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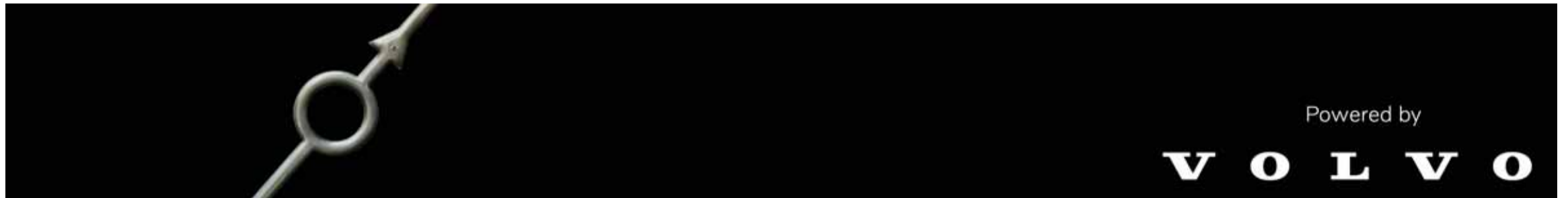
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FM underlines significance of Kuwait-US strategic dialogue

Pompeo hails Kuwait as a key strategic partner of US in Middle East



WASHINGTON: US Secretary of State Mike Pompeo and Kuwaiti Foreign Minister Sheikh Ahmad Nasser Al-Mohammad Al-Sabah speak to the media prior to meeting at the State Department on Tuesday. — AFP

KUWAIT: Kuwaiti Foreign Minister and Acting Information Minister Sheikh Ahmad Nasser Al-Mohammad Al-Sabah held talks with US Secretary of State Mike Pompeo on Tuesday. The meeting was held during the official visit of the Kuwaiti minister to Washington to lead Kuwait's delegation participating in the fourth session of the Kuwaiti-US strategic dialogue meeting held between Nov 9 and 24, the foreign ministry said in a statement.

During the meeting, the officials reviewed firm and close relations between both friendly countries and reiterated deep and distinguished bonds, while showing joint willingness to develop and promote them for the common interest of both countries and their friendly people, the ministry added. They also tackled the latest regional and international developments, the ministry said, noting that a joint press conference was held following official talks.

Kuwaiti Ambassador to the US Sheikh Salem Abdullah Al-Jaber Al-Sabah, Assistant Foreign Minister for Americas Affairs Minister Plenipotentiary Hamad Al-Mashaan and Deputy Assistant Foreign Minister for the Foreign Minister's Office Ahmad Al-Shuraim were present at the meeting.

During the joint press conference with Pompeo, Sheikh Ahmad stressed the significance of Kuwaiti-US strategic dialogue. He voiced the appreciation of HH the Amir Sheikh Nawaf Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah and the Kuwaiti government and people for the medical

plane and healthcare the US provided for HH the late Amir Sheikh Jaber Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah. He also commended US President Donald Trump for granting the late Amir the country's highest military rank, along with relentless US commitment towards Kuwaiti and regional security and bilateral cooperation.

The Kuwaiti minister said next year will see two watershed events - the 30th anniversary of the liberation of Kuwait and the 60th anniversary of diplomatic relations between Kuwait and the US. "Over the last four years, we have seen progress in all fields and sectors, and six working groups have made much progress in our bilateral relations in the fields of defense, security, economy, education health and human rights," he said. He underscored the importance of promoting cooperation between both countries in various realms and sectors amid the challenges of the COVID-19 pandemic.

Pompeo hailed Kuwait as a key strategic partner of the US in the Middle East, praising HH the late Amir for making this relationship closer. He said the US administration works hard to bolster historical bonds between both countries. Pompeo added he and the Kuwaiti foreign minister had signed a memo of understanding for boosting cooperation in the areas of biomedical research and information exchange. The US official emphasized that Kuwait and the US are working together to fight today's challenges, including the fight against the so-called Islamic State. — KUNA

News in brief

8,000 births unregistered

KUWAIT: Informed security sources said more than 8,000 expat children have no records at the interior ministry because their parents did not register them after birth. They added the interior ministry plans to set up a direct computerized link with the health ministry to immediately register births at government or private hospitals in the interior ministry database. — Al-Rai

UAE visa ban on 13 states

DUBAI: The UAE has stopped issuing new employment and visit visas to citizens of 13 mostly Muslim-majority countries, according to a document issued by a state-owned business park. The document said applications had been suspended for nationals of Afghanistan, Algeria, Iran, Iraq, Kenya, Lebanon, Libya, Pakistan, Somalia, Syria, Tunisia, Turkey and Yemen. — Reuters

Blast hits tanker in Saudi port

ATHENS: An explosion occurred on a Greek tanker in the Saudi Arabia port of Al Shuqaiq, but no one was injured in the blast and the causes were still not clear, the Greek ministry of the merchant marine said yesterday. — AFP

Sanitary products free in Scotland

LONDON: Scotland on Tuesday made sanitary products free to all women, becoming the first nation in the world to take such a step against "period poverty". The measure makes tampons and sanitary pads available at designated public places. — Reuters

Iran in prisoner swap

TEHRAN: Iran has exchanged a jailed British-Australian academic, Kylie Moore-Gilbert, with three Iranians who had been detained abroad, Iran's state broadcaster IRIB reported yesterday. It said an Iranian businessman and two Iranian citizens who had been held abroad "on baseless charges" had been exchanged. — Reuters

Football great Maradona dies

BUENOS AIRES: Argentine football legend Diego Maradona has died at the age of 60, his spokesman announced yesterday. Renowned along with Brazil's Pele as one of the greatest footballers of all time, the Argentine World Cup winning captain died of a heart attack, having undergone brain surgery earlier this month, a member of his entourage told AFP.

President Alberto Fernandez immediately announced three days of national mourning in the South American country. Shortly before the announcement that shocked a nation, Argentine media reported Maradona had suffered a serious health setback yesterday and was being treated by doctors at his home north of Buenos Aires.

Biden presents policy team

WILMINGTON: US President-elect Joe Biden on Tuesday introduced a slate of veteran diplomats and policy-makers who will make up his national security and foreign policy team, saying: "America is back, ready to lead the world." Biden, 78, presented his picks for secretary of state, national security advisor, homeland security secretary, intelligence chief, UN ambassador and climate change envoy. "These public servants will

Omani woman juggles 500 felines at home

MUSCAT: More than a dozen cats and dogs vie for Maryam Al-Balushi's attention as she hands out treats on a bed in her home in Oman's capital Muscat. Despite complaints from neighbors and mounting expense, she has accumulated 480 cats and 12 dogs, describing her pets as a mood-lifter

and better companions than her fellow humans. "I find that animals, especially cats and dogs, are more faithful than humans," she said as cats jumped on and off a nearby scratching pole.

Orphaned at a young age, Balushi has grown her menagerie over the past decade, identifying with her furry friends, many of which were rescued from hard lives on the street. Balushi spends about \$7,800 monthly to care for the creatures, 17 of which are blind, diligently feeding and cleaning them as well as taking them to the veterinarian for medical attention. — AFP (See Page 13)

restore America's global leadership and moral leadership," Biden said as the six men and women stood behind him wearing face-masks.

Biden said that after he is inaugurated on January 20 and Donald Trump leaves the White House, the United States will "once again sit at the head of the table, ready to confront our adversaries and not reject our allies". "It is a team that reflects the fact that America is back, ready to lead the world, not retreat from it," he said in a jab at President Trump's go-it-alone "America First" policies.

Biden's remarks came after Trump suffered further setbacks in his efforts. **Continued on Page 2**



MEXICO CITY: In this file photo taken on May 22, 1986, Argentine football star Diego Maradona balances a ball on his head as he walks off the practice field. — AFP



WILMINGTON: US President-elect Joe Biden speaks during a cabinet announcement event yesterday. — AFP



MUSCAT: Maryam Al-Balushi feeds her pets at her home on Nov 20, 2020. — AFP

Local

Amir congratulates Municipality Director on winning Arab Award

Sheikh Nawaf meets state officials at Bayan Palace



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



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



His Highness the Crown Prince Sheikh Mishal Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah meets His Highness the Prime Minister Sheikh Sabah Al-Khaled Al-Hamad Al-Sabah.



His Highness the Crown Prince Sheikh Mishal Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah meets Deputy Prime Minister and Defense Minister Sheikh Ahmad Mansour Al-Ahmad Al-Sabah.

KUWAIT: His Highness the Amir Sheikh Nawaf Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah congratulated in a cable yesterday Director General of Kuwait Municipality Ahmad Al-Manfouhi on winning the Arab Government Excellence Award granted by the UAE's Ministry of Climate Change and Environment. His Highness the Amir commended Manfouhi on

winning the best municipality director in the Arab region, wishing the official the best in his future endeavors. His Highness the Crown Prince Sheikh Mishal Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah and His Highness the Prime Minister Sheikh Sabah Al-Khaled Al-Hamad Al-Sabah sent similar cables. Meanwhile, His Highness the Amir Sheikh

Nawaf Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah received yesterday at Bayan Palace His Highness the Crown Prince Sheikh Mishal Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah. His Highness the Amir also received National Assembly Speaker Marzouq Al-Ghanem. Furthermore, His Highness the Amir received His Highness the Prime Minister Sheikh Sabah Al-

Khaled Al-Hamad Al-Sabah. Moreover, His Highness hosted Deputy Prime Minister and Defense Minister Sheikh Ahmad Al-Mansour Al-Ahmad Al-Sabah. In the meantime, His Highness the Crown Prince received Speaker Ghanem, His Highness Sheikh Sabah Al-Khaled and Sheikh Ahmad Al-Mansour at Bayan Palace. — KUNA

Kuwait condoles with Mauritania over ex-president's death

KUWAIT: Minister of Amiri Diwan Affairs Sheikh Ali Jarrah Al-Sabah yesterday visited the Mauritanian embassy to express condolences over the demise of former Mauritanian President Sidi Mohamed Ould Cheikh Abdallahi. Sheikh Ali Jarrah Al-Sabah conveyed condolences from His

Highness the Amir Sheikh Nawaf Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah, His Highness the Crown Prince Sheikh Mishal Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah, His Highness the Prime Minister Sheikh Sabah Al-Khaled Al-Hamad Al-Sabah, the government and the Kuwaiti people during the visit. — KUNA



KUWAIT: Minister of Amiri Diwan Affairs Sheikh Ali Jarrah Al-Sabah offers condolences over the demise of former Mauritanian President Sidi Mohamed Ould Cheikh Abdallahi. — Amiri Diwan photo

Kuwait showed progress in combating discrimination against women: Official

KUWAIT: Representative of the UN General Secretary, Resident Coordinator to Kuwait Dr Tareq El-Sheikh affirmed yesterday that Kuwait has achieved a significant progress in combating violence and discrimination against women. This statement came on the International Day for the Elimination of Violence against Women, and the launch of the 16-days campaign entitled 'United for Women.' In a press statement, Sheikh mentioned to the new law approved by Kuwaiti National Assembly on August 19 for the protection of women from domestic violence, which came into effect on September 20, 2020. The new law allowed the establishment of a national committee of representatives from ministries and civil community organizations to issue policies to defend women from domestic violence, he added. "We, at the United Nations, appreciate this progress in Kuwait that will guarantee the suitable legal, medical and psychological services for women and girls, and monitoring complaints to protect the documented and undocumented acts of violence against women," he added. He praised the cooperation between the Kuwaiti government and the United Nations to conduct researches and collect data all forms of gender-based violence, including domestic violence, statistics on complaints, prosecutions and judgments.

Meanwhile, Head of the European Union missions to Kuwait and Qatar Ambassador Cristian Tudor stressed that the European Union is "Committed to continue work with our International partners to solve the deep causes for violence

against women and girls and guarantee of legal supporting of victims "Equality between men and women and the empowerment of women is an important part of the European Union's foreign policy, we support Kuwait in its efforts to encourage the political participation of woman and the advancement of gender equality," Tudor noted. In the same context, Regional Director of UN Population Fund in the Arab Region Dr Luay Shabaneh stated, "It is time to stand firm and work to fulfill the promise and ensure zero tolerance for all forms of gender-based violence. We at the Fund, pledge to continue our efforts to prevent and respond to millions of women and girls in our region who are victims of domestic violence."

