "stain" on their regiment, on the armed forces and on Australia, and would be referred to the office of the special investigator for war crimes.

He also moved to revoke distinguished service medals awarded to special operations forces who served in Afghanistan between 2007 and 2013. After the September 11, 2001 attacks, more than 26,000 Australian uniformed personnel were sent to Afghanistan to fight alongside US and allied forces against the Taliban, Al-Qaeda and other Islamist groups. — AFP

Pakistan's PM goes to Afghanistan as US readies pullout

KABUL: Pakistan's Prime Minister Imran Khan arrived in Kabul yesterday to meet with Afghan President Ashraf Ghani, at a time when peace negotiations between the Afghan government and Taliban representatives have stalled and violence is rising. This will be Khan's first visit to Afghanistan since assuming office over two years ago. It is the highest profile visit by a Pakistani official to Kabul since peace talks began between the Taliban and the Afghan government in the Qatari capital of Doha.

And it comes days after the Pentagon announced it would reduce the number of US military personnel in Afghanistan from 4,500 to 2,500 by mid-January. Due to leave office on Jan. 20 after losing this month's presidential election to Democrat Joe Biden, President Donald Trump is seeking to end the 19-year war in Afghanistan, the United States' longest conflict.

Critics slammed Trump for timing the withdrawal to his own calendar as opposed to some kind of breakthrough in Afghanistan that would justify a major drawdown. And outside of Afghanistan, nowhere is the risk of instability greater than in neighboring Pakistan.

Mistrust has cloaked relations between the

neighbors, due to Pakistan's covert support for the Taliban during the past two decades. And as militants later began launching attacks inside Pakistan, it accused Afghanistan of stirring trouble in its borders. "Focus would be on further deepening the fraternal bilateral relations between Pakistan and Afghanistan, the Afghan peace process, and regional economic development and connectivity," Pakistan's foreign office said in a statement as Khan headed for Kabul.

Pakistan's role in the peace talks has been key, according to Washington, particularly given its influence over the Taliban leadership, though Pakistan says that influence has waned over the years.

Washington's special representative for Afghan peace, Zalmay Khalilzad has made a number of trips to Islamabad to discuss the peace process. Ghani had last visited Pakistan in June 2019, according to Pakistan's foreign office.

A spokesman for the Afghan presidential palace, Dawa Khan Minapal, said the main purpose of the visit would be bilateral trade and economic relations, but the fight against militancy in the region would also be at the top of the agenda. "The focus will be mainly on the peace process but we won't keep our hopes high," said a source in the Afghan presidential palace.

Violence has remained high in Afghanistan despite the ongoing peace process. During the past six months the Taliban have carried out 53 suicide attacks, while 1,210 civilians were among the thousands killed in violence linked to the insurgency, according to Tariq Arian, spokesman for the Afghan Interior Ministry. — Reuters

International

Graduating HK students display banned pro-democracy slogans

Judge says police were wrong to hide ID badges

HONG KONG: Dozens of graduating Hong Kong students displayed slogans yesterday that authorities have declared illegal in a rare act of defiance against a sweeping new national security law imposed on the city by Beijing. The law was unveiled in June and outlawed certain political views, such as advocating for independence or greater autonomy from Beijing. It has all but wiped out the mass democracy protests that rocked the city last year and has left swathes of the population too scared to speak out. Anti-coronavirus bans on more than four people gathering in public have also stifled protests and stopped official graduation ceremonies from being held.

But yesterday small groups of students at the Chinese University of Hong Kong (CUHK) donned face masks and chanted protest slogans for an unofficial graduation day. Among the slogans chanted and displayed were "Liberate Hong Kong. Revolution of our times" and "Hong Kong independent, the only way out." Both phrases were a common feature of last year's rallies, but have since been declared illegal under the new national security law, which can carry up to life in prison. The students also sang "Glory to Hong Kong", a protest song that authorities have also outlawed.

'People need to regather'

In a statement, CUHK said graffiti was sprayed during the protest and reported to the police. CUHK's campus saw brief clashes a year ago between police and protesters and was decked for months in slogans and graffiti that has since been wiped away. A few days later, much more intense clashes broke out at Polytechnic University with police besieging hundreds of protesters, some of whom were armed with bow and arrows.

Students attending the rally said political oppression had increased over the last year but they felt determined to speak out despite the risks. "My biggest graduation wish is the Chinese Communist Party will fall from power soon," a 22-year-old student, who identified his surname as Wong, told AFP. "To be honest, the movement is over now," said another student, who gave only a first name, Amanda. "People will need to regather the power and come back again". Beijing says its security law has restored stability and hit out at western criticism that the move ends the freedoms and autonomy Hong Kong was guaranteed ahead of its 1997 handover from Britain.

While yesterday's protest was small in number, it illustrates that

Western allies say China broke HK deal by ousting lawmakers

WASHINGTON: The United States, Britain, Australia, Canada and New Zealand accused China of violating its legally binding international commitments by ousting pro-democracy lawmakers from Hong Kong's legislature. The foreign ministers of the five allies said China was going against its 1984 promise that it would preserve autonomy in the financial hub after the then British colony's handover in 1997.

The removal of four opposition lawmakers triggered the en masse resignation of their remaining colleagues, the latest move in a deepening crackdown against Beijing's critics following last year's huge and often violent democracy protests. "China's action is a clear breach of its international obligations under the legally binding, UN-registered Sino-British Joint Declaration," the nations said in a joint statement, reiterating individual remarks.



HONG KONG: Students from the Chinese University of Hong Kong (CUHK), wearing graduation gowns and masks, display slogans that authorities say are now illegal under a new security law, at a protest in memory of the pro-democracy demonstrations at CUHK a year ago during graduation festivities at the campus in the Shatin area of Hong Kong yesterday. — AFP

many of the grievances which fuelled last year's unrest remain unaddressed. Meanwhile, Hong Kong police were wrong to hide identification badges during last year's democracy protests while the city's watchdog was "inadequate" for investigating complaints against officers, a senior judge said yesterday. The ruling is a blow to the city's pro-Beijing leaders who have defended the police's actions during the huge and often violent democracy protests and have dismissed calls to overhaul how officers are monitored.

Yesterday's ruling by Judge Anderson Chow in the High Court stemmed from a series of judicial review applications brought against police by multiple parties. During the months of clashes last year riot police often refused to wear ID badges making it all but impossible to identify officers involved in complaints. Lawyers for an Indonesian journalist who lost an eye to a police baton round, for example, have complained that they have been unable to identify the officer who fired the shot. No police officer has been sacked over last year's protests while the Independent Police Complaints Commission (IPCC) has exonerated the force of any major wrongdoing. But judge Chow said the police and government breached Article 3 of the Hong Kong Bill of Rights by failing to show identity badges and provide an adequate complaints mechanism. — Agencies

The foreign ministers said the latest move appeared to be part of a "concerted campaign to silence all critical voices" in the financial hub. "For the sake of Hong Kong's stability and prosperity, it is essential that China and the Hong Kong authorities respect the channels for the people of Hong Kong to express their legitimate concerns and opinions," said the alliance, known collectively as the Five Eyes.

China's foreign ministry spokesman yesterday hit back against the accusation, calling it a "blatant violation of international law" and saying "any attempt to exert pressure on China... is doomed to fail."

"No matter if they have five or ten eyes, if they dare to damage China's sovereignty, security and development interests, they should beware of being blinded," said spokesman Zhao Lijian. China promised to rule Hong Kong via a "One Country, Two Systems" model that would allow the city to retain key freedoms and autonomy from the authoritarian mainland until 2047.

Western allies say that agreement has been prematurely shredded by the clampdown, which has included a broad national security law that was imposed directly by Beijing in June. The law has since all but wiped out dissent against Chinese rule in the territory and left swathes of the population too scared to speak out, fearing being jailed or disappearing into the mainland's opaque legal system. — AFP

US Navy commander in Asia welcomes Japan-Australia pact

TOKYO: A senior US Navy commander in Asia yesterday welcomed an agreement by Japan and Australia to tighten military cooperation that will bolster the United States in a region where China's influence is growing. Japanese Prime Minister Yoshihide Suga and Australian leader Scott Morrison on Tuesday agreed in principle on a Reciprocal Access Agreement (RAA) that will more closely align the US allies through a legal framework allowing each other's troops to visit for training and to conduct joint military operations.

"That kind of agreement is really helpful and encouraging to everybody in the region. We are very supportive of that agreement and we look forward to exercising along right with them," Vice Admiral William Merz, commander of the US Navy's Seventh Fleet, which is headquartered in Japan, said during a roundtable briefing. The agreement between Canberra and Tokyo, Japan's first with another country since a similar agreement with Washington in 1960, comes as the two countries work more closely with the United States and India as part of an informal grouping known as the "Quad" as they grow more concerned about Chinese activity in the South China Sea and East China Sea.

Suga hosted foreign ministers from the Quad in Tokyo last month before heading to Vietnam and Indonesia to deepen ties with key Southeast Asian nations. Merz, who spoke with Lieutenant General H Stacy Clardy, the commanding general of III Marine Expeditionary Force in Okinawa, said greater cooperation in the region is not aimed at China. "There is no attempt to contain China or anyone else, we are trying to create an environment of inclusion," he said. — Reuters



This handout photo taken and released by the Indian Navy on Wednesday shows Indian army fighter jets on the deck on an aircraft carrier during the second phase of the Malabar naval exercise in the Arabian sea. India, Australia, Japan and the United States started the second phase of a strategic navy drill on November 17 in the Northern Arabian sea. — AFP

Friday Times

Lifestyle

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Issa Kassissieh, better known as the Jerusalem's Santa Claus, poses next to a Christmas tree on a solid salt formation in the Ein Boqeq Dead Sea resort near Neve Zohar.— AFP



'Wonder Woman' sequel to launch on HBO Max streaming and theaters

See Page 22

Private protection: Croatian codpiece is hit with tourists



Women pose in the premises of an association which purpose is to preserve the art of traditional handicrafts and where women gather to knit, crochet or weave, in Licko Petrovo Selo, central Croatia. —AFP photos



Elderly women make traditional woollen codpieces or 'nakurnjaks'.



An elderly woman stands in front of her house in Licko Petrovo Selo.



Sheep, of which the wool is used to make woollen codpieces or 'nakurnjaks', stand in an enclosure in Licko Petrovo Selo.



This picture shows the window of the premises of the Tara association, which purpose is to preserve the art of traditional handicrafts and where women gather to knit, crochet or weave traditional socks, handbags, towels and woollen codpieces.



Villager Anka Prica, 73 years old, knits traditional woollen codpieces or 'nakurnjaks'.



Bozica Leka, 83 years old, sits next to traditional woollen codpieces or 'nakurnjaks'.

Once used to warm men's private parts during harsh winters in rural Croatia, the woollen codpiece or 'nakurnjak' is making a comeback as a popular souvenir, thanks to a handful of women preserving traditional handicrafts from oblivion. "The nakurnjak sparks laughter, a lot of positive energy, jokes. Many (tourists) take one as a nice Christmas gift," explains Sonja Leka, a 55-year-old who runs an association of knitters preserving the old-fashioned arts in their tiny village in the central Lika region. In 15th and 16th century Europe, crotch coverings known as codpieces became fashionable items, seen in portraits of kings like Henry VIII of England. The French philosopher Michel de Montaigne went so far as to lambast the accessory as an "empty and useless model of a member that we cannot even decently mention by name, which however we show off and parade in public".

But ordinary men in the Balkans wore the coverings for more practical reasons—as underwear to stay warm and to soften the impact of horseback riding. In Lika, a mountainous sparsely populated region in central Croatia known for cold winters, the nakurnjak was a must-have item knitted by women from sheep's wool. "Men's folk costumes had large pants, without any protection below, they had to ride horses and walk through forests to collect firewood, that's where the need to make nakurnjak comes from," said Leka. "Our ancestors were practical, there was no shame in naming useful items," she said of the Croatian word for the garment, whose translation is more literal than 'codpiece'.

Part of dowry

In Licko Petrovo Selo, a village of around 100, Leka runs the Tara association where women have been gathering in the small centre to knit, crochet or weave traditional socks, handbags, towels and nakurnjaks. The latter became a hit among tourists visiting the nearby Plitvice

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Lakes national park, a UNESCO World Heritage site, said Leka, who is also a tourist guide. Last year some 600 mostly American tourists visited the handicraft group, which has received donations from embassies and the local municipality. But a four-star hotel across from the run-down building accommodating the association is now empty due to the coronavirus. A spread of knitted items including dozens of cylindrical white and grey nakurnjaks, lying on tables in Tara's modest premises, are a sad reminder of the pandemic.

The women have sold or gifted some 1,500 so far, packed in cardboard boxes with a background story and a pair of walnuts as a "symbol of good health". The elderly knitters say the nakurnjak was once an important item in a woman's dowry, which included the so-called "bride's chest" of handicrafts that women prepared for their future husbands. If a bride could not estimate the right dimensions of the nakurnjak for her husband, she had to ask her groom's relatives for guidance. The codpieces are available in XL, XXL and 'Lika size', Leka said with a laugh. Men in the region stopped sporting the item in the late 1950s when the availability of cotton underwear took over.

"We come here to socialize and work at the same time so that these old crafts, knitting and weaving, are not forgotten," said Anka Prica, a 73-year-old who is part of the association. She and 83-year-old Bozica Leka regret youngsters are not interested in learning the craft. "It's a pity not to pass this on to young people so that the tradition continues. The tradition will die with us," Leka said. —AFP



This picture shows a street of Licko Petrovo Selo, a village in Croatia's rural Lika region known for its harsh winters, where traditional woollen codpieces or 'nakurnjaks', which became popular tourist souvenirs, are made.



Women stuff traditional woollen codpieces or 'nakurnjaks'.



This picture shows a traditional woollen codpiece or 'nakurnjak', a popular tourists souvenir with two walnuts as a symbol of good health.



Villager Anka Prica (R), 73 years old, sits next to Bozica Leka, 83 years old, and shows traditional woollen codpieces or 'nakurnjaks'.



A woman puts on display traditional woollen codpieces or 'nakurnjaks'.



Bozica Leka, 83 years old, sits next to traditional woollen codpieces or 'nakurnjaks'.



Women pose in the premises of an association which purpose is to preserve the art of traditional handicrafts and where women gather to knit, crochet or weave, in Licko Petrovo Selo, central Croatia.



In this file photo Actress Gal Gadot attends the world premiere of "Wonder Woman" at the Pantages in Hollywood, California. — AFP

Wonder Woman' sequel to launch on HBO Max streaming and theaters

The much-delayed Warner Bros superhero sequel "Wonder Woman 1984" will premiere on HBO Max and in theaters simultaneously from Christmas Day in the United States, the studio announced Wednesday. The decision to release the eagerly awaited movie on the company's own recently launched streaming platform represents a gamble for a film which cost a reported \$200 million, and comes as Hollywood scrambles to respond to the Covid-19 pandemic. "It wasn't an easy decision and we never thought we'd have to hold onto the release for such a long time but COVID rocked all of our worlds," wrote star Gal Gadot on her social media accounts. She added: "You can watch it IN THEATERS (they're doing an amazing job keeping it safe) and you can also watch it on HBOMAX from your homes. Sending you my love. Please keep safe and wear a mask."

The movie, which was originally due to launch in June, will hit theaters in other countries a week earlier starting on December 16. Before the pandemic, blockbuster movies ran only on the big screen for a theatrical window of 90 days, but with theaters closed in many parts of the US, including New York and Los Angeles, distributors have been forced to innovate. The move comes after Disney released "Mulan" on Disney+ in September, but unlike that launch "Wonder Woman 1984" will be offered at no extra cost to subscribers of Warner's rival streaming platform for one month. "As we navigate these unprecedented times, we've had to be innovative in keeping our businesses moving forward while continuing to super-serve our fans," said WarnerMedia studios and networks chairwoman Ann Sarnoff.

The sequel to 2017's \$800-million-grossing "Wonder Woman" will see Gadot reprise the title role as one of the comic book universe's biggest female superheroes. Chris Pine also returns for the sequel, which is set in the 1980s, decades after the World War I-set first movie. Patty Jenkins returns to direct. The original "Wonder Woman" received the best reviews of any of the inter-connected DC Universe superhero movies from Warner Bros., which also include the latest Superman and Batman films. — AFP

Prince William welcomes probe into 1995 Diana interview

Prince William has called an investigation into claims that his mother Princess Diana was tricked into agreeing her bombshell 1995 BBC interview a "step in the right direction". The late princess' brother, Charles Spencer, has alleged the flagship "Panorama" program reporter who conducted the interview, Martin Bashir, showed him faked documents to persuade his sister to take part. The BBC announced Wednesday the immediate start of an investigation, a move welcomed by the prince. "The independent investigation is a step in the right direction," William, 38, said late on Wednesday. "It should help establish the truth behind the actions that led to the Panorama interview and subsequent decisions taken by those in the BBC at the time."

Diana detailed her collapsing marriage to the heir to the throne in the November 1995 interview, which was watched by a record 22.8 million people. She famously said "there were three people" in her marriage—her, Charles and his long-time lover Camilla Parker-Bowles—and also revealed she had been unfaithful. Diana and Charles formally divorced in 1996. She died in a Paris car crash the following year. Charles and Camilla married in 2005. New reports have surfaced alleging that Bashir used underhand methods to persuade Diana to talk, including by claiming her own staff members were being paid to spy on her.

The probe will focus principally on the role of Bashir, who was little-known at the time but went on to have a global career. It will consider "the mocked-up bank statements purporting to show payments to a former employee of Earl Spencer... (and) the purported payments to members of the Royal Household". It will also look at revelations made by Spencer this month about Bashir to the Daily Mail, which said the reporter made "lurid claims"



In this file photo taken on January 27, 1988 Princess of Wales Diana waves to the crowd during her visit to the Footscray Park in suburb of Melbourne. — AFP

about Queen Elizabeth II, Charles and other royals. Bashir, 57, who is now the BBC's religious affairs editor, has not responded to the latest claims. The BBC has said he was seriously unwell after contracting the coronavirus and is also recovering from heart surgery. — AFP

Cardi B and Hilton feature in their hairstylist Tokyo Stylez's 'Queen of Stylez' docuseries on Snapchat

Cardi B and Paris Hilton feature in their hairstylist Tokyo Stylez's "Queen of Stylez" docuseries on Snapchat. The 30-year-old hairstylist and wigmaker to the stars will be spilling the tea and discussing the design of a brand new wig as part of the series, with each episode set to feature one of her famous clients, including the 'WAP' and socialite, plus Karrueche Tran, Mulatto, Flo Milli, De'Arra, Kash Doll, and Nikita Dragun. The first episode is set to premiere on Saturday. Tokyo will take viewers behind-the-scenes of her creative process, the ups and downs of her "rapid rise to fame", and share how her family reacted to her recent transition.

A press release states that: "Tokyo relies on her closest friends to help manage her hectic life, intensified by her rapid rise to fame. Having recently transitioned, not everyone in Tokyo's life has adjusted seamlessly. In Tokyo's new world, she finds herself at a crossroads, redefining who she considers to be her true family." Tokyo - who has also worked for Kylie Jenner and the Kardashian family - started working with Cardi early on in her career and loves coming up with styles that are "outside the box" with the rapper. On how they met, she said previously: "I actually knew Cardi for a little while before I started doing her hair. She was always very nice



Paris Hilton and Cardi B

to me and always wanted me to do her hair but my schedule was always so crazy. At the time I was doing Kylie [Jenner] and a few of the other Kardashians and I had Nicki Minaj as well.

"I guess you could say the stars aligned, we had a gap in our schedule so I did her hair once and that was it. Then her song 'Bodak Yellow' really started to hit, and next thing you know we were everywhere as her

schedule got extremely busy. "I really appreciate Cardi because she is constantly pushing all her glam artists to do something outside the box. When you do stuff on a high level, you do start to get stagnant, so you have to find that person that will push your boundaries." The eight-episode Snap Original docuseries is produced by Glass Entertainment and can be viewed on Snapchat's Discover page. — Bang Showbiz

Lifestyle | Features

Friday, November 20, 2020

Qatar hotels fighting to survive until 2022 World Cup

Qatar has marketed its opulent skyscraper hotels as jewels in its World Cup 2022 crown but coronavirus curbs and a glut in new properties are jeopardizing the industry. As well as keeping out overseas visitors, travel restrictions have complicated staffing preparations just as Qatar's hospitality sector was scaling-up for football's marquee event. One former Qatar-based hotelier told AFP that preparations had been made "difficult" and staffing was not at levels to ensure properties are ready in time. "It's a struggle," she said. One Doha hotel manager said lockdown had forced him to wait three to five months to bring staff from abroad, complicating training plans.

As in much of the Gulf, migrant labor is vital to the gas-rich emirate where expat workers outnumber the 333,000 Qataris nearly nine to one. Without a large middle class to sustain domestic tourism, Qatar had hoped to expand its hospitality sector ahead of 2022 by encouraging mini-breaks for passengers connecting through Doha on Qatar Airways. That promotion is currently frozen. Qatar expects as many as 1.5 million people to descend on the tiny Gulf nation for the World Cup, and in the months before and after the big event. But the increasing supply of

hotel rooms needed for the tournament could hurt operators in the two years before kick-off. The hotel market is "generally over-supplied", said Pawel Banach of property valuation experts ValuStrat which has warned that not all of Qatar's hotels will survive the coronavirus downturn.