Meanwhile, the Resident Representative of the United Nations Development Program (UNDP), Hideko Hadzalic, stated that the Protection against Domestic Violence Act for the year 2020 is a major milestone for the State of Kuwait. UNDP is working closely with government agencies and the Center for Women's Studies and Research of Kuwait University to design training to support law enforcement, she said. In turn, the UN Regional Director for Women's Affairs Susanne Mikhail, expressed UN's pride in partnering with the other UN and Kuwaiti local organizations to achieve its national development goals in accordance with the Kuwait National Vision 2035. The international campaign '16 days of struggle against gender-based violence' is held annually since 2008; it begins on November 25 and ends of December 10th. — KUNA

Biden presents policy...

Continued from Page 1

to overturn the results of the election with unsubstantiated claims of fraud. Pennsylvania and Nevada certified the November 3 election results Tuesday, a day after the state of Michigan did so, a move which triggered the General Services Administration (GSA) to launch the transition process.

As more members of his Republican Party came out demanding an end to the impasse, Trump signed off on the GSA move, effectively admitting defeat. But the president on Tuesday tweeted a picture of himself in the Oval Office with the caption "I concede NOTHING!!!!!!" The 74-year-old Trump later attended a traditional Thanksgiving turkey-pardoning event at the White House. He appeared to indirectly address the election, saying: "I say America First - shouldn't go away from that."

The GSA determination gives Biden access to classified information and will allow his aides to coordinate with officials on addressing the worsening coronavirus pandemic. "We're already working out meeting with the Covid team in the White House... The outreach has been sincere," Biden told NBC in his first TV interview since winning the presidency. Biden said that in his first 100 days in office he would tackle the COVID crisis, scrap Trump policies "damaging" the environment and

push legislation offering millions of undocumented residents a route to citizenship.

And he said he wanted to get all students back in classrooms, despite the huge cost of adapting schools to be COVID-safe. The slate that Biden unveiled included veterans of the Barack Obama administration and signaled a return to traditional US diplomacy and multilateralism. Biden said that "America's going to reassert its role in the world and be a coalition builder," but he denied it would be like a third term of Obama - whom he served as vice president. "We face a totally different world," the president-elect said. "President Trump has changed the landscape. It's become America First, which meant America alone."

Antony Blinken, Biden's choice for secretary of state, said the United States cannot solve global problems on its own. "We need to be working with other countries," the former State Department official said. However, outgoing Secretary of State Mike Pompeo denounced Biden's call for greater international cooperation, saying that Trump had been focused on "real results" and "the reality on the ground". "More multilateralism for the sake of hanging out with their buddies at a cocktail party? That's not in the best interest of the United States," Pompeo told Fox News.

Pompeo said he had not spoken to Blinken but would "do everything that's required by law" as part of the transition. Former secretary of state John Kerry, who Biden chose as his special envoy on climate change, confirmed that the United States will rejoin the Paris climate accord which, under Trump, it formally withdrew from earlier this month. — AFP

Gaza female gas station attendant defies 'traditions'

KHAN YUNIS: Salma Al-Najjar, a petrol station attendant in the Gaza Strip, sees her part-time job in larger terms than the traditional act of filling a customer's tank. The 15-year-old trailblazer is the first female to work at a gas station in the Palestinian territory, which has been controlled by the Islamist group Hamas since 2007. Sporting an orange and black vest and poised for her next vehicle, Najjar said she wanted to "support Palestinian women and show they can do whatever they want, despite the criticism they face".

Gaza, under an Israeli blockade since 2007, had unemployment and poverty rates of roughly 50 percent before the Covid-19 pandemic further devastated the enclave's economy. While the job of pump attendant may be facing extinction in much of the world, Palestinians still prefer to have a paid professional fill their tanks. When the boss of a petrol station in Khan Yunis in southern Gaza informed her she had been hired, Najjar said she was both surprised and happy.

"Why not become the first woman to do this job and challenge traditions in our conservative society," she said, adding that she was encouraged by her family. Boss Mohammed Al-Agha said he was more than willing to hire a female. "I am a businessman and I support all girls and women who want to



GAZA: Salma Al-Najjar works at a petrol station in Khan Yunis in the southern Gaza Strip on Tuesday. — AFP

achieve their dreams," Agha said. In addition to being a pioneer for women in Gaza, Najjar said she is also representing young people. "I'm young but not a child," she said. "I want to prove that it's not age that matters, it's skills."

Palestinian law allows people to begin work at age 18. In 2018 report, the UN's International Labour Organization said 4.5 percent children in Gaza and the occupied West Bank are part of the workforce, calling that a "worrying" figure. — AFP

Local

Kuwait's expats over 60 face sudden reality of leaving 'home'

University degree, family visa only remaining solutions

By Nawara Fattahova

KUWAIT: Expat employees who reach 60 years of age and are not university graduates have a short time remaining in Kuwait. They won't be able to work anymore, but they may have a chance to stay in Kuwait - according to certain conditions - if their children are working in the country.

When this decision by the Public Authority for Manpower was issued a few months back, nobody explained the reason for it. People in this category - many of whom have called Kuwait home for most of their lives - usually work in technical or low-wage jobs, which are shunned by Kuwaitis. If the reason was potential pressure on medical services due to their age, then can pay more for health insurance, for instance.

An administrative mistake can change the life of an entire family. Abu Mohammed, who has been living in Kuwait for almost 50 years, will be forced to leave the country. "Unfortunately, I'm paying for somebody else's mistake. Although I'm a university graduate, the mandoub (company representative) did not submit my certificate, and they registered me as a high school graduate. I never checked this information before as I didn't need to. When the mandoub informed me of the new decision and said he won't be able to renew my visa next year, I was shocked. I told him to change my educational status based on my degree, but he said that it's not allowed to modify the status now, as many years have passed," the 65-year-old Jordanian told Kuwait Times.



New decision applies from Jan 2021

for 20 or 30 years and even longer, and are loyal to this country much more than those who arrived just a few years ago. Kuwait should benefit from our long work experience here. Most of us feel like strangers when we visit our home countries, as we have lived the majority of our lives here," he said.

The only solution for such residents is to transfer to a family visa, but this option is not available for Abu Mohammed. "Unfortunately, my children live abroad. I only have three younger brothers living in Kuwait, and I can't be dependent on them as it's not allowed. If this decision doesn't change, I will have to leave the country, sadly," he added.

Most of these people have families abroad depending on them, and many will find it difficult to return to their homelands, especially developing countries. Abu Abdullah is a 61-year-old Iranian who has been living in Kuwait since the early 1960s, when he arrived here as a child. When he renewed his residency in July, his employer told him that he won't be able to renew his residency next year due to the new regulation.

'Very tough situation'

"I work as a driver at a private company and I only receive KD 250 monthly. I send most of my salary to my family in Iran, where I have my wife and six children. The situation there is very tough, and even my married daughters depend on my support. In Kuwait I only have one daughter, who is married. I can't become her dependent as she is not employed and her residency is dependent on her husband. I really don't know what I will do next year, as the situation in Iran is difficult and in my old age no one will employ me," stressed Abu Abdullah. There are many more similar cases. Abu Abbas, 62,



KUWAIT: This archive photo shows a group of people waiting at a bus stop in Kuwait City. This photo is for illustration purposes only. —Photo by Yasser Al-Zayyat

is an Iranian blacksmith living in Kuwait for over 25 years. "I was very sad to hear that this decision will be applied from January. My family back home depends on my salary. Also, I'm living with only one kidney, so I have to drink at least 5 liters of mineral water daily. If I go back home in this situation, it would be impossible to get this quantity of water there and most probably I will not survive," he said dejectedly.

According to a report published by Al-Qabas Arabic daily on Tuesday, many company owners believe that this decision is unjust towards occupational workers who were trained inside and outside Kuwait and honed their skills until they became experts, and it is not fair to let them go in this man-

ner. The report said Kuwait Chamber of Commerce and Industry Chairman Mohammad Jassim Al-Saqer said the decision, besides not being right, will have negative effects on certain economic activities, adding the peak of a man's contributions are during the period between 60 and 70 years of age.

According to the latest available official statistics, there were 79,506 expatriate workers over 60 years in Kuwait as of June 30, 2020, of whom 73,480 were employed by private firms and 6,026 in the public sector. The statistics, released by the Central Statistical Bureau's Labor Market Information System, do not specify the educational levels of those labor forces.

UNSC applauds cooperation on missing Kuwaitis

NEW YORK: The United Nations Security Council (UNSC) has applauded current cooperation between Kuwait and Iraq in the search for missing people from Kuwait and other states. The UNSC adopted a press release yesterday alluding to the handover of human remains, believed to be of Kuwaiti nationals, from the Iraqi government to the Kuwaiti government on September 16, 2020, and before that on August 8, 2019. The council member states expressed gratitude to Iraq for the logistical support, lauding particularly the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) and the "tripartite mechanism" for

implementing the UN Resolution 2107 (2013) for resolving standing issues related to the missing people from Kuwait and other countries. They also hailed the Iraqi government for the continuous repatriation of Kuwaiti properties, urging it to pursue the search for other missing items, namely the Kuwaiti manuscripts. Moreover, they expressed hope that the team of Kuwaiti coroners will finish the task of determining identity of the delivered human remains that have been sent to the country from Baghdad.

Furthermore, the UNSC member countries voiced gratitude to the Iraqi government for seeking to honor remaining commitments at this level according to the council relevant resolutions. Iraq's ousted regime of the late Saddam Hussein had invaded Kuwait early August 1990 and occupied the country for months. During the aggression and occupation, hundreds of Kuwaiti citizens were abducted by the occupiers and remained missing since then. —KUNA

Ten-day cancer awareness campaign kicks off Friday

By Sajeev K Peter

KUWAIT: A ten-day cancer awareness campaign titled 'Know Cancer Better' will kick off tomorrow, reaching out to various sections of the Kuwaiti society. The awareness campaign is organized by Center for India Studies (CIS-Kuwait) in association with the Indian Doctors forum (IDF), Kuwait and Kuwait Medical Association (KMA). As the chief guest, Indian Ambassador Sibi George will inaugurate the campaign at 5:30 pm on Friday, November 27, on Zoom platform. "Cancer is one of the major killers of the modern world. There is a popular belief that it is a dead end. But it is not. It can be prevented or cured if the disease is detected early at a precancerous stage itself. For that, we need public awareness," said the ambassador, while congratulating CIS and IDF for initiating the awareness campaign.

Dr Sadeq Abu Zalouf, Chairman, Radiation Oncology, Kuwait Cancer Control Center

(KCCC), as the guest of honor, will address the audience and brief the listeners about the various facilities available for cancer treatment in Kuwait. "Cancer awareness among the general public helps dispel the myth about the disease and enables early diagnosis, thus reducing mortality," said Dr Zalouf. According to Dr Zalouf, the most common cancer cases in Kuwait are prostate and lung cancer in males and breast and endometrium in females. Today, KCCC has state-of-the-art diagnostic and therapeutic facilities to treat cancer, he added. Wishing the campaign all success on behalf of KCCC and the Kuwait community, Dr Zalouf said he is quite privileged to participate in this ten-day cancer awareness campaign.

Dr Amir Ahmed, President of IDF will address the audience as the guest of honor. Dr Juzer Ali, Radiation Oncologist, Kuwait Cancer Control Center, will deliver the keynote address. Dr Surendra Nayak, CIS advisor, will be releasing a pamphlet on cancer awareness, prevention and treatment in different languages that would

be distributed to the attending organizations and public forums. "The ten-day campaign will be held via virtual mode in view of the present COVID situation. Various socio-cultural organizations have become part of this campaign with over 20 sessions being already scheduled," said Vibheesh Thikkodi, the CIS president.

A panel of eminent specialist doctors from IDF Kuwait and from India will address people on specialized topics relating to cancer awareness during the campaign. The organizers have announced that there will be exclusive programs for women audiences. "The primary purpose of the campaign is to create awareness about how to prevent the disease and how to get treatment and cure on time. There will be general cancer awareness talks and also on specific cancers such as breast cancer, cervical cancer, colorectal, oral and laryngeal, lung and prostatic cancer," said Dr Nayak. Periodic screening tests are important as they help in detecting the disease at precancerous stage itself, he said.

Kuwait reports 422 new COVID cases, one death

KUWAIT: Kuwait listed 422 new coronavirus cases yesterday which the Ministry of Health said were registered over the previous 24 hours, raising total infections to 141,217. Meanwhile, one patient died over the past 24 hours, which upped Kuwait's COVID-19 death toll to 871, the health ministry said. The number of people hospitalized with the virus currently stands at 6,313, with 78 of them in intensive care units, said ministry spokesman Dr Abdullah Al-Sanad, adding that 6,117 swab tests were conducted over the past 24 hours out of a total of 1,068,193 so far. The ministry had earlier reported that some 626 more people had recovered from the virus over the same period, raising the total of patients to have overcome the disease to 134,033. The spokesman went on to urge the public to abide by health precautions, including social distancing, which he said remains critical to halt the spread of the virus. —KUNA



Stay safe. Stay home. Stay informed.