Smaller properties have suffered the most during Qatar's strict lockdown, the Doha manager said, with non-residents mostly unable to visit the country since March. "Some hotels lost 30 to 50 percent of their expat staff," he added. "The country has been affected for sure." Even Doha's best-known properties are now rarely full, with many depending on their restaurants and bars to stay afloat as demand for stays has collapsed.

'Difficult market'

The situation shows no sign of picking up soon. Strict curbs on entry have been extended to January, meaning hotels look unlikely to exceed the 50 percent occupancy rates for 2020 forecast by property services firm Cushman and Wakefield. That's down more than 10 percentage points on 2019, squeezing the bottom line at many properties. Qatar still aims to ex-



This file photo shows a view of the skyline of the Qatari capital Doha. — AFP

pand its hotel room capacity from 28,000 to around 45,000 by 2022, according to Banach, making it harder for existing hotels to stay profitable as new properties open. "It could be a huge oversupply for sure which will be difficult to sustain," he said. "It is a difficult market obviously." Amid the challenges, some developers have ditched plans for high-end hotels, opening instead as serviced hotel-style apartments popular with expatriate professionals. Qatar's hotel industry has been taking knocks ever since

2016 when the oil price crashed, depressing business in the Gulf. That was followed by the 2017 Gulf crisis which saw Saudi Arabia, the United Arab Emirates and other countries abruptly cut ties with Doha.

The cut has caused travel from its two neighbors—once key sources of revenue for Qatar—to dry up overnight. In what has turned into a stalemate, the neighboring states accuse Qatar of being too close to Iran and radical Islamists, charges Doha denies. — AFP

New Zealand vows crackdown on defecating backpackers

The New Zealand government promised Wednesday to take action against backpackers relieving themselves at natural beauty spots as part of post-coronavirus tourism plans. Kiwis have long complained about so-called "freedom campers" who travel the country in campervans that do not have toilet facilities and leave human waste by the side of the road. Tourism Minister Stuart Nash said the practice did not fit New Zealand's "100 percent pure" image and that international visitors could expect changes when borders eventually reopen. "They need to buy into our sustainability brand and what we stand for as a country—defecating on the side of the road and waterways is not who we are as a nation," he told reporters.

Nash said he planned to ban travellers from hiring campervans that were not self-contained as part of a tourism industry reset when the Covid-19 pandemic eases. "My ambition is that once global borders open, New Zealand is considered by the world's most discerning travellers as one of the top three places in the world to visit," he said. Before the pandemic, tourism was one of New Zealand's biggest money-spinners, with about four million annual international visitors contributing NZ\$16.2 billion (\$11.2 billion) to the economy. Nash suggested that visitors in future should follow his own example before setting out to explore New Zealand's rugged natural wonders. "I always go before I leave home," he said. — AFP

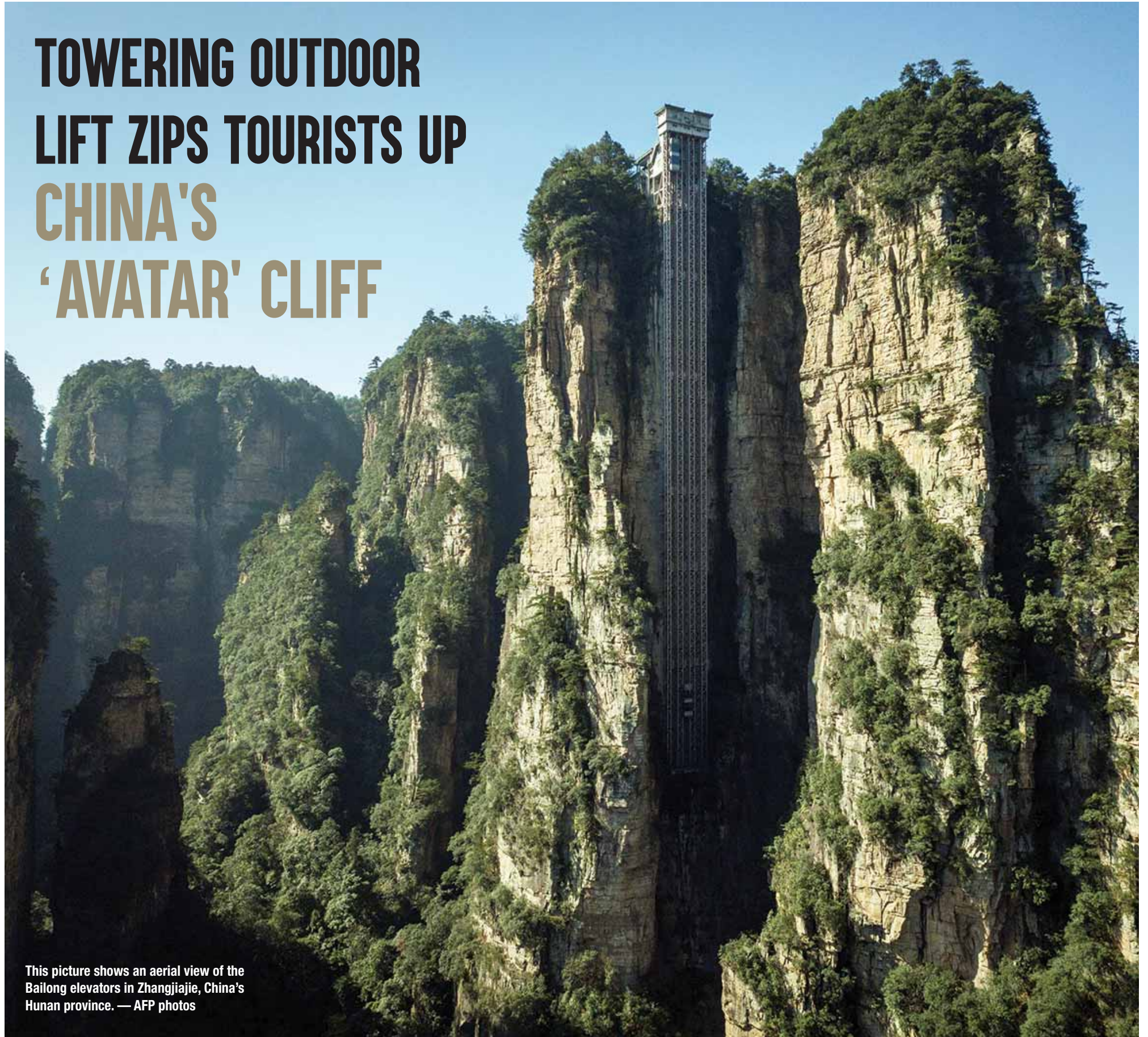


Robot reminds Japan shoppers to wear masks

Asking someone to put on a mask is a touchy subject, so one shop in Japan has enlisted a robot to make sure its customers wear them during the pandemic. "I'm sorry to bother you, but please wear a mask," says the small humanoid machine after wheeling up to a bare-faced shopper, in a demonstration video released by its developers. "Thank you for understanding," it says when the customer obliges, bowing its rounded white head towards them in thanks.

The robot nicknamed "Robovie" has been deployed at a sports store in the city of Osaka in an experiment by Kyoto-based research institute ATR, which built the electronic clerk. Its camera and laser scanner can detect when people are not wearing a mask, or standing too close together in the queue—in which case it asks them to move apart. As well as enforcing social distancing, Robovie can direct customers to the part of the store they want to go to, according to ATR. Japan has had a comparatively small coronavirus outbreak overall, although cases are rising with a record 2,201 infections recorded nationwide on Wednesday. — AFP

TOWERING OUTDOOR LIFT ZIPS TOURISTS UP CHINA'S 'AVATAR' CLIFF



This picture shows an aerial view of the Bailong elevators in Zhangjiajie, China's Hunan province. — AFP photos

Towering more than 300 meters (1,000 feet) up the cliff face that inspired the landscape for the blockbuster movie "Avatar", the world's highest outdoor lift whisks brave tourists to breathtaking views. The three double-decker elevators in central China's Zhangjiajie Forest

Park zip up the cliff in just 88 seconds, a speedy attraction as domestic tourism slowly recovers in China after the coronavirus forced strict travel measures and lockdowns earlier this year. It delivers tourists to the top of the sandstone rock face that inspired the fictional jungle moon of

Pandora—home to the blue-hued Na'vi people—of the 2009 James Cameron smash hit. "One of the main reasons we came is that the site inspired Avatar," said Qiao Ke, 45, who travelled to the lift with his family. "The film really made an impression on us. And it really is beautiful here."

Lifestyle | Travel

Friday, November 20, 2020



This picture shows tourist taking the Bailong elevators in Zhangjiajie, China's Hunan province.

"Its geological structure is very suited to using elevators as a means of transport, so we made this Bailong Elevator", explained Liu Jie, the director of the company managing the lift, whose name means "Hundred Dragons." "Before, there was only a cable car with limited capacity, so tourists had to wait a long time," Liu added. The alternative

was to brave a three-hour climb up on foot. "It's super-fast," retiree Jin Shihao told AFP after completing the ride, which costs \$19 (129 yuan) for a return ticket. Around 8,000 tourists take the lift every day. However, numbers are still significantly down from an average of 14,000 before the pandemic. — AFP



This picture shows an aerial view of the Bailong elevators in Zhangjiajie, China's Hunan province.



A group of tourists using mobile phones to take pictures of the scenery as they ride the Bailong elevator.



A model of an "Avatar" at the gate of an Avatar theme post office in a passage led to Bailong elevator.



Two tourists using their mobile phones to take pictures of the Bailong elevators.



Two tourists wearing face masks looking out in front of the Bailong elevators.



Famous Irish milliner, fashion designer and the world's only haute couture expert Philip Treacy attends the presentation of the exhibition "Maestro Philip Treacy" displayed at the Erarta museum in Saint Petersburg. — AFP photos



ROYAL HATTER TREACY

BRINGS GLAMOUR TO RUSSIA DESPITE PANDEMIC



Designer Philip Treacy, a haute couture hatmaker to the British royals and American stars, presented his collection in Saint Petersburg on Wednesday saying "we all need entertainment" during a pandemic. The 53-year-old Irishman, who counts among his clients Queen Elizabeth II, the Duchess of Cambridge and Madonna, unveiled the collection at Saint Petersburg's Erarta Museum of Contemporary Art, which celebrated its 10th anniversary this autumn. Speaking to reporters at Russia's largest private museum of contemporary art, Treacy said he had defied the pandemic to bring his collection to the country's second city because people needed a happy distraction and Saint Petersburgers responded especially well to his creations.

"We all need entertainment at the moment...to distract us from what's actually happening worldwide," said Treacy, described by Vogue magazine as "perhaps the greatest living milliner." Forty-six pieces of the designer's work feature in the "Maestro Philip Treacy" exhibition which opens on Friday and will run until March 21. He said he was "very touched" by the warm reception the first exhibition of his works received in Russia's former imperial capital in 2015.

"Hats are about elegance and beauty," Treacy said, adding that residents of Saint Petersburg "understand the power of the hat" because they live in one of the world's most beautiful cities. "You live within elegance and beauty," he said. Presenting the new exhibition, the Erarta museum said that "both Petersburg and the museum got under Philip Treacy's skin." — AFP



Visitors take pictures of hats by the famous Irish milliner, fashion designer and world's haute couture expert Philip Treacy during the presentation of the exhibition "Maestro Philip Treacy" displayed at the Erarta museum in Saint Petersburg.

Not to be sniffed at: Historical smells project launched

From stinky streets to the stench of the Battle of Waterloo, a multi-skilled team of experts is setting out to recreate the smell of Europe's past, which will be shared with museums across the continent. The ODEUROPA project will look to identify, describe and recreate the aromas that wafted across the continent from the 16th to the early 20th century. Experts say every period in history has its own smell, from when agriculture was the mainstay of society, to the factories of industrialization and the creep of urbanization.

William Tullett, a smell historian from Anglia Ruskin University in eastern England and a member of the ODEUROPA team, said he hoped the archive would bring new insights and transport the public into a bygone era. "The one thing the public is interested in about the past is what it was like to be there," he told AFP. "I think it will give people a more intimate experience of the past but it will also encourage people to think about the smells around them today." The 2.8 million euro (2.5 million pound, \$3.3 million) project will see the key smells from more than 400 years of European life shared at museums across the continent. Artificial intelligence will also be used to trawl through literature in seven languages and works of art across the centuries for references to odor. The archive will be available to the public on the internet through the world's first historical encyclopedia of scent.

Protected for posterity

Some museums have already incorporated scents from the past into exhibits, such as the smells of World War I trenches at London's Imperial War Museum or the recreated aromas of a Viking settlement at the Jorvik Viking Centre in York. For this project, ODEUROPA has brought together experts and academics from universities and institutes in the Netherlands, Germany, Italy, France and Slovenia as well as Britain to discover how scents have molded communities and traditions. "Smells shape our experience of the world, yet we have very little sensory information about the past," said Inger Leemans, the project lead and a professor of cultural history at Vrije Universiteit Amsterdam. "We want to teach the computer to see a smell," added Peter Bell, a professor of digital humanities at the University of Erlangen-Nuremberg in Germany. "Our goal is to develop a 'computer nose' able to trace scents and olfactory experiences." Tullett said the project would take in simple smells, like rosemary, which in the 16th century people believed could protect them from plague. But it would also extend to the "smell-scape" of large-scale events like the Battle of Waterloo, which ended in defeat for Napoleon Bonaparte in 1815, and everything in between. The project will pose the question of whether smells should be protected for posterity by organizations like UNESCO, the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization.—AFP



An exhibition of Yemeni artist Boshra Al-Habub



Yemenis visit an exhibition of Yemeni artist Boshra Al-Habub in the capital Sanaa.— AFP photos

Kids Page

Word Search

Egyptian Gods

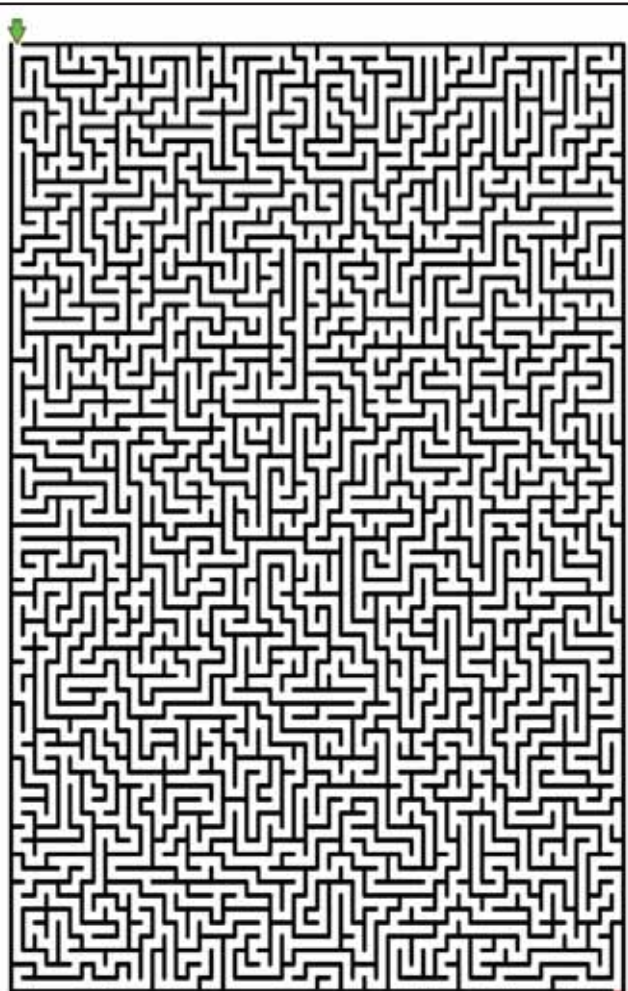


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| AMMIT | HEKET | PTAH |
| ANPUT | HORUS | RA |
| ANUBIS | ISIS | SEKHMET |
| ANUKET | KEBECHET | SERQET |
| APOPHIS | KHEPRI | SESHAT |
| ATEN | KHNUM | SETH |
| BABI | KHONSU | SHU |
| BAST | MAAT | SOBEK |
| BASTET | MAFDET | TAWARET |
| BES | MENHIT | TEFNUT |
| GEB | NEKHET | THOTH |
| GENGEN-WER | NEPHTHYS | WADJET |
| HAPI | NUT | |
| HATHOR | OSIRIS | |

Color It



Kids Mazes



Join the dots



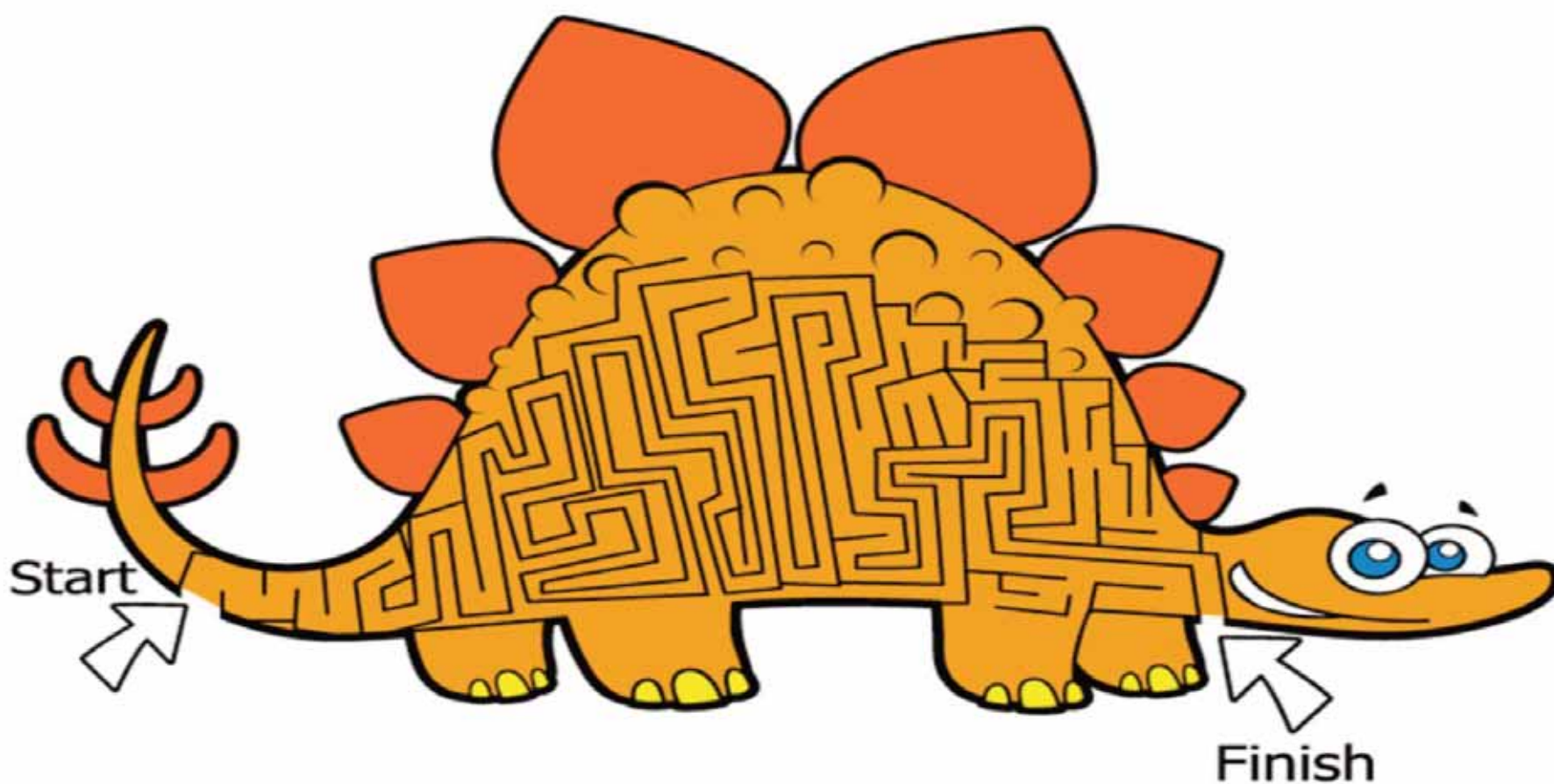
Word Scramble

State Capitals Word Scramble

All of the scrambled words below are names of state capitals. Can you put the letters in the right order to spell the 25 different state capital names correctly? Careful! Some of the names are made up of two words.

HIGBRUSARR	
EONTGRYMOM	
LAAISDNIOINP	
TKLTSLAAICEY	
EIILSPNDGRF	
ORFTNAKRF	
ATEKOP	
ERONTNT	
NPNOAAISL	
LSTALHASEAE	
LLETTKOCIR	
EISBO	
NECNEYEH	
RCVDIENOEP	
SAONDMI	
NYRSICJEETFFO	
OBNST	
HUONLLUO	
KOITHMLAOYAC	
SUGUATA	
MOIPYAL	
ENAEHL	
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IELLSAHVN	

Find the way



CLINIC PAGE



Kuwait Times

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Friday, November 20, 2020

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Friday, November 20, 2020

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- G.I. surgeries.
- Thyroid and para - thyroid surgeries.
- Anal surgeries.