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News in brief

KD17.5 - 20.5 for car insurance

KUWAIT: The Insurance Organization Unit issued a decision in regards to the regulations of obtaining compulsory vehicle insurance. Al-Qabas reported yesterday. The new decision includes prices for private vehicle insurance, which varies according to the number of passengers. The prices are as follows: KD 17.5 - 20.5 for one year, KD 35 - 41 for two years and KD 52 - 61 for three years. As for taxis, the prices are as follows: KD 21.5 - 27.5 for one year and KD 43 - 55 for two years.

Kuwait, UAE share common history

DUBAI: Kuwait and the UAE share common history and heritage, said Kuwaiti Consul General in Dubai, Theyab Al-Rashidi, stressing the strength of fraternal relations between the two countries. This came during the celebration organized yesterday by the Kuwaiti Consulate in Dubai on the occasion of the UAE 49th National Day. The ceremony was held with the participation of the Director-General of the UAE Ministry of Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation Office Sheikh Maktoum bin Butti Al-Maktoum and a number of consuls of brotherly and friendly countries in the UAE.

Kuwait oil edges 31 cents higher

KUWAIT: Kuwait crude oil edged 31 cents higher during Tuesday's trading to end the day at \$45.45 per barrel (pb), Kuwait Petroleum Corporation (KPC) said yesterday. Benchmark Brent rose \$1.8 to stand at \$47.86 pb and West Texas Intermediate jumped \$1.85 to \$44.91 pb.

Photo of the Day



KUWAIT: A general view of Kuwait City. —Photo by Yasser Al-Zayyat

Foreign Minister meets Kuwaiti embassy in US' staff members

WASHINGTON: Kuwaiti Foreign Minister and Acting Minister of Information Sheikh Dr Ahmad Nasser Al-Mohammad Al-Sabah, in the presence of Kuwaiti Ambassador to the United States Sheikh Salem Abdullah Al-Jaber Al-Sabah, met with staff members of the embassy and heads of the attached offices. The meeting was held on the sideline of Sheikh Dr Ahmad's participation in the fourth Kuwaiti-US strategic dialogue on Wednesday, the foreign ministry said in a statement. Minister Sheikh Dr Ahmad conveyed greetings from His Highness the Amir of Kuwait Sheikh

Nawaf Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah, His Highness the Crown Prince Sheikh Mishal Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah, and His Highness the Prime Minister Sheikh Sabah Al-Khaled Al-Hamad Al-Sabah.

Sheikh Dr Ahmad affirmed that the Kuwaiti leadership was very pleased with the role carried out by the embassy's staff and diplomats in their assistance to Kuwaiti nationals abroad especially during the repatriation to Kuwait during the novel coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic. They also praised the ongoing assistance provided to citi-

zens seeking treatment, students, and Kuwaitis on leisure in the US, he added. Meanwhile, Kuwait's Ambassador to Washington Sheikh Salem lauded the meeting with the Foreign Minister and expressed gratitude towards instructions provided by Sheikh Dr Ahmad. He affirmed that the embassy and attached offices will continue to serve Kuwaiti citizens and focused on means to bolster relations with the United States. During the meeting, heads of offices in Washington briefed Sheikh Dr Ahmad on their duties and efforts to improve cooperation with US and services for citizens. —KUNA

Kuwait fund, USAID sign MoU

WASHINGTON: Kuwaiti Foreign Minister and Acting Information Minister Sheikh Dr Ahmad Nasser Al-Mohammad Al-Sabah on Tuesday signed a MoU with the US Agency for International Development (USAID). The signing of the MoU came on the sidelines of the official visit to Washington by the foreign minister, who doubles as Chairman of the Kuwait Fund for Arab Economic Development (KFAED). The memo is meant to promote bilateral technical cooperation and joint action in the field of financing economic and social development in developing countries and bilateral coordination for response to humanitarian crises and natural disasters, and to share technical and information experience. Kuwaiti Ambassador to the US Sheikh Salem Abdullah Al-Jaber Al-Sabah, Assistant Foreign Minister for Americas' Affairs Minister Plenipotentiary Hamad Al-Mashaan and Deputy Assistant Foreign Minister for the Foreign Minister's Office Ahmad Al-Shuraim were in attendance. —KUNA



WASHINGTON: Kuwaiti Foreign Minister Sheikh Dr Ahmad Nasser Al-Mohammad Al-Sabah (right) attends a press conference to announce the signing of the deal. —KUNA

Candidates claim Kuwait held 'hostage' by corrupt forces

By B Izzak

KUWAIT: Candidates fighting for parliamentary seats in next month's general polls yesterday blasted what they called government failure to fight corruption, claiming the country has been taken hostage by corruption forces.

"Kuwait has been taken hostage by those sponsoring corruption, by people with vested interests and by those who lack patriotism," former minister Bader Al-Humaidi, contesting in the second constituency, said.

Opposition MP Shuwaib Al-Muwaizri, bidding for re-election from the fourth constituency, said the government is incapable of fighting against corruption and dealing with crises, adding that the previous national assembly has excluded legislation for fighting corruption. This has resulted in an increase in corruption indicators in the country.

MP Adel Al-Damkhi went a step further. He said Kuwait has been facing an ever developing and ever increasing corruption that has many shapes and forms. Damkhi, trying to retain his seat in the first constituency, charged that the corruption system has penetrated all authorities in the country and is responsible for major

bureaucratic appointments. They control the media and have great influence and are behind an open war against reformers in the country, he said.

Former MP Hasan Jowhar charged that ministers who earnestly fought against corruption have been dismissed. He said former health minister Jamal Al-Harbi did not last for long in his post because he fought against forces of corruption in his ministry.

The same thing happened to former housing minister Yasser Abul who was dismissed for cracking down on corruption. Jowhar has ended an eight-year boycott to election and decided to contest from the first constituency.

Former MP Khaled Al-Shulaimi charged that the government is sponsoring vote buying by certain candidates since the practice is being done in the open. New candidate Marwan Al-Fagan from the first constituency blamed squandering of public funds and corruption for part of the lingering budget deficit in Kuwait. He said that in the five fiscal years from 2014/15 to 2018/19, Kuwait incurred a budget deficit of KD 22.5 billion, adding that if the expected shortfalls for this year and next are added, the total deficit will exceed KD 40 billion.

In the meantime, the Kuwait Progressive Movement called on the government yesterday to include changing the voting system in its proposed amendments to the election law. The Movement insisted that the main problem with the Kuwaiti elections is the single-vote system which must be changed.

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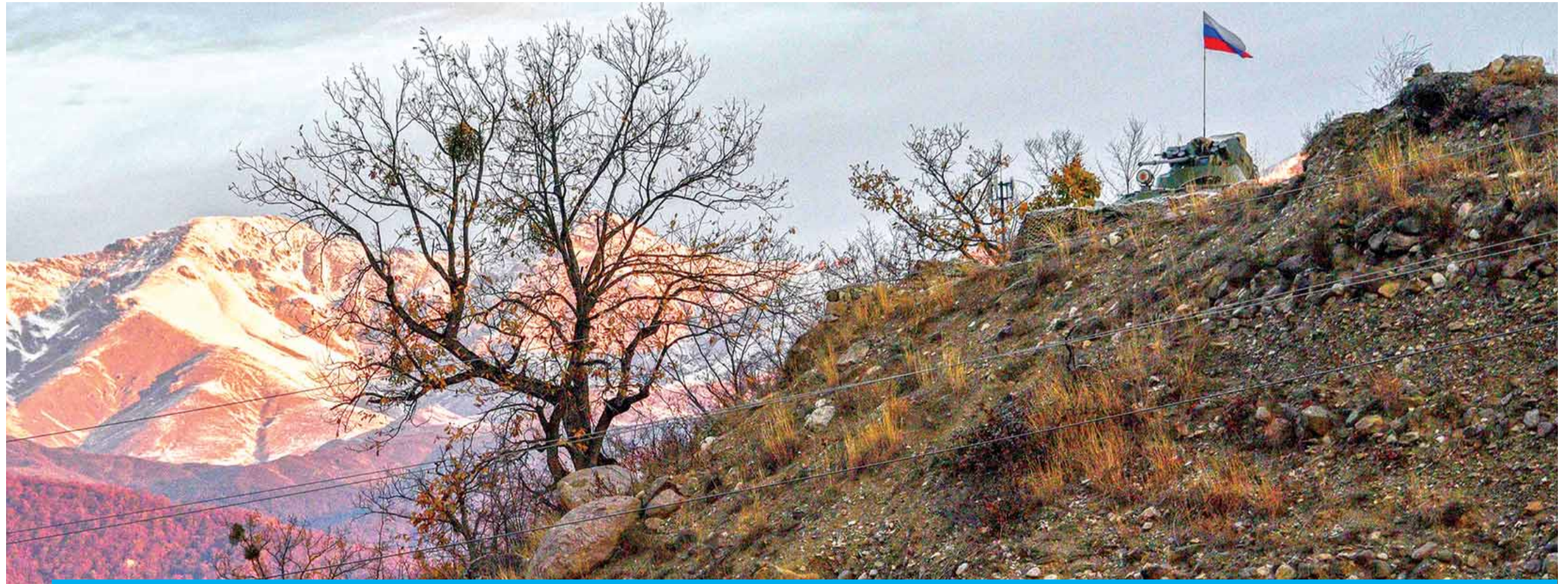


World scrambles for vaccine deals as infections near 60m

Thai protesters rally as leaders summoned over defamation

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CHAREKTAR, Azerbaijan: An armored personnel carrier (APC) of Russian peacekeeping forces is stationed above the demarcation line near this village yesterday as Azerbaijan forces entered the Kalbajar district. — AFP

Azerbaijan moves into Kalbajar district

Second district handed back by Armenia under peace deal

CHEREKTAR, Azerbaijan: Azerbaijani soldiers and military trucks rolled into the district of Kalbajar yesterday, reclaiming the second of three regions Armenia is handing back under a deal that ended weeks of fighting. Images released by Azerbaijan's defense ministry showed troops deploying into the district overnight, some scanning for landmines on snow-covered roads.

The district is among those being handed back by Armenia after it agreed to a peace deal ending six weeks of clashes over the disputed Nagorno-Karabakh region. Kalbajar, wedged between Karabakh and the territory of Armenia, was initially scheduled for handover on November 15 but Azerbaijan pushed back the deadline for humanitarian reasons.

Armenia agreed to hand back three districts around Karabakh - Aghdam, Kalbajar and Lachin - as part of the deal that stopped an Azerbaijani offensive that had reclaimed swathes of territory lost to Armenian separatists in a 1990s war. Aghdam was ceded on Nov 20 and Lachin is to be handed over by Dec 1.

Kalbajar 'liberated'

Near the village of Cherektar on the edges of

Kalbajar, Armenian soldiers were setting up a checkpoint with stacks of tyres blocking the road. Holding a Kalashnikov rifle and with a white cross drawn on the front of his camouflage uniform, 20-year-old soldier Armen Shakhnazaryan said it was a shame for Armenia to lose the district. "We have a lot of churches here," Shakhnazaryan told AFP. "Our ancestors, our elders and our friends are buried here."

In a televised address yesterday, Azerbaijan's President Ilham Aliyev congratulated his people, saying Kalbajar had been "liberated". He said historic monuments in the district including churches and mosques were considered "historical treasures" by mainly Muslim Azerbaijan and would be preserved.

Azerbaijanis who fled the region nearly 30 years ago are expected to return as Armenians left en masse. In the days before the handover, Kalbajar residents packed all they could take, determined to leave nothing for their longtime foes. Locals collected electric cables, loaded parts of a hydroelectric power station into a truck and even cut down trees to take with them as they left.

Clashes between the ex-Soviet rivals over Nagorno-

Karabakh broke out in late September, reigniting a long-simmering conflict over the mountainous region. The ethnic Armenian enclave broke away from Azerbaijani control in the 1990s war and declared independence, though this was never internationally recognized.

The peace deal was reached after Azerbaijan's military overwhelmed Armenian separatist forces and threatened to advance on Karabakh's main city Stepanakert. Under the agreement, Armenia is losing control of seven districts seized during the post-Soviet war in the 1990s, which killed 30,000 people and displaced many Azerbaijanis that used to live there.

The separatists are retaining control over most of Karabakh's Soviet-era territory and some 2,000 Russian peacekeepers have deployed along frontline areas and to protect the Lachin corridor, which connects Karabakh with Armenia. Other Armenians have meanwhile been returning to Karabakh itself. Russia said on Tuesday it had helped more than 13,000 people to return from Armenia after they had fled the fighting, which left thousands dead including more than 100 civilians.

Russia steals spotlight

Moscow's role in halting the fighting has stolen the spotlight from France and the United States, who together with Russia form the so-called Minsk Group of negotiators that brokered an unstable ceasefire in the 1990s. The three countries attempted three separate ceasefires during the recent fighting, all of which collapsed as Armenia and Azerbaijan accused each other of violations.

Since the peace deal was announced, Armenian Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan has faced a backlash at home, with protesters ransacking government buildings and demanding his resignation. Russian President Vladimir Putin held phone calls with Pashinyan and Aliyev ahead of the Kalbajar handover to discuss "further measures to provide humanitarian aid", the Kremlin said on Tuesday.

Also on Tuesday, Putin spoke to Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan to discuss the work of Russia's peacekeepers in the region. Russia insists that Turkey - a key ally of Azerbaijan - will not take part in the peacekeeping mission, despite Azerbaijani claims to the contrary. — AFP

Ethiopian PM rejects 'interference' ahead of deadline

ADDIS ABABA: Prime Minister Abiy Ahmed yesterday said he rejected international "interference" in Ethiopia's affairs, hours before a deadline for Tigray's rebellious leaders to surrender or face an assault on their capital. Abiy, the winner of last year's Nobel Prize, late Sunday gave the Tigray People's Liberation Front (TPLF) 72 hours to surrender - an ultimatum rejected by the leader of the dissident northern region, who has said his people are "ready to die" for their homeland.

As the clock ticked down, the UN Security Council held its first meeting on the three-week old crisis, with particular concern for civilians in the regional capital Mekele. Ethiopian forces say they are encircling the city with tanks ahead of an assault on the TPLF, and have urged its half million residents to leave. Rights groups have warned that attacking the city could constitute a war crime. The UN, US, EU and others have urged restraint, and called for an immediate halt to hostilities.

Abiy has resisted calls for mediation and insists the "law enforcement operation" against the TPLF is entering its decisive final stage. In a statement yesterday, he said Ethiopia appreciated the concern but stressed his government was "very much capable" of resolving the matter on its own. "While we consider the concerns and advice of our friends, we reject any interference in our internal affairs," Abiy said. "We therefore respectfully urge the international community to refrain from any unwelcome and unlawful acts of interference and respect the fundamental principles of non-intervention under international law." — AFP



PRETORIA: Ethiopians from the Tigray region living in South Africa hold placards as they gather and protest outside the Department of International Relations and Cooperation yesterday. — AFP

Stateless scientist sets sights on COVID vaccine

LONDON: Ask scientist Nowras Rahhal about his cutting-edge work on a COVID-19 vaccine and he is eager to explain the complexities, but ask him where he comes from and he struggles for words. Rahhal, who moved to Germany two years ago from Syria's war-shattered capital Damascus, is stateless - meaning no country recognizes him as a citizen. "When you are stateless, the simple question 'Where are you from?' becomes very loaded," he told the Thomson Reuters Foundation. "Most people are happy to say where they belong, but I don't know what to answer. I'd love to have a place to call home." Rahhal, 27, has just finished working with a team at one of the Max Planck institutes on developing a system allowing a COVID-19 vaccine to be applied to the skin, rather than injected into muscle. He said the technique - targeting specialist immune cells in the skin that can trigger an immune reaction in the body - would require a far smaller dose per person, a big advantage when inoculating large populations.

Before arriving in Germany, Rahhal spent years studying to the sound of bombings and artillery fire, using his phone torch to read when the electricity cut out at his Damascus home. But Rahhal's academic achievements are remarkable for another reason - stateless people often struggle to access education.

Rahhal's grandfather was among tens of thousands of Palestinians who fled the Mediterranean city of Haifa during conflict surrounding the birth of Israel in 1948. Today there are half a million Palestinians in Syria, but they are not allowed to naturalize even though most were born in the country. Although Rahhal's mother is Syrian, laws in many Arab countries ban women passing their nationality to their children, so Rahhal, his two brothers and sister were born stateless like their father.

There are an estimated 10 million stateless people in the world with large populations in Myanmar, Ivory Coast, Thailand and Dominican Republic. Deprived of basic rights, they often live on the margins of society. While stateless Palestinians do not enjoy the same rights as Syrian nationals, they can access education, healthcare and jobs.

Rahhal, who spent most of his childhood in the now bombed out Damascus suburb of Darayya, went to a school run by UNRWA, the UN agency responsible for Palestinian refugees. The scientist said he was lucky to be born into a family that valued education. His Syrian-born father is an agricultural engineer, his mother an economist. But as he grew up, Rahhal saw how statelessness stalled his father's career and prevented him pursuing opportunities abroad.

There was social prejudice too. After meeting a girl at university, Rahhal was crushed when her family ended the relationship. "They told me I wasn't welcome



Nowras Rahhal

because I was a stateless refugee. This incident had a big impact on me. It was pure discrimination," he said. Leaving his family in 2018 was heartbreaking. "It was like I was saying goodbye almost for the last time because I don't know when I'll see them again," he said. "When I saw my family crying I was determined to do something that made them proud."

Rahhal said the war has left him with physical and psychological scars, but prefers not to talk about his experiences. He did not flee Syria as a refugee, but applied to study in Germany after gaining a degree in pharmaceutical sciences from Damascus University. Rahhal's diligence has seen him nominated for best international student at the University of Kassel, where he received a masters in nanosciences this month, achieving the highest grade. He has also learned German, worked on cancer drug research and helped with a bilingual storytelling project for refugee children.

'Undefined person'

But Rahhal's statelessness continues to cast a large shadow over his life. Even simple tasks like validating a phone SIM card become a huge headache without a nationality, he said. Flummoxed German authorities have changed his status three times - first categorizing him as stateless, then Syrian, and now as unspecified. "When you look at your ID and you see you are an 'undefined person' it's really painful," he said.

His documents create suspicion among officials and baffle acquaintances. "If I say I'm stateless I worry if people will think I've done something so bad in life that I've had my nationality taken away," he added. Christoph Rademacher, a professor in molecular drug targeting, who picked Rahhal to join the COVID-19 vaccine project, said he was astonished when he learned about the hurdles his protegee has had to overcome.

Rahhal is now embarking on a PhD in vaccine technology under Rademacher at the University of Vienna. Their vaccine has passed initial tests and is undergoing further trials with another team. Rahhal hopes his story will encourage other young stateless people to dream big, and spur more countries to back a UN campaign to end statelessness called #Ibelong. UN experts say the global failure to integrate stateless people is an enormous waste of human potential. "I'm very lucky because I had the chance to get an education," Rahhal said. "I'm sure if other stateless kids had these opportunities we'd hear a lot more success stories." — Reuters

Lame-duck Trump pardons turkey

WASHINGTON: US President Donald Trump emerged from self-imposed isolation on Tuesday to show that at least one thing in Washington would run according to tradition: The pardoning of a Thanksgiving turkey. In the Rose Garden, Trump stuck to the script in pardoning a 42-pound turkey named Corn as part of an annual presidential ritual, the sparing of a turkey from American dinner tables on the Thanksgiving holiday on Thursday.

"Corn, I hereby grant you a full pardon," Trump said, raising a hand over the white bird with long wattle. Corn gobbled approvingly after the pardon to applause from the seated crowd of White House staffers, many of them wearing masks to guard against the coronavirus. Since losing the presidential election to Democrat Joe Biden three weeks ago, Trump has defied custom. There's been no concession speech and no phone call to Biden. He has largely remained out of sight.

Trump has bitterly fought the results of the Nov 3 election with nothing to show for it. His administration's move to allow for a proper transition of power to Biden on Monday was a sign that he knows he is a lame-duck president, but one reluctant to cede the stage. Trump's annual trek to his oceanfront Mar-a-Lago resort for the Thanksgiving holiday was canceled by first lady Melania Trump, a move seen internally as a sign the Trumps realize this will be the last such holiday they spend at the White House.

When the Dow Jones cracked 30,000 on Tuesday, Trump was so eager to take credit for it that aides scrambled to get the White House briefing room ready for his hastily arranged appearance and shouted at reporters to take their seats. "The stock market Dow Jones Industrial Average just hit 30,000, which is the highest in history," said Trump. "We've never broken 30,000. And that's despite everything that's taken place with the pandemic." — Reuters



WASHINGTON: First Lady Melania Trump looks on as US President Donald Trump gives the National Thanksgiving turkey "Corn" a presidential pardon in the Rose Garden of the White House on Tuesday. — AFP

International

World scrambles for vaccine deals as COVID infections near 60 million

US leads the world in COVID deaths and infections

PARIS/BERLIN: Countries around the world are scrambling to finalize vaccine deals as the global number of coronavirus infections approached 60 million yesterday, scientists urged caution and US officials pleaded with Americans to stay home over Thanksgiving. The holiday weekend is expected to fuel a surge of infections in the United States, which leads the world with soaring COVID-19 infections and the daily toll on Tuesday climbing above 2,000, the highest 24-hour tally since early May.

Hopes for a successful vaccine, boosted by Pfizer, AstraZenica and Moderna, have boosted world stock markets. But an approved vaccine is unlikely to be widely available for months while scientists insist on the continued need for vigilance as politicians seek to relax curbs for Christmas amid a second wave of the pandemic.

Germany yesterday reported a record 410 COVID-19 deaths in the last 24 hours, before its 16 federal state leaders and Chancellor Angela Merkel meet today to discuss easing restrictions for the Christmas and New Year holidays. Italy reported 853 deaths related to COVID-19 on Tuesday, soar-

ing from 630 the day before and the highest daily toll since March 28. But new infections and the number of people in hospital with the virus in France dropped sharply as a national lockdown went into its fourth week.

French President Emmanuel Macron said on Tuesday a vaccine could start being administered by the end of the year. "We will very likely, and pending authorization by health authorities, start vaccination of the most vulnerable populations, hence the elderly, as soon as the end of December, early January," he said in a televised address.

Air France-KLM is among airlines gearing up for the challenge of transporting millions of doses of temperature-sensitive COVID-19 vaccines. "It's going to be a major logistics challenge," said Air France cargo chief Christophe Boucher. Macron said France will start easing its COVID-19 lockdown this weekend so that by Christmas, shops, theatres and cinemas will reopen and people can spend the holiday with their families.

Thanksgiving challenges

The four nations of the United Kingdom, which



LONDON: People wearing a face mask because of the coronavirus pandemic walk in London's China Town yesterday. British Prime Minister Boris Johnson said the "escape route" from the coronavirus was in sight as he announced that tough restrictions in England would not be extended beyond December 2. — AFP

have devised their own pandemic policies until now, agreed to relax restrictions for Christmas to allow up to three households to meet at home for five days. European Commission President Ursula von der Leyen warned against relaxing lockdowns too quickly.

"We must learn from the summer and not repeat the same mistakes," she told the European

Parliament. "Relaxing too fast and too much is a risk for a third wave after Christmas."

US President-elect Joe Biden was to give a speech later highlighting the challenges facing Americans as Thanksgiving approaches, challenges incumbent President Donald Trump has repeatedly failed to address over the last year and into the final days of his tenure. — Reuters



Germany, France plan to relax curbs over Christmas

Germany yesterday reported a record 410 COVID-19 deaths in the last 24 hours, before its 16 federal state leaders and Chancellor Angela Merkel meet today to discuss easing restrictions for the Christmas and New Year holidays. Italy reported 853 deaths related to COVID-19 on Tuesday, soar-

What is it like to take part in a vaccine trial?

MIAMI: A key facet of the global mad scramble by Pfizer, Moderna and other pharma groups to develop a viable coronavirus vaccine is the recruitment of tens of thousands of volunteers willing to participate in clinical trials. AFP's correspondent in Miami, Leila Macor, took part in such a trial organized by US biotech firm Moderna, which announced Monday that its experimental vaccine was nearly 95 percent effective.

Why did Macor, who suffers from asthma, decide to be one of Moderna's 30,000 test subjects? Here, she recounts her experience, which began just weeks after her own father died of COVID-19 in Chile.

Tough decision

Three weeks before Pfizer and Moderna launched their coronavirus vaccine clinical trials in late July, my father passed away—alone, as so many have in this crisis. As our family lived through the trauma, and said goodbye as best we could, I was confronting another stark and dangerous reality—Miami was becoming a major US virus hotspot, and my job was to cover the story.