Classifieds

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BY DAY: Fair with light to moderate north westerly wind to light variable wind with speed of 08 - 28 km/h and some high clouds will appear.

BY NIGHT: Rather cold and Partly cloudy with light variable wind to light to moderate south easterly wind with speed of 08 - 30 km/h .

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

Clinics

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

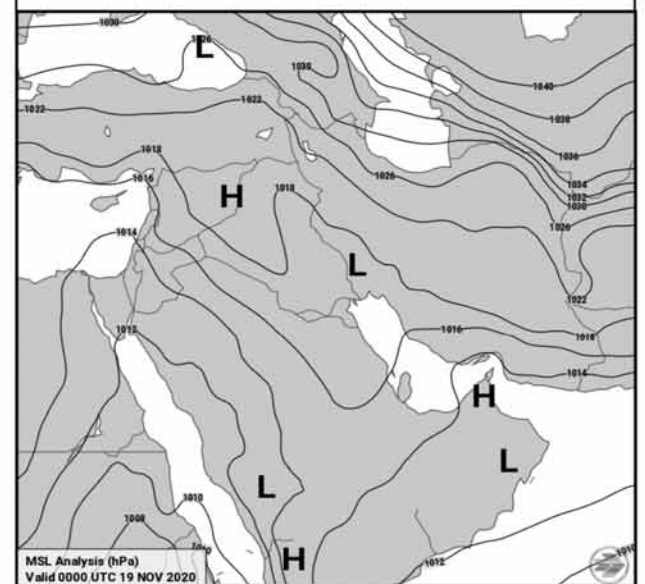
WEATHER WARNING

No Current Warnings

STATION	MAX. EXP.	MIN. REC.
KUWAIT CITY	26 °C	18 °C
KUWAIT AIRPORT	25 °C	14 °C
ABDALY	24 °C	11 °C
BUBYAN	- °C	- °C
JAHRA	26 °C	15 °C
FAILAKA ISLAND	- °C	- °C
SALMIYAH	24 °C	19 °C
AHMADI	- °C	- °C
NUWAISIB	27 °C	15 °C
WAFRA	26 °C	13 °C
SALMY	22 °C	11 °C

SFC. CHART

19/11/2020 0000 UTC



4 DAYS FORECAST

DAY	DATE	WEATHER	Temperatures		Wind Direction	Wind Speed
			MAX.	MIN.		
Friday	11/20	Fair with a chance for rising dust	28 °C	16 °C	SE-S	12 - 45 km/h
Saturday	11/21	Rather hot and Partly cloudy to cloudy with a chance for rain that might be thundery at times	32 °C	19 °C	SE-NW	20 - 55 km/h
Sunday	11/22	Fair and Clouds will decrease gradually	26 °C	17 °C	NW	15 - 40 km/h
Monday	11/23	Fair and Partly cloudy	24 °C	15 °C	NW-VRB	08 - 32 km/h

PRAYER TIMES

Fajr	04:53
Sunrise	06:15
Zuhr	11:33
Asr	14:31
Sunset	16:52
Isha	18:12

RECORDED YESTERDAY AT KUWAIT AIRPORT

MAX. Temp.	25 °C
MIN. Temp.	16 °C
MAX. RH	88 %
MIN. RH	32 %
MAX. Wind	N 36 km/h
TOTAL RAINFALL IN 24 HR.	0 mm

All times are local time unless otherwise stated.

UP.0

Business

FRIDAY, NOVEMBER 20, 2020

34 Saudi to invest \$20 billion in AI by 2030 amid slumping crude prices



35 Google redesigns Pay app, opens waitlist for bank accounts with Citi



36 Xi touts China's huge economy as base of free trade in APEC speech



SAN JOSE: People protest against the government's motion to increase taxes in order to reach a credit agreement with the International Monetary Fund (IMF), outside the Congress building in San Jose, on Wednesday. — AFP

Global recovery from COVID difficult: IMF

Nations should remove trade barriers on medical technologies: Georgieva

WASHINGTON: The global economy faces a hard road back from the COVID-19 downturn, and nations should remove trade barriers on medical technologies to aid the recovery, the IMF chief said yesterday.

The call from Managing Director Kristalina Georgieva ahead of this week's G20 leaders' summit comes as countries grapple with the fallout from a pandemic that has killed hundreds of thousands and caused a sharp contraction in growth. "While a medical solution to the crisis is now in sight, the economic path ahead remains difficult and prone to setbacks," Georgieva said in a blog post. Major pharmaceutical companies are now closing in on vaccines against the virus, amid a global spike in cases that has caused some countries to reimpose restrictions to curb transmission.

"The resurgence in infections is a powerful reminder that a sustainable economic recovery cannot be achieved anywhere unless we defeat the pandemic everywhere," Georgieva said. She called for countries to cooperate to ensure an adequate supply of vaccines,

tests and medicines, as well as "multilateral efforts on the manufacturing, purchase and distribution of these health solutions — especially in poorer nations. It also means removing recent trade restrictions on all medical goods and services, including those related to vaccines," Georgieva said.

Last summit

The COVID-19 pandemic has caused more than 1.3 million deaths worldwide, according to an AFP tally, and wreaked a grievous toll on the global economy. The IMF expects global growth to contract by 4.4 percent this year before rebounding 5.2 percent in 2021. However, Georgieva noted third-quarter growth was better than expected in the United States, Japan and European countries. The virtual summit hosted by Saudi Arabia is set to be the last during the term of US President Donald Trump, who lost his bid for another four years in office earlier this month, though he has rejected the results. Under his leadership, Washington has engaged in trade conflicts with strategic

rival China as well as its European allies, which slowed down global growth even before the virus's arrival.

In a separate research note, the IMF called for countries to work together to finish the pandemic off.

"Combining well-coordinated national policies with joint measures at the global level will help ensure a strong, sustainable recovery," the Washington-based crisis lender said. "In the immediate term, the G20 should refrain from imposing or intensifying trade restrictions and promptly remove those put in place since the start of the year on all medical goods and services as well as on any goods and services related to vaccine manufacturing and distribution."

The IMF called for Britain and the European Union to conclude a trade deal that would forestall new trade barriers as London disentangles itself from the regional bloc. The lender also reiterated its call for more public spending to help countries escape the growth slowdown and reshape their economies for both growth and to fight climate change. — AFP

Business

Saudi to invest \$20 billion in AI by 2030 amid slumping crude prices

Saudia got \$7bn of state help in 2019-2020

RIYADH: Saudi Arabia announced yesterday it will invest \$20 billion in artificial intelligence projects by 2030, as the oil-rich country seeks to diversify its economy amid slumping crude prices. The kingdom, the Arab world's biggest economy, launched an artificial intelligence strategy last month to attract investors as part of Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman's ambitious "Vision 2030" plan to wean the kingdom off oil.

"Saudi Arabia will invest \$20 billion from now until 2030," said Abdullah Al-Ghamdi, head of the Data and Artificial Intelligence Authority, which was established in 2019. "We aspire to have artificial intelligence as a component of an alternative economy through startups and innovation companies... and view artificial intelligence as a source of savings and additional income," he said during a G20 media briefing.

Ghamdi added that shares will be open to both foreign and local investors, as the country seeks to establish more than 300 start-ups in artificial intelligence by 2030. Like most countries in the energy-rich Gulf, Saudi Arabia has been trying to diversify its economy which has been hit by the double whammy of low oil prices and the coronavirus pandemic.

The G20 summit in Riyadh at the weekend is set to bring together the leaders of the world's

20 richest nations but has been overshadowed by human rights group calls for the kingdom to release jailed activists.

The Saudi government has provided state-owned Saudi Arabian Airlines (Saudia) with at least \$7 billion in direct payments and other financial support in 2019 and 2020, company documents show, as the carrier struggles with losses and the coronavirus pandemic.

The finance ministry approved a payment of 13.6 billion riyals (\$3.6 billion) for Saudia in 2019, and a further 6.4 billion riyals in the first half of this year, according to the documents reviewed by Reuters. Saudia has struggled for years and the pandemic, which has brought global aviation to its knees, has added more pressure on its finances. The amounts, labeled as "government compensation", include government payments for services.

The ministry has also taken charge of a 5.3 billion riyals loan provided by Saudi Arabia's sovereign wealth fund, the Public Investment Fund (PIF), to the airline, and converted it to a "contribution in equity", according to the documents. The airline and ministry declined to comment on the details of the documents, but said government compensation can cover a wide range of receivables, as well as any services provided by



RIYADH: A picture taken on Wednesday shows an electronic billboard bearing the portraits of Saudi King Salman bin Abdulaziz (right) and his son Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman ahead of a meeting of Finance ministers and central bank governors of the G20 nations in the Saudi capital Riyadh tomorrow. — AFP

Saudia, including mandatory flight routes.

Saudi Arabia in March suspended flights and banned Muslims abroad from performing pilgrimages in the kingdom, which normally attract

millions of foreign visitors. The kingdom has recently resumed international flights including to cities in the Middle East, Asia, Europe, Africa and the United States. — Agencies

German MPs grill ex-Wirecard boss over massive fraud

BERLIN: Markus Braun, the former chief executive of disgraced payments giant Wirecard, faced a public grilling by German lawmakers yesterday over the massive accounting fraud that brought down his firm. Wirecard collapsed in June after it was forced to admit 1.9 billion euros (\$2.2 billion) missing from its accounts did not exist, and MPs have opened a full parliamentary inquiry into possible regulatory failings that allowed the cheating to go unnoticed for years. Austria-born Braun began his testimony at the Bundestag lower house of parliament, which was also open to the media, at 1:30 pm (1230 GMT).

He had travelled to Berlin from the Bavarian city of Augsburg, where he is in pre-trial detention on suspicion of organized commercial fraud and market manipulation. Absent from the proceedings was fellow prime suspect and Austrian Jan Marsalek, Wirecard's mysterious former chief operating officer who has been on the run since the scandal broke and features on Interpol's most wanted list.

"Apart from Jan Marsalek, Markus Braun is probably the main person responsible for the Wirecard fraud who can shed light on what happened," said lawmaker Frank Schaeffler from the pro-business FDP party, a member of the parliamentary finance committee running the inquiry. The Wirecard implosion, which has drawn comparisons with the Enron accounting scandal in the US in the early 2000s, has been described as "unparalleled" in Germany by Finance Minister Olaf Scholz.

The fallout has prompted Scholz to announce plans to overhaul finance watchdog Bafin, accused of lax oversight of Wirecard, and introduce stricter rules for auditing firms. But Scholz has himself



BERLIN: Markus Braun, the former chief executive of disgraced payments giant Wirecard, faces a public grilling by German lawmakers over the massive accounting fraud that brought down his firm, yesterday. — AFP

faced scrutiny from MPs eager to know when exactly government officials learned of the Wirecard suspicions and whether authorities failed to act on early warning signs.