But my life has been irrevocably changed. I lost my dad, and I have asthma, which could lead to serious complications if I were to be infected. The idea of taking action to help bring this deadly medical



In this file photo taken on September 10, 2020 a nurse prepares to inoculate volunteer Ilya Dubrovin, 36, with Russia's new coronavirus vaccine in a post-registration trials at a clinic in Moscow. — AFP

emergency under control offered me some inner peace.

Let me be clear, this was a totally personal decision that had nothing to do with work.

I talked it over with friends and family, who helped me decide that any possible side effects from the trial would not be worse than getting COVID-19. So I took the plunge. Two days after writing a story about the start of phase 3 trials in Florida, I once again knocked on the door of a lab—this time as a potential subject.

Research Centers of America, located in the Miami suburb of Hollywood, was working on trials for Pfizer and Moderna, alternating every other day.

Dozens of other labs were recruiting volunteers across the United States. Anyone was eligible, as long as they were in high-risk jobs: doctors, taxi drivers,

grocery store workers... and reporters.

I made an appointment for a Tuesday in mid-August. That happened to be a Moderna day.

Vaccine or placebo?

Lab staff put a name tag on me and brought me to an office, where they explained what would happen. They also gave me a 22-page document with all the details. The trial consists of two doses. Volunteers are paid \$2,400 over the course of the two-year study. They warned of possible side effects—from pain at the injection site to fever and chills. The 30,000 subjects are divided in two groups: those who get the vaccine and those who get a placebo.

"Even we don't know which is which," the nurse told me, when I asked about my group. Only Moderna knows—but not until the data is compiled and analyzed. — AFP

Sudanese open arms to fleeing Ethiopians

HAMDAYIT, Sudan: Ethiopian refugee Sejamara didn't know what to expect when she and her husband waded across a river to Sudan, certainly not the welcome they received from local residents.

Hungry, thirsty and exhausted after a trek of several hours, they entered the poor border town of Hamdayit in the early days of the conflict in northern Ethiopia's Tigray region. All they wanted was a place to sleep, away from the crammed makeshift camps housing thousands of refugees at the nearby Hamdayit transit centre.

"We thought of renting a place but the people here have put us up without money," said Sejamara, who now lives in a straw-built shelter with a simple bed inside. The young couple are among more than 40,000 Ethiopians turned into refugees inside Sudan since the Tigray conflict erupted in early November. Hundreds have been killed in fighting between the federal government of Prime Minister Abiy Ahmed and the Tigray People's Liberation Front.

"They can stay here as long as

they want," said Sejamara's hostess Mariam Abubakr, who lives nearby in a small mud house with a thatched roof.

Like thousands of others, Sejamara and her husband have registered with aid groups to receive daily meals at the transit center. "We'll stay here for a few days, until things calm down... If not, we'll have no option but to live in a refugee camp," she said.

The border region of eastern Sudan has a long history of hospitality in times of hardship. Since 1967, it has hosted hundreds of thousands of Ethiopian and Eritrean war or famine refugees.

Crowded camps

Many residents of Hamdayit, itself a poverty-stricken region, have again welcomed Ethiopian refugees in their modest homes. Some offer shelter only, others are providing food and water.

Hamdayit's transit center says it has taken in 24,000 refugees. "It's become very crowded around here but that's alright. They're our guests," said local farmer Eissa Hassan.

However, the influx has resulted in instant price hikes. "Prices of vegetables, fruit, meat, and even water have increased dramatically," said Hassan, with the price of bananas doubling for instance. Farmer and trader Bahradin Yacoub explained: "Now that demand is higher, prices have increased." — AFP



The border region of eastern Sudan has a long history of hospitality in times of hardship. Since 1967, it has hosted hundreds of thousands of Ethiopian and Eritrean war or famine refugees.

German vote to pick Merkel successor set for Sept 26, 2021

BERLIN: The German government yesterday agreed on September 26 next year for the general election to choose a successor to Chancellor Angela Merkel, a government spokeswoman said.

Merkel has said she will not stand for a fifth term and will retire from politics next year after 16 years at the helm of Europe's top economic power and the EU's most populous country. Her departure will mark a new, less certain phase in German politics and at the heart of the European Union, whose rotating presidency Merkel currently holds.

The government "proposes to the federal president the date of Sunday, September 26, 2021 for the election of the 20th Bundestag (lower house of parliament)," spokeswoman Martina Fietz told reporters. President Frank-Walter Steinmeier must still give his official approval. The race to fill Merkel's shoes still looks wide open, as her Christian Democratic Union (CDU) party remains embroiled in an increasingly bitter leadership battle that has been extended by the pandemic. There are currently three hopefuls for the top job in Germany's biggest party, with a twice-delayed election for a new chief now scheduled for mid-January.

North Rhine-Westphalia state premier Armin Laschet, corporate lawyer Friedrich Merz and foreign affairs expert Norbert Röttgen are vying for the post. The candidates have proposed an online congress if



BERLIN: German Defense Minister Annegret Kramp-Karrenbauer (right) speaks and gesticulates during a session of questions at the Bundestag (lower house of parliament) in Berlin yesterday. — AFP

meeting in person were to be impossible because of restrictions to curb coronavirus transmission.

Pandemic uncertainty

The chief of the CDU traditionally leads it and its smaller Bavarian sister party the Christian Social Union to the polls. However given the failure of any of the Christian Democrat candidates to create real momentum at this early stage, CSU chief and Bavarian premier Markus Soeder has been the focus of ardent speculation about a possible run.

Bavaria has been among the states hardest hit by coronavirus infections and Soeder's robust response to the outbreak has won praise and given him an intense national spotlight. He leads opinion polls against all three CDU candidates when Germans are asked who they would like to see as their next chancellor. Yet Germany's complex coalition maths, the uncertainty created by the pandemic and the absence of Merkel as a foregone conclusion in a German general election could well throw up other surprises. — AFP

8 dead as migrant boat capsizes off Canaries

ARGUINEGUIN, Spain: Eight people died when a rickety boat carrying migrants capsized off Lanzarote in the Canary Islands, the emergency services on this Spanish archipelago said yesterday. Rescuers had initially given a toll of four dead after the boat went down just off Orzola, a village at the northern tip of Lanzarote island, at around 7:30 pm (1830 GMT) on Tuesday evening.

But they later found another four bodies, the 12 emergency services said yesterday morning. Enrique Espinosa, Lanzarote's emergency chief, said 28 people survived, telling the authorities the boat had set sail three days earlier from the Moroccan port of Agadir which lies some 420 kilometers (260 miles) away. More than 18,000 people have landed on the Spanish archipelago since the start of 2020, some two-thirds of them in the past few months, after making the perilous trip by boat from the African coast.

Spain is in the process of setting up emergency camps for up to 7,000 people as it seeks to tackle the huge influx of arrivals in the Canary Islands, while also stepping up a diplomatic offensive in various African countries to slow the rate of departures. The current wave has echoes of the crisis of 2006 when 30,000 migrants reached the Canaries, prompting Spain to step up patrols and ink repatriation agreements. — AFP

Car crashes into gate of Merkel's office in Berlin

BERLIN: A car with slogans scrawled on its sides crashed into the gate of the office of German Chancellor Angela Merkel in Berlin yesterday and police arrested the driver, a Reuters witness said.

Reuters pictures from the scene showed police inspecting the estate car at the gate with the words "Stop Globalization Politics" written in white on its right side and "You damn killers of children and old people" on the other.

"The Chancellor, other members of the government and people working in the Chancellery were not in danger at any time," government spokesman Steffen Seibert said, adding that the incident had caused only minor damage. It was not clear if Merkel was inside the building, a white post-mod-

ernist structure set across a square from the Reichstag building that houses Germany's parliament and well set back from any main roads. Dozens of police and a fire engine attended the incident.

The driver, who appeared to be in late middle age, was taken away in a wheelchair by police.

"We are establishing if the driver deliberately drove against (the gate)," Berlin police said on Twitter. "He has been taken into custody." A firefighter subsequently moved the car, which had a license plate from the north-western county of Lippe, away from the gate. Both fence and car appeared largely undamaged.

Berlin is home to an active left-wing anti-globalization scene, whose members have sought to stop development projects by big global companies and occupied empty houses. Merkel was scheduled host a video conference of German state premiers yesterday, at which an extension to the coronavirus lockdown and further steps to combat the pandemic were due to be discussed. — Reuters

International

Thai protesters rally as leaders summoned over defamation

First use of draconian law in almost three years

BANGKOK: Thai pro-democracy protesters gathered in Bangkok yesterday as police summoned 12 of their leaders to answer charges of royal defamation, the first use of the draconian law in almost three years.

At least a thousand demonstrators—many brandishing the yellow toy ducks that have become a symbol of the movement—took to the streets near the headquarters of the Siam Commercial Bank (SCB) to protest at the secrecy surrounding King Maha Vajiralongkorn's wealth. Thailand has for months been rocked by youth-led protests demanding a new constitution, reform of the untouchable monarchy, and for Prime Minister Prayut Chan-O-Cha to resign.

Tensions in Bangkok have been rising—police used water cannon and tear gas at a rally outside parliament last week, with 55 people injured and six shot in scuffles with royalists. The source of the gunfire is under investigation. The protesters had planned to rally outside the headquarters of the Crown Property Bureau yesterday, prompting police to lock down the area with razor wire and rows of shipping containers.

But overnight they flagged they would switch the protest to the main office of the Siam Commercial Bank—in which the king is a major shareholder—to avoid potential clashes with a rival ultra-royalist rally. Sea, 27 a masters student from Phuket, described the police use of containers to protect the Crown Property Bureau as a “joke”.

“I have two emotions. First I was angry and then I laughed. It's very funny. On the internet we make fun of their actions every day,” Sea said. Many protesters

were sporting yellow ducks-on T-shirts, hats and helmets—after demonstrators used larger inflatable versions last week to defend themselves against police water cannon and tear gas.

As protester numbers grew, there was a festive atmosphere with police—not wearing riot gear—keeping a relatively low profile. Stalls sprang up yesterday selling a huge range of yellow duck merchandise, while some were even giving out pretend money adorned with a crowned version of the bathtime toy.

Royal wealth

The focus of yesterday's protest is the secrecy surrounding the royal finances. Soon after coming to power following his father's death in 2016, the new king took control of the Crown Property Bureau, which has assets in banks, companies and prime real estate. The bureau's board was previously headed by the finance minister in an arrangement that gave a sheen of public oversight to a trust some experts estimate is worth \$30-\$60 billion. The full assets are privately held and remain a closely guarded secret.

On the eve of yesterday's protest, 12 leaders received police orders to come for questioning over allegations of royal defamation. Thailand has one of the harshest lese majeste laws in the world. It is routinely interpreted to include any criticism of the monarchy—including content posted or shared on social media. Under section 112 of the penal code, anyone convicted of defaming, insulting or threatening the king, queen or their faces between three and 15 years in prison on each count.



BANGKOK: Pro-democracy protesters take part in an anti-government rally outside the headquarters of the Siam Commercial Bank in Bangkok yesterday. — AFP

The laws have not been invoked since 2018, but last week Prime Minister Prayut gave the green light for authorities to use them, after protesters daubed anti-royal graffiti around police headquarters in central Bangkok. “I'm not scared just one bit and I believe that by being sent the 112 summons, it will bring out more people to (Wednesday's) rally,” Parit “Penguin” Chiwarak, one of the 12 called for

questioning, said.

“Does this mean the monarchy has declared an all-out war with the people—is that right?” Government spokesman Anucha Burapachaisri told AFP the authorities were “increasingly concerned about attempts to undermine the rule of law” and would use “all pertaining laws” to pursue troublemakers. — AFP

Homes evacuated as cyclone threatens India

PUDUCHERRY, India: Several thousand people in south-eastern India fled their homes yesterday, out of the path of a cyclone due to slam coastal areas after midnight, bringing with it heavy rain.

Nivar, classified as a very severe cyclonic storm, was expected to pack winds of 120 kilometers (75 miles) per hour and gusts of up to 145 km/h when it makes landfall, forecasters said. Thousands of state and national emergency personnel have been deployed in the southern regions of Tamil Nadu, Andhra Pradesh and Puducherry, where the cyclone was due to hit in the early hours of today morning. Local authorities have declared a public holiday, shutting everything except emergency services, and a spokesman for the National Crisis Management Committee said thousands had been evacuated from their homes.

Heavy rain was already falling in the region, and was expected to intensify in the next few hours.

In Puducherry, the rain-soaked streets and markets were all deserted. Lieutenant Governor Kiran Bedi appealed to locals to stay indoors and abide by authorities' instructions.

“Move to high places wherever you have to. There are relief centers. Please move there,” Bedi said in a video message on Twitter. But people in



COLOMBO: Women walk through a road during a rain shower as cyclone Nivar approaches, in Beruwala, some 58 km from the Sri Lankan capital of Colombo yesterday. — AFP

some pockets along the coast were reluctant to abandon their homes and fishing boats and move to government shelters, an AFP reporter said.

In Tamil Nadu's capital Chennai, authorities said they were also closely observing the level of reservoirs and lakes to avoid a repeat of floods in 2015 when several hundred people died in the state.

Lake Chembarambakkam outside Chennai was expected to discharge extra water because of the heavy rains, and people in low-lying areas around the discharge area had been warned.

The cyclone's center was expected to pass some

175 kilometers northeast of Sri Lanka's northern tip early yesterday. No evacuation orders were issued in Sri Lanka but heavy rains were forecast, particularly in the north of the island nation. Fishermen there were advised not to go out to sea.

More than 110 people died after “super cyclone” Amphan ravaged eastern India and Bangladesh in May, flattening villages, destroying farms and leaving millions without electricity. But the death toll was far lower than the many thousands killed in previous cyclones of that size, a result of improved weather forecasting and better response plans. — AFP

Don't cut foreign aid, Malala urges UK

LONDON: Nobel laureate Malala Yousafzai has urged Britain not to cut overseas aid, ahead of a major announcement by the country's finance minister yesterday. Rishi Sunak is expected to suspend a legal commitment to spend 0.7 percent of gross national income on international development.

Reports suggest he will cut the level of aid to 0.5 percent in his Spending Review, as the government seeks to support the coronavirus-ravaged economy and looks for savings from an aid budget worth £15 billion (\$20 billion, €17 billion). In a tweet late on Tuesday, Yousafzai reminded Sunak and Prime Minister Boris Johnson of the 0.7 percent pledge, renewed in last year's Conservative election manifesto.

“When you announce spending priorities... I hope you'll deliver on that promise,” she wrote.

The Pakistani education campaigner wrote that leaders must “prioritise education” as “Covid-19 could force 20 million more girls out of school”. Her plea came as five former prime ministers also opposed the planned cut. Among them was former Conservative leader John Major, quoted by The Times newspaper yesterday as saying the spending cut was “morally wrong and politically unwise”.

Former Labour prime minister Tony Blair said on Saturday that Britain's overseas aid budget had an impact “measured literally in millions of lives”.



In this file photo, Pakistani activist and Nobel Peace prize laureate Malala Yousafzai attends an event about the importance of education and women empowerment in Sao Paulo, Brazil. — AFP

David Cameron, whose coalition government enshrined the 0.7 percent in law, has said abandoning it would be a “moral, strategic and political mistake”.

Johnson's government has repeatedly committed to maintaining the spending and his Conservatives made it a key plank of the election manifesto last year.

The government also promised not to grab ring-fenced aid money when it merged the foreign and development ministries earlier this year. But Sunak on Sunday told Sky News the UK was under “enormous pressure and stress” and faced an “economic shock”.

Any cut—even a temporary one—is likely to trigger a battle with Conservative MPs.

Tom Tugendhat, who chairs parliament's Foreign Affairs Committee, wrote in The Times: “If we cut aid we'll fall behind.” He retweeted Yousafzai's message, saying the UK needs “others to join us” as other G7 nations spend less on foreign aid. — AFP

Nearly 100 whales die after mass stranding in NZ

WELLINGTON: About 100 pilot whales and bottlenose dolphins have died in a mass stranding on the remote Chatham Islands, about 800 km (497 miles) off New Zealand's east coast, officials said yesterday. Most of them were stranded during the weekend but rescue efforts have been hampered by the remote location of the island.

New Zealand's Department of Conservation (DOC) said in total 97 pilot whales and three dolphins died in the stranding, adding that

they were notified of the incident on Sunday.

“Only 26 of the whales were still alive at this point, the majority of them appearing very weak, and were euthanized due to the rough sea conditions and almost certainty of there being great white sharks in the water which are brought in by a stranding like this,” said DOC Biodiversity Ranger Jemma Welch. Mass strandings are reasonably common on the Chatham Islands with up to 1,000 animals dying in a single stranding in 1918.

Mass whale strandings have occurred throughout recorded modern history, and why it happens is a question that has puzzled marine biologists for years. In late September, several hundred whales died in shallow waters off the Australian coast in one of the world's biggest mass whale strandings. — Reuters



Some of the 100 dead pilot whales stranded on New Zealand's remote Chatham Islands, as of the marine mammals beached themselves over the weekend but rescue efforts were hampered by the area's isolated location, about 800 kilometers (500 miles) east of the South Island. — AFP

News in brief

Second wave grips Pakistan

ISLAMABAD: Intensive care units across Pakistan are nearing capacity as a second, deadlier wave of the coronavirus builds momentum and officials struggle to counter public indifference to the pandemic. Several doctors said yesterday that hospitals are having to turn away suspected Covid-19 patients, with the potential for a major health care crisis increasing daily. “The coming two weeks are critical and our situation is going to worsen,” said Qaisar Sajjad, secretary general of the Pakistan Medical Association. “Around 95 percent of the beds are occupied. Only a few hospitals still have capacity—but most of the hospitals are full and refusing to take more patients.” — AFP

China accuses India over app ban

BEIJING: Beijing lashed out at India yesterday after it banned another tranche of Chinese apps for national security reasons, the latest sore point between the two nuclear-armed neighbors. Tensions remain high between Beijing and New Delhi after a deadly June clash in a disputed border area that left 20 Indian soldiers dead and an unspecified number of Chinese casualties. India banned 43 Chinese apps on Tuesday—including some from e-commerce giant Alibaba—for threatening “sovereignty and integrity”. China said it had “serious concerns” about the move. — AFP

China sentences Taiwan professor

BEIJING: China sentenced a Taiwanese professor to four years in jail for spying, officials said yesterday, as tensions between Beijing and Taipei deteriorate further. It comes a month after Shih Cheng-ping, a former chief economist for Chinese conglomerate Huaxia Group, made a televised “confession” on state media. The retired National Taiwan Normal University professor was found guilty by a Chinese court on Tuesday, Beijing's Taiwan Affairs Office said at a press briefing. Shih—who disappeared after travelling to the mainland in August 2018 — was one of several Taiwan residents who appeared on a television program by state broadcaster CCTV in October confessing to spying on the mainland. — AFP

HK leader vows to restore order

HONG KONG: Hong Kong's leader vowed yesterday to restore order to the city's legislature and save its political system from “chaos”, in a key policy speech at a muted gathering of almost exclusively pro-Beijing lawmakers. Chief executive Carrie Lam's annual policy address to the Legislative Council—postponed for more than a month after she was ordered to travel to mainland China for meetings with central government officials—outlines the administration's plans for the city. Hong Kong is ruled under a “One Country, Two Systems” model that allows it to retain a degree of autonomy and some freedoms that are denied to citizens on the authoritarian mainland. — AFP

Business

THURSDAY, NOVEMBER 26, 2020

Kuwait commissions largest crude distillation unit at Mina Abdullah

Unit marks a giant leap for Kuwait's refining industry, a gateway to clean fuel project

By Nawara Fattahova

KUWAIT: The Kuwait National Petroleum Company (KNPC) celebrated the commissioning of crude oil distillation unit no 111 at Mina Abdullah refinery yesterday. This key unit for KNPC and the Kuwaiti oil sector is the largest crude distillation unit in Kuwait, with a refining capacity of 264,000 bpd. It also includes one of the largest air distillation towers and the largest hydrogen production unit in the world.

Wadha Al-Khateeb, Deputy CEO of Mina Abdullah refinery (MAB) said operation of the crude distillation unit (CDU) 111 of the Clean Fuels project (CFP) is considered the gateway to the CFP of MAB refinery, which in turn represents a giant quantum leap in Kuwait's refining industry.

"By commissioning unit 111, KNPC moves ahead with the implementation of the KPC strategy to raise the refining capacity in Kuwait to 1.6 million bpd of high-quality petroleum products that are in line with the highest global stipulations and standards. This will open up new global markets for our company and boost Kuwait's position as a world leader in oil production," Khateeb said during a press conference held yesterday.

The successful operation of the unit comes in light of the current critical circumstances the whole world is experiencing due to the COVID-19 pandemic. "We are very proud of our competent teams that played a key role in today's historic success. This occasion is the culmination of over two years of tremendous efforts in testing and operating a number of support units and systems which were necessary for the safe operation of this unit. Our national cadres were able to challenge these conditions, overcome difficulties, operate and equip more than 11 plants and systems that had to be operated up to the CDU 111 commissioning," she added.

The project has paved the way to implement state-of-the-art technology and equipment in order to increase the refinery's ability to produce high-quality products that are compatible with international market conditions, while maintaining the highest levels of efficiency and operational flexibility through observing safety and environmental standards and requirements.



Wadha Al-Khateeb, Deputy CEO of Mina Abdullah Refinery, speaks during the celebration



Abdullah Al-Ajmi, Deputy CEO Projects, speaks during the event

"MAB refinery is ranked third on the world refinery complexity index, which reflects the highest category in sophistication and diversity of process units in terms of technology, capacity and yielding more value-added per barrel of oil," she further said.

In order to ensure the highest degree of integration and economically feasible operation, the CFP units were tied-in with existing ones at the refinery. "The departments within Mina Abdullah refinery worked side by side to complete the necessary tie-ins between more than five processing units at the current MAB refinery and its depots at Mina Abdullah and Shuaiba to pump crude oil to the unit and receive, refine and produce new products," stressed Khateeb.

This work required efforts by nearly 400 male and female national cadres from various departments. "It has been with careful planning by the technical services department, supervision by the quality assurance department, coordination by MAB operations department, equipment, machinery and lines by the

maintenance department, and monitoring of safety and environmental standards by the health, safety and environment department. The refinery has adopted the latest technology in operating the unit, such as thermal cameras for early detection of any leaks that may occur during operation to protect workers, the environment and our facility," she concluded.

Top quality products

Deputy CEO Projects Abdullah Al-Ajmi noted that despite the critical circumstances that the whole world is experiencing due to the COVID-19 pandemic, which had repercussions and impact on the activities of all companies and institutions, Kuwait National Petroleum Co has taken a decision to continue the completion and operation of its production units and maintain the continuity of executing its mega projects.

The new CDU 111 will generate high quality products like LPG, kerosene, diesel and others. "The end result will be that top-quality products in world will



KUWAIT: Kuwait National Petroleum Company's crude oil distillation unit No 111 at Mina Abdullah refinery which was commissioned yesterday. — Photos by Yasser Al-Zayyat

be manufactured in Kuwait. It will open new markets for selling refined products of Kuwait. The objective is to approach the international market. Also, these projects will provide new jobs for young Kuwaitis and business opportunity for various contractors in the next phase for maintenance and services," he told Kuwait Times.

CFP Commissioning Manager Ali Al-Ajmi said the new CDU 111 is designed to process 264,000 bpd of Kuwait Export Crude (KEC) using the latest technology that fractionates KEC into the petrochemical categories of naphtha, kerosene, light diesel, heavy diesel and atmospheric residue. Naphtha and kerosene are final products, whereas light diesel, heavy diesel and atmospheric residue are intermediate products that require further treatment.

"The Clean Fuels Project will also allow a major modernization/expansion of MAB to increase the total refining capacity from 270,000 bpd up to 454,000 bpd while maintaining high safety and environmental standards, and in line with the strategic directives of the Kuwait Petroleum Corporation. The conversion capacity of crude oil into higher value products will be increased by processing the atmospheric residue using additional hi-tech conversion units in order to meet global market specifications," he added.

"Upon commissioning the new CDU 111 at MAB refinery, it became the largest single crude processing unit (264,000 bpd) in Kuwait, compared to Mina Al-Ahmadi refinery which has a refining capacity of 200,000 bpd as well as the CDU of KIPIC with 210,000 bpd respectively. MAB currently has two distillation units - CDU 01 and CDU 11 with a capacity of 80,000 and 190,000 bpd of KEC crude respectively," noted Ajmi.

The new CDU 111 will operate with a capacity of 264,000 bpd. "As part of CFP, work on unit 01 will be suspended and the refinery will continue operating the units - CDU 11 and CDU 111 - with a total capacity of 454,000 barrels per stream day (kbpsd) of KEC crude. The execution of the project has reached its final stages. The new CDU 111 as well as the hydrogen production unit (HPU) have been successfully commissioned. Preparations are underway to prepare the remaining units as per the operation plan during the coming months," he explained.