Even Chancellor Angela Merkel has been embarrassed by the scandal, after it emerged that she promoted Wirecard on a trip to China in September 2019, when the firm was eyeing a foray into the Chinese market—and when journalists were already raising questions about its books. Founded in 1999, Bavarian start-up Wirecard rose from a company piping cash to porn and gambling sites to a respectable electronic payments provider that edged traditional lender Commerzbank out of the blue-chip DAX 30 index in 2018. A rising star in the fintech sector, Wirecard boasted a market valuation of more than 23 billion euros at one point—outweighing giant Deutsche Bank. — AFP

Turkey's new central banker raises key rate

ANKARA: Turkey's central bank yesterday aggressively raised its main interest rate after a major economic team shake-up that included President Recep Tayyip Erdogan's son-in-law giving up his finance ministry brief. The bank said the one-week repo auction rate would go to 15 percent from 10.25 percent and that it was eliminating all other lending facilities to make its policy decisions more "transparent".

The Turkish lira rose two percent in value against the dollar moments after the announcement before paring back some of its gains. "The Central Bank will attain its main objective of achieving and maintaining price stability by adopting transparency, predictability and accountability principles of the inflation targeting regime," the bank said in a statement.

The hike was in line with market expectations but the shift to a single funding mechanism—thus eliminating the much-criticized practice of raising the main rate through stealth and unpredictable means—pleasantly surprised some economists.

"Investors were always more focused on whether the decision would mark a shift towards orthodox policymaking—that is, a transparent monetary policy framework based on one main policy rate," Capital Economics emerging markets economist Jason Tuvey said.

The lira has been one of the worst performing among emerging market currencies and has lost nearly a quarter of its value since the start of the year. The bank's new governor Naci Agbal is a market-friendly former finance minister whose appointment on November 7 reportedly prompted Erdogan's powerful son-in-law Berat Albayrak to resign in protest. — AFP

Business

Google redesigns Pay app, opens waitlist for bank accounts with Citi

New Google Pay app enables contactless payments in stores, money transfers

OAKLAND, Calif/LONDON: Alphabet Inc's Google relaunched its US payments app, introducing paid promotions to the service and opening a waitlist for bank accounts being launched next year with Citigroup Inc and 10 other institutions.

The new Google Pay app, like its predecessor which will be discontinued eventually, enables contactless payments in stores and money transfers. But now users can transact with groups of people, search transactions, view analytics and explore cashback offers from merchants including Burger King and Target Corp. Google will receive a distribution fee for those promotions, opening a small new line of revenue for the advertising giant. Transactions will not affect the ads that users see on other Google services, it said. The new functionality brings US Google Pay up to par with its counterpart in India, where mobile payments are the norm, while escalating the global battle among tech companies, merchants and banks over consumers and their financial data.

"Our goal is to be the all-in-one app that

gives users more value and control out of their money," said Caesar Sengupta, who oversees Google's payment initiatives. Pay has more than 150 million monthly users spanning 30 countries. Alibaba Group, Apple Inc, Samsung Electronics Co and PayPal Holdings Inc also offer mobile wallets aiming to be hubs for shopping and banking, with the companies battling over security and other features.

For instance, Google said its web search technology makes its app more useful for budgeting and sifting through transactions to spot granular categories such as "Mexican restaurants" or "T-shirts."

The new US app works at over 100,000 restaurants, 30,000 gas stations and 400 cities' parking meters, Google said. Google first discussed adding banking accounts a year ago, but did not solicit customers for the service, dubbed Plex, until Wednesday. Partners such as Citi starting next year will activate checkings and savings accounts with no monthly fees, overdraft charges

or minimum balance rules. The Citi Plex users will get free access to its network of 60,000 ATMs nationwide, the megabank said on Wednesday. The offering is Citi's first bundled savings and checking account.

"This collaboration gives us a platform to drive

significant scale in our Retail Bank," said Citi's incoming Chief Executive Jane Fraser. The newest Plex partners include Green Dot Corp, Seattle Bank and The Harbor Bank of Maryland. Sengupta said one goal was "to gamify saving and make it a lot more fun." —Reuters

Royal Mail parcels revenue overtakes letters on pandemic

LONDON: British postal operator Royal Mail yesterday said revenue from parcel deliveries has for the first time overtaken that from letters in the wake of the pandemic. Reporting results for its first half, or six months to the end of September, the former state-run company said growth in online shopping during the coronavirus outbreak led to total group revenue growth of almost 10 percent to £5.67 billion (\$7.39 billion, 6.23 billion euros) year-on-year.

"For the first time, parcels revenue at Royal Mail is now larger than letters revenue, representing 60 percent of total revenue, compared with 47 percent in the prior period," Royal Mail's interim executive chair Keith Williams said in an earnings statement. "Whilst we have done exceptionally well in terms of revenue and have seen real growth for the first time since privatization (in 2013), we have recorded a first half... operating loss of £176 million" — largely owing to restructuring charges.

Royal Mail added: "We have also incurred significant costs due to increased parcel volumes and manual sortation of much of this additional volume through our network, costs related to Covid-19 such as protective equipment, overtime and agency staff, as well as social distancing measures."

Royal Mail said it was recruiting about 33,000 temporary staff to meet customer demand around the peak Christmas period. It said it would invest £100 million "to ensure... we deliver Christmas for our customers and continue to support the government's Covid-



In this file photo Royal Mail delivery vans are parked at the Mount Pleasant sorting office in London. —AFP

19 testing program".

Amid the pandemic, Royal Mail last month announced plans to begin collecting parcels from UK homes for a fee-avoiding the need for customers to visit a postbox or postal office.

Royal Mail employees have enjoyed elevated status during the coronavirus pandemic thanks to their key role in delivering virus test kits and helping businesses survive the economic fallout. The company also stepped in to help the likes of Amazon fulfil its deliveries during Britain's initial nationwide lockdown for around three months to late June.

Royal Mail is, however, facing a slump in its core letters business as people increasingly go online to communicate. An inability to turn around the core business quickly enough was a factor behind the departure in May of chief executive Rico Back. —AFP

Al Ahli Bank of Kuwait (ABK) Congratulates the Second and Final Summer Promotion Winners



Kuwait City, 20th November, 2020: Al Ahli Bank of Kuwait (ABK) announced the names of the 10 lucky winners of the second and final draw for its "Spend and Win this Summer with ABK Credit and

Prepaid cards" campaign. The draw was held at ABK's Head Office under the supervision of the Ministry of Commerce and Industry. The winners who will each receive KD 500 each were:

HANI MOHAMAD ABOUN	ENTISAR ABDLRAHEEM AL SUWAIDI
FAISAL ALI ALMUTAWA	JASSIM FAISAL ABDULLAH
SAAD MOHAMMAD ALQAHTANI	MAITHAM HUSSAIN BOHAMAD
MONA MUBARAK ALFALEH	ABDULRAHMAN AZIZ ALENEZI
AHMAD ADNAN ABDULKARIM	BADER AHMAD ALANSARI

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Business

Xi touts China's huge economy as base of free trade in APEC speech

Beijing vows to keep its 'super-sized' economy open for business

KUALA LUMPUR: President Xi Jinping hailed China as the pivot point for global free trade yesterday, vowing to keep its "super-sized" economy open for business and warning against protectionism as the world battles the Covid-19 pandemic. Buoyed by the signing of the world's largest trade pact over the weekend, Xi said the Asia-Pacific is the "forerunner driving global growth" in a world hit by "multiple challenges."

He vowed "openness" to trade and rejected any possibility of the "decoupling" of China's economy, in his only nod to the hostile trade policy of US President Donald Trump's administration, which has battered China with tariffs and tech restrictions. Xi was speaking at the Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC) forum, held online this year because of the pandemic, which brings together 21 Pacific Rim countries, accounting for about 60 percent of global GDP.

It was not immediately clear if Trump, wounded by his election loss to Joe Biden, would take part in the two-day gathering or send a high-level delegate in his place. In a speech that veered into triumphalism over China's economic "resilience and vitality" in bouncing back from the virus, which first emerged in the central city of Wuhan, Xi warned countries who insist on trade barriers would suffer self-inflicted wounds.

"Openness enables a country to move forward while seclusion holds it back," he said.

"China will actively cooperate with all countries, regions and enterprises that want to do so. We will continue to hold high the banner of openness and co-operation."

Trade agenda

But Xi's rhetoric may raise eyebrows in capitals where China has either restricted trade or used its giant economy as a bargaining chip in wider geopolitical disputes. Australian exports of beef, wine and barley to China—their biggest market—have been restricted, as a diplomatic rumble over the origins of the pandemic as well as accusations of espionage hammer relations.

The APEC summit comes a week after China and 14 other Asia-Pacific countries signed the world's largest free-trade deal. The Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership (RCEP), which excludes the US, is viewed as a major coup for China and further evidence that Beijing is setting the agenda for global commerce as Washington retreats. RCEP's rival was the Trans-Pacific Partnership—championed by former US president Barack Obama—but Trump withdrew from it and the pact has now been replaced by a watered-down alternative that the United States has not joined.

Xi had no direct words for President-elect Biden, whose ascension to office next year, while still clouded by Trump's refusal to concede de-



BEIJING: People walk below a giant screen showing news coverage of China's President Xi Jinping's speech via a virtual meeting to the Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC) forum in Malaysia, outside a shopping mall in Beijing yesterday. — AFP

feat, is expected to see a more nuanced extension of Washington's current China policy. Biden has been strident on China's human rights record, from its treatment of Uighur Muslims in the restive Xinjiang region to Hong Kong's democracy movement. But some at the APEC

forum were optimistic the incoming US president would engage more with international groupings. "I think that (a Biden administration) will be more supportive of the WTO (World Trade Organization), and of APEC," Singaporean Prime Minister Lee Hsien Loong said. — AFP

Indonesia cuts rates to bolster ailing economy

JAKARTA: Indonesia's central bank slashed interest rates again yesterday after the COVID-19 pandemic pushed Southeast Asia's biggest economy into its first recession in more than 20 years.

Bank Indonesia cut the key lending rate by 25 basis points to 3.75 percent, its fifth rate reduction this year, as the global health crisis slams the brakes on growth. The move comes two weeks after Indonesia posted its second consecutive quarter of negative growth—the country's first recession since the 1998-99 Asian financial crisis. "This is a follow-up step to accelerate the national economy's recovery," central bank governor Perry Warjiyo said.