"The project mainly aims to enhance the quality of Kuwait petroleum products in line with international environmental specifications, boost Kuwait's competitiveness in world markets and open new markets for Kuwaiti products. Advanced protection systems have been installed to limit the impact on Kuwait's environment," concluded Ajmi.

EU chief: Brexit deal must not hurt single market

BRUSSELS: In a downbeat assessment of progress in post-Brexit trade talks, EU chief Ursula von der Leyen warned yesterday that any deal must not undermine the EU single market. "We will do all in our power to reach an agreement, we're ready to be creative," she told the European Parliament, warning that Britain must agree to fair trade rules.

"But we are not ready to put into question the integrity of the single market, the main safeguard for European prosperity and wealth." Von der Leyen, head of the European Commission, repeated Brussels' warning that Britain would not enjoy the benefits of EU membership from the outside: "There will be a clear difference between being a full member of the Union, and being just a valued partner."

She acknowledged MEPs' frustration that time was running out for them to debate and ratify any trade deal before Britain leaves the single market on January 1. But she warned that British Prime Minister Boris Johnson's tactics had shown the need for clear rules.

"We want to know what remedies are available in case one side will deviate in the future because trust is good, but law is better," she said. "Crucially, in the light of recent experience, a strong governance system is essential to ensure that what has been agreed is actually agreed."

London has been resisting signing up to the EU's vision of a post-Brexit "level playing field", with trade penalties if either side diverges from agreed standards. Johnson has also introduced a draft law to govern the UK internal market that his own government admits would breach promises made in Britain's EU withdrawal treaty. This has undermined Brussels' trust in Britain, and talks have now blown past several unofficial deadlines,



BRUSSELS: European Commission President Ursula Von Der Leyen speaks during a debate on the next EU council and last Brexit development during a plenary session at the European Parliament in Brussels yesterday. — AFP

leaving only a narrow window for agreement before the end of the year.

European Commission vice-president Maros Sefkovic said he hoped to hold a meeting with British minister Michael Gove and their joint committee on implementing the withdrawal deal in the coming days. Brussels is keen to see movement from London in implementing border controls between Great Britain and Northern Ireland, which will remain in the EU single market despite being a part of the UK.

"I really would like to use it for a decisive solution for the issues, especially the proper implementation of the protocol on Ireland and Northern Ireland," he said. If a deal cannot be signed and ratified by December 31, cross-Channel trade will face a tariff barrier and businesses on both sides-but especially, experts agree, in Britain-will suffer. Von der Leyen paid tribute to her chief negotiator Michel Barnier, who today is due to come out of isolation imposed after a member of his team contracted the coronavirus. He is then due to return to London to resume face-to-face negotiations with his British opposite number, David Frost. Talks have been continuing by video link. — AFP

Fitch rates KIB Tier 2 Capital Sukuk final 'A-'

KUWAIT: Fitch Ratings report dated 24th November has assigned Kuwait International Bank's (KIB) \$300 million Tier 2 Sukuk final "A-" rating. The Tier 2 certificates are being issued under the trust certificate issuance program, housed under KIB Sukuk Limited. Fitch also assigned final A+/F1 long/ short-term ratings, in accordance with the capital adequacy standard (Basel III) 10-Year non-call 5-year Sukuk priced at a profit rate of 2.375 percent per annum, respectively, to the senior unsecured program.

KIB's issuance of this AT2 Capital Sukuk comes in collaboration with a number of high-level local, regional and international financial institutions, including: Citi and Standard Chartered Bank as Joint Global Coordinators, together with Boubyan Bank, Emirates NBD Capital, First Abu Dhabi Bank, Kamco Invest and KFH Capital and The Islamic Corporation of the Private Sector (ICD), as Joint Lead Managers and Joint Bookrunners. Commenting on this achievement, Raed Jawad Bukhamseen, Vice Chairman and CEO of the Bank said: "This ratings from Fitch is yet another strong

Weekly jobless claims increase again in US

WASHINGTON: The number of Americans filing first-time claims for jobless benefits increased further last week, suggesting that an explosion in new COVID-19 infections and business restrictions were boosting layoffs and undermining the labor market recovery. Initial claims

testament to KIB's successful Sukuk transaction since these are the highest rated T2 in Kuwait and the GCC by Fitch, in addition to being the first USD T2 Sukuk from Kuwait to be listed on London Stock Exchange (LSE), which reflects KIB's leading role in the regional Sukuk market."

Bukhamseen noted that the Sukuk issuance is also set to further diversify the Bank's funding base and strengthen its standing among international investors, highlighting that the total order book peaked at approximately \$2.7 billion, (9 times) with more than 50 percent allocated to international investors.

Bukhamseen added, "We have always been proud of KIB's successful track record of financial transactions and are extremely satisfied with these strong ratings towards, both, of the Bank's tier T2 Capital Sukuk and \$2 billion Sukuk program, which is two ratings below KIB's Long-Term IDR of 'A+', he added. It serves to note that Fitch assigned the Bank's Long-Term Issuer Default Rating (IDR) at 'A+', in addition to having affirmed the bank's Viability Rating (VR) at 'bb-' with a Stable Outlook, according to its report issued on September 14, 2020. The Stable Outlook on KIB's Long-Term IDR reflects that on the Kuwaiti sovereign rating.

for state unemployment benefits totaled a seasonally adjusted 778,000 for the week ended Nov 21, compared to 748,000 in the prior week, the Labor Department said yesterday. Economists polled by Reuters had forecast 730,000 applications in the latest week.

The weekly claims report, the most timely data on the economy's health, was published a day early because of today's Thanksgiving Day holiday. The United States has been slammed by a fresh wave of coronavirus infections, with daily cases exceeding 100,000 since early November. More than 12 million people have been infected in the country, according to a Reuters tally of official data. —Reuters



Raed Jawad Bukhamseen

Business

Africa's economic giant Nigeria reaches a 'critical juncture'

Pandemic sends oil prices tumbling, pushes economy into recession

LAGOS, Nigeria: More than 200 million Nigerians will slide further into poverty as the coronavirus pandemic has sent oil prices tumbling and pushed Africa's largest economy into recession. To many in oil-rich Nigeria, Saturday's announcement of a recession was no surprise—even the president had warned a downturn was coming.

"It feels like we have been in recession since the beginning of the year," said French teacher Joseph Olaniyan, who works at different private schools in the capital Abuja. The 30-year-old had no income for six months, between April and September, due to school closures.



200m Nigerians will slide further into poverty

The number of poor Nigerians was expected to increase by about two million largely due to population growth, according to the World Bank, but with the pandemic, the number could increase by 7 million.

And now with a recession on its hands—Nigeria's GDP shrank for a second consecutive quarter by 3.62 percent—opportunities seem to have gone from bad to worse. With the contraction in GDP, "Nigeria per capita income on an inflation adjusted basis could be around what it was in 1980, four decades ago. This is absolutely a very critical juncture," Shubham Chaudhuri, the World Bank's Country Director for Nigeria said Tuesday.

Popular discontent

"The recession will likely further accentuate the youth's frustrations," further warned Aurelien Mali, an analyst at Moody's. In October, several thousand young Nigerians descended to the streets in the biggest show of people power in years.

Initially against police violence, the youth-led protests quickly evolved into broader anti-government demonstrations. After a wave of unrest and a violent intervention by the army, the protests stopped—but popular discontent is still present.

"It is likely that the population will demonstrate its frustration, in particular young people, over the next few years," said Mali. The government has attempted to

reform its economy and cushion the recent shock caused by the pandemic. But the five-week national lockdown was a disaster for many.

"The money I was able to make during lockdown was just to keep on going, buy food and pay electricity," said Olaniyan, who was able to start teaching again in October but says "things are still a bit on balance". In addition to the pandemic, the economy suffered from a fall in global oil prices and diminishing production.

"Just when the government should support the economy and its most vulnerable citizens, its revenues plummeted," said Mali. While oil prices have gone up slightly, the outlook remains sombre for a country where crude accounts for about 90 percent of foreign-exchange earnings and half of government revenue.

Risk of hunger

"A lot of what needed to be done in the immediate crisis is also what has been on the agenda for a long time," said Chaudhuri, pointing to Nigeria's major issues with revenue and low public spending.

Nigeria's vice president Yemi Osinbajo said in a statement that the government was "ready to experiment and ready to do a lot more." To limit the impact of the downturn, the country's central bank devalued its currency earlier this year, but this has triggered inflation. "A cup of rice which we used to buy for N100 (0.22 euros) is now double," said Edna Anidi, 55, an office assistant for an oil company in the oil-rich southern Delta state. Anidi, who has six children with her taxi driver husband, said she had to rely on remittances from her brother in America.

Food prices in Nigeria have increased since the government closed its land borders in 2019, imposing protectionist measures to try and diversify its economy. But until that is achieved, the country "will remain extremely dependent on oil revenues," said Mali, and unless there's a spike in oil prices, the country "will take several years to recover from this recession."

The government is much more optimistic about its recovery. "By the first quarter of 2021, the country will exit recession," finance minister Zainab Ahmed said at a summit in Abuja Monday, adding that the government "is working around the clock to reverse the trend and restore the economy in the path of sustainable inclusive growth." The stakes are high for a country that already holds the infamous record for the most people living in extreme poverty, and the UN estimates the number of people at risk of hunger may increase by 20 percent during the next lean period before crops are harvested. —AFP



Food prices in Nigeria have increased since the government closed its land borders in 2019, imposing protectionist measures to try and diversify its economy.

Kenya's economic growth to rebound next year: WB

NAIROBI: Kenya's economic growth is expected to bounce back next year, the World Bank said yesterday, as it emerges from a projected decline in output this year caused by the coronavirus crisis.

East Africa's biggest economy is expected to contract by 1.0-1.5 percent this year as the COVID-19 pandemic pushes 2 million people into poverty and takes a toll on the government's finances, the World Bank said in a new report. "The economy is projected to rebound relatively quickly in 2021, lifting real GDP by 6.9 percent year on year," the bank said in its twice a year review of the Kenyan economy, boosted by the resumption of learning in all educational institutions in January.

The government forecast 6.4 percent growth next year. The World Bank said its forecast for growth in 2021 still faced significant risks, including the uncer-

tainty around the length and severity of the pandemic, unpredictable weather conditions and the pace of the global economic recovery.

Kenya's economy contracted by 0.4 percent in the first half of this year, compared with an expansion of 5.4 percent a year earlier. The bank said the pandemic increased poverty by 4 percentage points as incomes dropped and people were laid off from work.

"The unemployment rate increased sharply, approximately doubling to 10.4 percent in the second quarter," it said, citing official data. Kenya's total debt jumped to 65.6 percent of gross domestic product in June this year from 62.4 percent a year earlier, the World Bank said, as the fiscal deficit widened. The bank urged the government to take advantage of debt service relief offered by richer nations, to free up liquidity that would have gone into repayments.

Finance Minister Ukur Yatani told Reuters last week that the government planned to make a final decision soon on joining the G20's Debt Service Suspension Initiative (DSSI), aimed at helping poor countries weather the pandemic.

"As economic conditions allow, policy should progressively prioritize returning to a medium-term fiscal consolidation path," the World Bank said. — Reuters

Erdogan's economic rethink prompted by bleak briefings

ANKARA: President Tayyip Erdogan's decision to oust Turkey's central bank chief this month was made hours after briefings on the fragile state of the economy, a snap judgment that prompted his son-in-law to resign as finance minister, four sources said. According to the four people familiar with the chain of events, Naci Agbal was propelled into the central bank job after he and other senior AK Party members warned the president about sharply depleted foreign reserves.

Their accounts offer important clues to the sudden economic pivot over the weekend of Nov. 6-9. Investors are still trying to navigate what Erdogan has called a new economic era, with the lira rising 10 percent on the reshuffle but dropping back 5 percent this week.

Over at least two days of briefings leading to Erdogan's decision on Friday Nov. 6, he was also warned about a failure to secure more foreign funding from abroad, and strains from the lira's 30 percent fall since January and COVID-19, the sources said. Alarmed, the president summoned then-central bank governor Murat Uysal that Friday to ask how net FX reserves had fallen by more than half this year and his plan to restore the buffer. The drop is recorded in public central bank data so cannot have been a surprise, but the sources said the chat convinced Erdogan that Uysal must be replaced. "Uysal's removal and Agbal's appointment happened in a matter of hours," one of the sources, who is close to the ruling AK Party (AKP), said. All the sources requested anonymity because they were not authorized to speak publicly.

The presidency declined to comment on Erdogan's meetings ahead of Uysal's dismissal, which was announced in the early hours of that Saturday with little explanation. Uysal was not immediately available to comment. On the Sunday, Erdogan's son-in-law Berat Albayrak abruptly resigned from his position as finance minister - a political earthquake for a powerful figure once seen as a potential successor to the president. Albayrak could not be reached for comment.