The government has unveiled more than \$48 billion in stimulus to help offset the impact of the virus, which forced large-scale restrictions that hammered growth. Several million Indonesians have been laid off or furloughed as the vast country, home to nearly 270 million people, has battled to contain the crisis.

COVID-19 infections have topped 480,000 with more than 15,000 deaths, putting Indonesia among the worst-hit Asian countries. However, the true scale of the crisis is widely believed to be much bigger in Indonesia, which has one of the world's lowest testing rates. "There is little doubt the economy is in need of further support," research house Capital Economics said of the latest rate cut. — AFP

Thyssenkrupp cuts more jobs as pandemic bites

BERLIN: Troubled German industrial giant Thyssenkrupp said yesterday it was slashing 5,000 more jobs than expected, bringing total cuts to 11,000 as the coronavirus pandemic takes a massive toll. The group, which makes products from steel to submarines, elevators and car parts, employs more than 100,000 people worldwide. It is in the midst of a painful restructuring that could see the historic company tap state aid as it scrambles to find a solution for its loss-making steel business.

News of the job cuts, set to stretch over several years, came as the group reported a 9.6-billion-euro (\$11.3 billion) net profit for its 2019-2020 financial year that ended in September. But the figure was largely down to the sale of its lucrative elevator division for 17.2 billion euros in February. Without it, the group actually made a net loss of 5.5 billion euros. Revenues—excluding elevators—fell 15 percent year-on-year to 28.9 billion euros, partly because of a slump in demand from the auto industry after global lockdowns shuttered factories and showrooms during the first Covid-19 wave.

"The coronavirus pandemic is a massive stress test for Thyssenkrupp," said CEO Martina Merz in a statement. "We're not yet where we need to be. The next steps could be more painful than the previous ones. But we will have to take them."

In a conference call with reporters, she said the group hoped to avoid forced redundancies but that they couldn't be "ruled out 100 percent". Thyssenkrupp said 3,600 jobs have already been shed so far this year.

Looking ahead, Thyssenkrupp expects to make a net loss of



This file photo taken on November 21, 2019 shows the CEO of German industrial conglomerate Thyssenkrupp Martina Merz posing before attending the annual press conference of the group in Essen, western Germany. — AFP

"over one billion euros" in its 2020-2021 financial year. Sales are projected to grow "in the low to mid single-digit percentage", depending on the recovery of the auto market as the pandemic evolves. To counter the headwinds, Thyssenkrupp has indicated it is looking for partners to help shore up steel operations, which have for years suffered from cut-price competition from China and showed an adjusted operating loss of 946 million euros in 2019-2020. Britain's Liberty Steel, founded and led by Sanjeev Gupta, made an offer for the group's steel activities last month. — AFP

Sports

Friday, November 20, 2020

Belgium, Italy into Nations League finals as Foden stars in England win

PARIS: Romelu Lukaku helped fire Belgium into the UEFA Nations League finals by scoring twice in a 4-2 win over Denmark on Wednesday, while Italy also secured a place in the last four with victory away to Bosnia and Herzegovina.

The world's number one-ranked side, Belgium only required a draw from their last League A, Group 2 game at home to Denmark behind closed doors in Leuven and took an early lead through Youri Tielemans.

Jonas Wind equalized for Denmark, but Lukaku got a second-half double and Kevin De Bruyne made sure of the victory for Roberto Martinez's side after Thibaut Courtois allowed a Nacer Chadli back-pass to squirm under his leg and in for an own goal.

Italy secured first place in Group 1 with a 2-0 triumph in Sarajevo thanks to a goal in each half from Torino's Andrea Belotti and Domenico Berardi of Sassuolo. That ensured they finished a point ahead of the Netherlands, who came from behind to beat Poland 2-1 away with captain Georginio Wijnaldum scoring the winner after Memphis Depay's penalty cancelled out Kamil Jozwiak's opener. Italy and Belgium join Spain and World Cup holders France in a final tournament which is expected to be held in Italy in October next year. Before the finals, European national teams will start their 2022 World Cup qualifying campaign in March and then the delayed Euro 2020 is set to go ahead next June and July.

England have more than one eye on that tournament, with the semi-finals and final scheduled for Wembley, and Gareth Southgate's team

rounded out their Nations League campaign with a 4-0 win over Iceland. Declan Rice and Mason Mount scored in the first half and Manchester City's Phil Foden got his first international goals with a late brace as England had three players aged 21 or younger score in the same match for the first time since 1883. "It was a very difficult game. All the players were hearing messages that this is meaningless and there was nothing to play for but they did play for it," Southgate told Sky Sports. Birkir Mar Saevarsson was sent off for Iceland who, like Bosnia, are relegated and will compete in League B in the next edition.

Wales move up, Scotland miss out

Wales won promotion to League A with a 3-1 win over 10-man Finland in Cardiff that allowed them to top Group B4. Despite manager Ryan Giggs being missing after his recent arrest on suspicion of assaulting his girlfriend, Wales came good with goals from Harry Wilson, Daniel James and Kieffer Moore. Teemu Pukki netted for Finland, who had left-back Jere Uronen sent off after just 12 minutes.

Winning their group also improves Wales' chances of securing a place in the 2022 World Cup qualifying play-offs, as the two best group winners in the Nations League are guaranteed play-off places if they don't make it via the usual route.

While Wales go up, Scotland missed out on promotion from League B, Group 2 after losing 1-0 in Israel, their second consecutive loss since clinching qualification for Euro 2020. Manor



LEUVEN: Belgium's forward Romelu Lukaku fights for the ball with Denmark's midfielder Pierre Højbjerg during UEFA Nations League football match between Belgium and Denmark at the Den Dreef Stadium in Leuven on Wednesday. —AFP

Solomon's first-half goal sunk the Scots, and the Czech Republic won promotion at their expense after beating Slovakia 2-0.

"We are all disappointed with the way the week's finished," Scotland manager Steve Clarke told Sky Sports. "It's been an historic week for Scottish football. There was no lack of endeavour. It was similar to the game on Sunday (1-0 loss in

Slovakia), just a little lack of quality in the final third meant we couldn't get a goal."

Also securing promotion to the top tier were Austria, who drew 1-1 with a Norway side deprived of stars Erling Braut Haaland and Martin Odegaard after being ordered to quarantine because of a positive coronavirus test in their squad. —AFP

Wunderkind Moukoko on verge of making Bundesliga history

BERLIN: Teen prodigy Youssoufa Moukoko could become the youngest debutant in Bundesliga history this weekend as Borussia Dortmund hint that the German goal-scoring sensation may make his senior debut the day after his 16th birthday.

If he plays at Hertha Berlin tomorrow evening, Moukoko will set a new Bundesliga record having already sent goal records tumbling in German youth football. "I read what the media write, but I don't put any pressure on myself," Moukoko told Dortmund's website in a rare interview during which the club hinted he could feature in Berlin. Even if his league debut comes only in the following weeks, the confident teen is "not worried - I know I will make my debut at some point."

Nuri Sahin, whose record is under threat by Moukoko, wants to see the teen make his Bundesliga debut, because "the Under-19s is too easy for him." Sahin, now 32, was 16 years, 335 days when he made his Dortmund debut in 2005, giving Moukoko ample time to break the record.

Moukoko could also make his Champions League debut this autumn to break the record of Celestine Babayaro, who was 16 years, 87 days when he played for Anderlecht in the 1994/95 group stages. Moukoko has already trained with Dortmund's first team on the back of his goal-scoring feats for the youth team.

Despite often facing opponents four years his senior, the robust 15-year-old is captain of Dortmund's U19 team and has scored 13 goals in just four games so far this season. His stats are part of a mind-blowing total of 47 goals

with 10 assists in just 25 matches for Dortmund U19s over two seasons.

Dortmund are doing their best to shield the Cameroon-born teen from the hype — all interview requests are denied — but his name is already well known at the top of German football. "Youssoufa Moukoko has a talent that you don't come across that often," commented Germany coach Joachim Löw. Moukoko already has more than 700,000 followers on Instagram and a sponsorship deal with Nike.

Six-goal debut

He was born in Yaounde, Cameroon, and moved to Hamburg, his father's home city, in 2014 where he first started playing for St Pauli's junior side. In 2016, he switched to Dortmund's youth academy, where he started breaking goal-scoring records, sparking unfounded doubts over his age.

As a 13-year-old at the start of 2017/18, he banged in 40 goals in 28 games for Dortmund Under-17s including the winning goal in the play-off final against Bayern Munich. He topped that with 50 goals in 28 games in 2018/19, including 46 in the league to set a new youth record at Under-17 level.

Last season he moved up to Dortmund's Under-19s just before his 15th birthday and dismissed doubts about his ability at the higher level with six goals on his stunning debut in a 9-2 demolition of Wuppertal.

He finished 2019/20 with 38 goals in 28 games and talk of a Bundesliga debut soon started. "We would all do well to watch Youssoufa's development in a relaxed fashion with a bit of patience," said German FA sports director Joti Chatzalexou optimistically. Yet the teen, who has already played for the Germany Under-20s, is already showing maturity beyond his years.

Last month, Moukoko scored a hat-trick as Dortmund's Under-19 side beat Schalke 3-2, but his brilliant display was overshadowed by racist abuse from home supporters in Gelsenkirchen. Schalke apologized to Dortmund and Moukoko, who responded by taking a knee after scoring in his next game to join the 'Black Lives Matter' protest. —AFP



DORTMUND: In this file photo taken on August 03, 2020 Borussia Dortmund's Youssoufa Moukoko attends a training session of the German first division Bundesliga team Borussia Dortmund at the team training grounds in Dortmund, western Germany. —AFP

Sports

NFL bumps up COVID-19 protocols for remainder of the season

LOS ANGELES: The National Football League has stepped up its pandemic protocols with tougher restrictions going into effect tomorrow to try and mitigate the spread of coronavirus on the same day the Las Vegas Raiders found themselves in the midst of another outbreak.

The stricter measures, which will last until the end of the season, include forcing players to wear masks during practice sessions, a strict 15-minute time limit per person in the dressing room, and making sure all players and coaches have a negative test from the previous day before being allowed into the club's facilities.

"It has been said many times that our 2020 season cannot be 'normal' because nothing about this year is normal," NFL commissioner Roger Goodell wrote in a memo to all the teams on Wednesday. "Flexibility and adaptability have been critical to our success to date and we must

continue with that approach."

The league also said in the memo that 28 of the 32 teams had already been slapped with temporary stricter measures for COVID-19 reasons. Of those 28, a total of 16 had been on them more than once. "The upcoming holidays, beginning with Thanksgiving next week, will introduce new risks of exposure that we need to address now," Goodell said in the memo.

"Because we have a highly sophisticated program of daily testing, we know when the virus enters our facilities, which underscores the importance of contact tracing and other steps to minimize close contacts within a facility."

Other protocols include: all meetings held virtually unless outdoors or with pre-approval for indoors; locker room usage discouraged on non-game days; meals served on a grab-and-go basis; limits of 10 players in the weight room at one time.

According to the latest test results announced by the league earlier this week, 95 players and 175 team personnel had tested positive through November 14 since monitoring began in August. Teams across the league have continued to report cases of COVID-19 despite safety protocols put in place this season.

On Wednesday, the Raiders placed seven more players on the COVID-19 reserve list, four days before the team is due to host the Super Bowl champion Kansas City Chiefs. Eleven Raiders players are now on the COVID list, although the game is expected to go ahead. In a separate development, the Los Angeles Rams also confirmed a COVID-19 case — the first positive case found by the team this season. The Rams said Wednesday the team had placed tight end Kendall Blanton, defensive back Jake Gervase and wide receiver JJ Koski on the COVID-19 reserve list. —AFP



MIAMI: In this file photo taken on February 01, 2020 NFL Commissioner Roger Goodell looks on before Super Bowl LIV between the Kansas City Chiefs and the San Francisco 49ers at Hard Rock Stadium in Miami, Florida. —AFP

Tennis stars warn of playing Australian Open after quarantine

LONDON: Playing the Australian Open with no preparation time would be "very dangerous", Brazilian doubles specialist Bruno Soares warned on Wednesday, after lead-up events to the Grand Slam were thrown into further doubt.

The stark message came after Australian tennis chiefs flagged "new challenges" around the arrival of players during the coronavirus pandemic. In correspondence with players, the ATP — the men's tennis tour — said arrivals originally planned for December were now uncertain, potentially disrupting the packed January schedule.

With players facing a 14-day quarantine, any delay could make it difficult to hold the high-profile ATP Cup and other tournaments before the scheduled start of the Australian Open in Melbourne on January 18.

"In discussions with Tennis Australia over the past 24 hours, we have been informed there are some new challenges around the previously planned arrival dates for players and team members," read the ATP's message, which was tweeted by world number 193 Lukas Lacko.

"We understand there is uncertainty about the start of the 2021 season, and we are working as hard as possible to deliver the best possible calendar of events," the ATP added. International travel to Australia is still tightly controlled and all overseas arrivals must quarantine for two weeks, while individual states also have their own COVID-19 restrictions. It is also unclear whether players will be allowed to train during quarantine. Soares, playing in the doubles event at the ATP Finals in London this week, said it would be tough to play with no practice.

"If we have to quarantine for 14 days inside a room and then go play a Grand Slam, I mean, I will do it because it's my job and I have to find a way," said the Brazilian, a member of the ATP player council. "But I think it's quite dangerous for the players with no preparation I think to go there and compete right away. I think it's physically very dangerous." —AFP

Mets star Cano suspended 162 games for doping

NEW YORK: New York Mets second baseman Robinson Cano was banned 162 games after testing positive for the banned steroid Stanozolol in a second Major League Baseball doping violation, MLB said Wednesday.

"The Office of the Commissioner of Baseball announced today that New York Mets second baseman Robinson Cano has received a 162-game suspension without pay after testing positive for Stanozolol, a performance-enhancing substance, in violation of Major League Baseball's Joint Drug Prevention and Treatment Program," an MLB statement said. "The suspension of Cano, who was previously suspended for a violation of the Program on May 15, 2018, will commence at the start of the 2021 regular season."

Cano's suspension without pay will cost him some \$24 million in salary. Cano was with the Seattle Mariners when he was suspended in 2018 after testing positive for the diuretic furosemide, which can be used as a masking agent for performance-enhancing drugs.

"We were extremely disappointed to be informed about Robinson's suspension for violating Major League Baseball's Joint Drug Prevention and Treatment Program," Mets president Sandy Alderson said in a statement. "The violation is very unfortunate for him, the organization, our fans, and the sport. "The Mets fully support MLB's efforts toward eliminating performance enhancing substances from the game."

Cano, 38, was suspended for 80 games in 2018, saying at the time he was prescribed furosemide for a "medical ailment" by a doctor in his native Dominican Republic. The Mets acquired Cano after that season in a trade that brought him and Edwin Diaz to New York in exchange for Jay Bruce and star prospect Jarred Kelenic.

In his first season with the Mets, Cano hit just .256 as



NEW YORK: In this file photo taken on August 30, 2020 Robinson Cano #24 of the New York Mets reacts at home plate after his fifth inning two run home run against the New York Yankees at Yankee Stadium in New York City. —AFP

he landed repeatedly on the injured list. But he rebounded in the pandemic-shortened 2020 campaign, playing 49 of 60 games and hitting .316 with 10 home runs. Although Cano's suspension will cost him his 2021 salary, He will still be due \$48 million from 2022-23, with the Mets due to pick up about \$40 million of that amount and the Mariners responsible for the rest. His test is a blow for a Mets team whose new owner, billionaire fund manager Steve Cohen, said last week he hopes will bring home a World Series title in three to five years. —AFP

Sports

T-Wolves take Edwards first in NBA draft, France's Hayes seventh overall

LOS ANGELES: The Minnesota Timberwolves made University of Georgia standout Anthony Edwards the first overall selection in the pandemic-delayed 2020 NBA draft on Wednesday. The Timberwolves, who finished 19-45 in the coronavirus-disrupted 2020 season, opted for Edwards, who averaged 19 points per game as a freshman, to bolster a roster that includes young stars Karl-Anthony Towns and D'Angelo Russell.

"I feel like I'm going to fit perfect with those guys because Russell likes to play off the ball sometimes, and I can play on the ball," Edwards said in a virtual press conference from his home in Georgia. "When he wants to play on the rock, I can play off the ball. And KAT is the best three-point shooting big man in the league. So I feel we can't go wrong with that, a lot of pick-and-pops, pick-and-rolls and such."

The Golden State Warriors took center James Wiseman with the second overall pick and the Charlotte Hornets — owned by NBA icon Michael Jordan — made guard LaMelo Ball the third selection.

Edwards, a 6-foot-5, 220-pound guard from Atlanta who spent his lone collegiate season at Georgia, joins a young Timberwolves core led by star center Karl-Anthony Towns and point guard D'Angelo Russell. Edwards led all Division I freshmen with 19.1 points per game and was the Southeastern Conference Freshman of the Year.

The 2020 draft comes five months after it was originally scheduled in June and barely four weeks after LeBron James and the Los Angeles Lakers clinched the NBA Finals after a virus-disrupted season. And it comes just five weeks before the 2020-21 campaign tips off on December 22.

That means the NBA's newest top recruits face being thrown in at the deep end after an unprecedented last leg of their journey to the league. "It makes for a lot of unknowns," said Golden State



The number one overall pick by the Minnesota Timberwolves, Anthony Edwards poses for a photo with his draft hat during the 2020 NBA Draft.

general manager Bob Myers of a year that saw the influential "March Madness" collegiate tournament cancelled and chances for NBA hopefuls to showcase their talent curtailed.

The Warriors, who finished last in the Western Conference after a season marred by injuries to Stephen Curry and Klay Thompson, got another injury scare hours before the draft with what they called a leg injury to Thompson in training, the severity of which was not immediately known.

In Wiseman they get a player who hasn't played organized basketball in more than a year. He played just three games for the University of Memphis to aim at the NBA draft. "This draft process has been the longest for me, so I've just been working on my game," said the 7-foot-1 (2.16m) center who is an imposing presence at the rim. "I've actually been playing pickup games with pros already, so I've been getting a lot of experience. But really just focusing on myself. I'm truly ready to play with these great guys."

Ball goes third

Ball, the youngest of three basketball-playing brothers who already have their own reality TV show, was touted as a potential top selection. But



NBA Commissioner, Adam Silver reacts to the Charlotte Hornets number three overall pick of LaMelo Ball during the 2020 NBA Draft.

erratic shooting ability may have weighed against the 6-foot-7 19-year-old from California whose path to the NBA included stints playing professionally in Lithuania and Australia. He averaged 17 points, 7.4 rebounds and 6.8 assists in 31.2 minutes over 12 games for the Illawarra Hawks in Australia's National Basketball League this past season.

The Chicago Bulls took Patrick Williams with the fourth pick, Isaac Okoro went fifth to the Cleveland Cavaliers and the Atlanta Hawks took Onyeka Okongwu sixth overall. French point guard Killian Hayes, who has been playing with ratiopharm Ulm in Germany, went seventh overall to the Detroit Pistons — the highest overseas player taken this year.

Hayes, 19, averaged 11.6 points and 5.3 assists per game in 2019-20 in Germany's top league and

is expected to combine well with last year's first-round pick, Sekou Doumbouya, who is also from France. Deni Avdija, 19, became the highest-drafted player from Israel when the Washington Wizards took him ninth.

Avdija, who played for Israeli powerhouse Maccabi Tel Aviv at 16 and averaged 12.9 points per game in the 2019-20 EuroLeague season, was tabbed by the Wizards a year after they made Rui Hachimura the first player from Japan to be drafted in the first round.

For the first time two players born in Nigeria — Precious Achiuwa and Udoka Azubuike — featured in the first round. Achiuwa was taken 20th by the Miami Heat and Azubuike 27th by the New York Knicks, both coming through US collegiate programs, as did Aussie Josh Green who was taken 18th by the Dallas Mavericks. —AFP

FIRST ROUND		
1		ANTHONY EDWARDS
2		JAMES WISEMAN
3		LAMELO BALL
4		PATRICK WILLIAMS
5		ISAAC OKORO
6		ONYEKA OKONGWU
7		KILLIAN HAYES
8		OBİ TOPPIN
9		DENI AVDIJA
10		JALEN SMITH
11		DEVIN VASSELL
12		TYRESE HALIBURTON
13		KIRA LEWIS JR.
14		AARON NESMITH
15		COLE ANTHONY
16		ISAAH STEWART
17		ALEKSEJ POKUSEVSKI
18		JOSH GREEN
19		SADDIQ BEY
20		PRECIOUS ACHIUWA
21		TYRESE MAXEY
22		ZEKE NNAJI
23		LEANDRO BOLMARO
24		R.J. HAMPTON
25		IMMANUEL QUICKLEY
26		PAYTON PRITCHARD
27		UDOKA AZUBUIKE
28		JADEN MCDANIELS
29		MALACHI FLYNN
30		DESMOND BANE

BRISTOL: A wide angle view of the first round draft board during the 2020 NBA Draft on Wednesday in Bristol, Connecticut at ESPN Headquarters. — AFP



BRISTOL: NBA Commissioner Adam Silver is seen on stage for a virtual group photo with the 2020 NAB Draft Prospects on Wednesday in Bristol, Connecticut at ESPN Headquarters. — AFP

Edwards picked 1st overall in virtual 2020 NBA Draft

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