A second source said Erdogan had been told of the concerns of business leaders about a "major wave in unemployment" once the government lifts a coronavirus-related ban on layoffs.

Last week, the central bank under Agbal delivered a 475-point rate hike, its sharpest in more than two years. Yet the currency's weakness this week suggests Erdogan may need to do more to show he is serious about his Nov. 11 promise of market-friendly economic reforms.—Reuters



In this file photo, US Federal Reserve chief Janet Yellen speaks as she attends a conference. — AFP

Yellen's appointment 'good news for world economy': ECB VP

FRANKFURT: The prospect of former Federal Reserve boss Janet Yellen becoming the next US Treasury Secretary is "good news" for the US and the world, ECB vice president Luis de Guindos said yesterday. Yellen's nomination by US President-elect Joe Biden, which needs to be confirmed by the Senate, would make her the first woman in the job.

The 74-year-old would face the daunting task of steering the world's largest economy through the COVID-19 crisis and is seen by experts as favorable to more government spending to provide the necessary support. The ECB itself has unleashed unprecedented stimulus to shore up the eurozone economy and regularly urges governments to support its efforts through more spending.

"What I can say for a personal standpoint is that Janet Yellen knows perfectly what the US economy needs," de Guindos said at a press conference on the ECB's latest financial stability report. Yellen did "a very good job when she was the head of the Federal Reserve," he said, adding that her appointment "is good news for the US economy and for the world economy". Yellen broke barriers when former president Barack Obama nominated her to serve as Fed chair in 2014, a position President Donald Trump ousted her from four years later. At the Fed, Yellen was seen as a "dove" inclined towards low interest rates to support employment.

She would succeed Steven Mnuchin and likely be faced with breaking a months-long deadlock in Congress over passing a new stimulus spending bill for the US economy—assuming lawmakers do not act before Biden's inauguration in January. News of Yellen's appointment has boosted Wall Street stocks this week.

Yellen is a known quantity on financial markets and "has been favorable to the idea of fiscal stimulus," Gregori Volokhine of Meeschaert Financial Services said on Monday.

The European Central Bank warned yesterday that a premature withdrawal of government support to the eurozone's pandemic-hit economies could derail the recovery and trigger a wave of bankruptcies. An "abrupt" end to the measures could "result in a more severe economic contraction than during the first wave of the pandemic," the ECB said in its twice-yearly financial stability report. —AFP



**Invitation to subscribe to the Capital Increase Shares of
United Projects Company for Aviation Services K.S.C.P. ("UPAC")**
(Commercial Registration 82992)

UPAC
UNITED PROJECTS COMPANY FOR AVIATION SERVICES K.S.C.P.

Pursuant to the resolution passed by the Extra-ordinary General Assembly Meeting of United Projects Company for Aviation Services K.S.C.P. ("UPAC" or the "Issuer" or the "Company") held on 29 September 2020, approving the increase of the Company's authorized share capital to KD 38,250,000; and pursuant to the resolution of the Company's Board of Directors dated 12 October 2020 approving the increase of the issued and paid up share capital with a total nominal value of KD 21,800,000 divided into 218,000,000 ordinary shares at a total value of KD 28,340,000 including the issuance premium; and pursuant to the approval of the Capital Markets Authority ("CMA") dated 26 October 2020, approving the issuance of the new shares, and the approval of the CMA on the Prospectus on 11 November 2020;

UPAC's Board of Directors is pleased to invite all shareholders who are registered in the Company's shareholders' register as of 29 November 2020 ("Record Date") to subscribe to the new shares in accordance with the following terms:

Subscription Period	From 01 December 2020 (inclusive) to 15 December 2020 (inclusive) from Sunday to Thursday from 9 am to 2 pm, excluding official holidays.
Offer Price	130 Kuwaiti Fils per Share (including the nominal value of 100 Kuwaiti Fils per share and the issuance premium of 30 Kuwaiti Fils).
Pre-emption right/ Eligible Subscribers	Shareholders recorded in UPAC's shareholders' register as on the Record Date, have the right to subscribe to up to 132.5% of their holding.
Subscription in additional share	Eligible Subscribers with pre-emption right are allowed to subscribe to additional surplus shares resulting from other shareholders not exercising their pre-emption right, provided that, such eligible subscriber has fully subscribed to the capital increase shares to which he/she is entitled.
Allocations of shares	The Board of Directors will fully allocate the shares to the Eligible Subscribers holding pre-emption right. The Board of directors will allocate the surplus shares that result from shareholders not exercising their pre-emption rights, to eligible shareholders who are willing to subscribe in additional shares above their pre-emption right.
Lead Manager and Subscription Agent	Kuwait Financial Centre K.P.S.C.
Subscription Agent Address	Al-Sharq, Block 1, Ahmad Al-Jaber Street, Universal Tower, Mezzanine.
Required Documents	The subscriber must submit the following documents to the Subscription Agent along with the Subscription Application Form, as applicable. The Subscription Agent officer will check the copies against originals and thereafter return the originals to the subscriber. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Individual Subscriber <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Original and copy of personal civil identification card; - Original and copy of passport for citizens of GCC states; - Original and copy of special legal proxy for subscribing in shares (for proxy subscribers); - Original and copy of Certificate of Guardianship for minors/orphans; or - Original and copy of Determination of Succession Deed for heirs. - Evidence of payment of the subscription amount along with the Subscriber's IBAN number. - If the Subscriber is not present in person, an original proxy to the person delegated in administrative dealings related to the Subscription Application (provided that the signature of the Subscriber on the proxy is authenticated by the Subscriber's Bank).
Payment Methods	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Bank Transfer <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Bank Name: Gulf Bank, Kuwait - A/C Number: 06406899 - A/C Title: KFC (Markaz) - Clients - Collection - Fiduciary Money - IBAN: KW51GLUB00000000000006406899 - Swift Code: GULBKW33 • Certified bank cheque in favor of the subscription account: KFC (Markaz) - Clients - Collection - Fiduciary Money
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Business

Western Sahara flare-up spells gloom for buffer zone businesses

Businesses on border 'lose everything' since arrival of Moroccan forces

GUERGUERAT, Undefined: Kamal Zerfi has long run a junkyard in a no-man's land on the far edge of the Sahara desert. Then government soldiers came and things took a turn for the worse. Zerfi lives in a remote outpost of the Western Sahara region claimed by both Morocco and Polisario Front pro-independence rebels who recently revived their three-decade struggle.

His auto- and scrapyard is located at the desolate truck stop of Guerguerat in a UN-patrolled buffer zone along the Mauritanian border, where the deployment of Moroccan soldiers has now put paid to his lucrative business. "They've stripped me of my goods!" protested the 42-year-old who said he had been doing good-and, he insists, legal-business selling cars on to Mauritania until Rabat sent in the troops on November 13.

Western Sahara has been disputed since the end of Spanish colonial rule. Morocco claims all of it as its own, while Polisario rebels, backed by Algeria, want independence. Trouble flared again when Rabat recently accused the rebels of blockading the road which links the desert region with Mauritania and the rest of Africa at Guerguerat.

The pro-independence movement, which says the road was built in violation of a 1991 UN-sponsored ceasefire deal, declared the truce null and void and insisted it had no choice but "to intensify the fight for national liberation".

'Apaches in Kandahar'

Zerfi said the rebels, whom he calls "Apaches", would often block the road link, harming business in

the region locals dub "Kandahar" after the city in southern Afghanistan. No UN forces could be seen by a visiting AFP team in the region, known as a hotspot for smuggling of all kinds.

Zerfi, from Marrakesh in southern Morocco, insists his trade is entirely legitimate due to the special status of the demilitarized zone, even if the Moroccan customs service may disagree. License plates buried in the sand identify the origins of cars that have passed through the junkyard: France, Italy, Spain-and Germany, the most sought after among Mauritanian buyers, the dealer said.

Now that Moroccan troops have asserted control, tow trucks have taken away the cars that were in decent condition. Spare parts and loads of rubbish, meanwhile, have been set on fire, with acrid black smoke swirling into the sky.

'State of war'

Some businesses in the border outpost "have lost everything", said Zerfi, since Moroccan forces arrived to secure the road. The Polisario has since declared a "state of war" that put an end to its 30-year-old ceasefire with Rabat in the disputed territory.

Rabat has also built a sand wall to secure the road to the border post where Moroccan flags are now displayed. The "parking lots" in Guerguerat have long served as a depot for various goods from Mauritania, providing significant income for locals.

Since the troop deployment, "those who had deposited goods have recovered them-but those who left them here have been left with nothing",



Now that Moroccan troops have asserted control, tow trucks have taken away the cars that were in decent condition.

said Zerfi. Under the ceasefire deal, Morocco controls around three-quarters of the Western Sahara, including its considerable phosphate deposits and access to its rich Atlantic fisheries. The Polisario controls the rest. In August 2016, Morocco launched operations to "combat smuggling, drug trafficking, and all forms of illegal trade" in Guerguerat, sparking tensions with the Polisario. At

the time, the UN had finally convinced the two camps to evacuate the buffer zone.

Talks between Morocco and the Polisario, as well as neighboring Algeria and Mauritania, have been suspended since March 2019. The UN's envoy for the territory, former German president Horst Kohler, quit in May of that year citing poor health and has not been replaced. —AFP

German vials in spotlight as COVID vaccine nears

MAINZ, Germany: As expectations grow that the first Covid-19 jabs will be administered in a matter of weeks, German glassmaker Schott is quietly doing what it has been for months: churning out vials that will hold the vaccine. The 130-year-old company, whose founder Otto Schott invented the high-quality borosilicate glass favored by the pharma industry, has been working round the clock to meet unprecedented demand.

Already it has delivered millions of the little bottles to vaccine makers involved in Covid-19 trials, who have already started filling them so they can be shipped out the minute regulators give the okay. While non-disclosure agreements prevent Schott from detailing its customer list, head of communications Christina Rettig said they include "the ones you hear about in the media". In fact, Schott is supplying vials for three-quarters of the more than 100 coronavirus vaccine trials worldwide.

Closest to the finish line are US firm Moderna and a joint effort by US giant Pfizer and Germany's BioNTech-which coincidentally has its headquarters in the same western German city of Mainz as Schott. Large-scale data has shown both vaccines to be around 95 percent effective and US and European authorities have signalled that inoculations could start in mid-December.

With the world on the brink of a mass immu-



MAINZ: Pharmaceutical vials and syringes made by German glass company Schott are pictured at the company's headquarters in Mainz, western Germany. — AFP

nization effort to end the pandemic, Schott and its competitors say they are ready to rise to the challenge. The company issued a statement in July with Germany's Gerresheimer and Italy's Stevanato Group, fellow leaders in pharmaceutical packaging, to say they were coordinating closely with pharma customers and could ensure sufficient supply. Schott alone aims to produce enough vials to store two billion doses of a coronavirus vaccine by the end of 2021, Rettig told AFP at the company's offices in Mainz.

Ramping up

In a lucky break, the industry was already seeing rising demand from China and other countries for top-level Type 1 borosilicate glass products, meaning Schott and other major players were building up capacity well before the pandemic struck. Schott launched a \$1.0-billion (840-million-euro) investment program in 2019 to expand its pharmaceutical business. By the

time the Covid-19 vial requests started pouring in, new manufacturing equipment was already up and running.

"That puts us in a very good position to ramp up production quickly," Rettig said. And because regulators have long been familiar with the tried-and-tested vials, which have to meet strict international norms, they won't hold up the vaccine authorization process. To keep production moving, workers are churning out vials 24 hours a day, a typical pace in the sector, and outsiders are banned from the premises to minimize the risk of coronavirus infections. Schott itself had an early encounter with the virus at its Mitterteich plant in Bavaria, where it manufactures glass tubes that can be turned into vials.

The town became one of Germany's first coronavirus hotspots in March after a beer festival, and Rettig said several Schott workers from the Czech Republic ended up "not seeing friends and family for weeks" as borders slammed shut. — AFP

Zanzibar goes digital to prove property ownership

DAR ES SALAAM: A team of Zanzibari data collectors armed with tablets have gathered enough information from hundreds of people on the Tanzanian archipelago to issue each of them a deed to their land in 20 minutes - a process that typically takes up to five years. The project run by Kenya-based technology consulting company Spatial Collective has produced official documentation for about 700 land parcels in a southern town called Shakani since it launched last year.

"With title deeds, people can get loans and they will have the security of knowing that, 'This is mine and no one will claim it,'" said Justus Muhando, 30, Spatial Collective's technical lead steering the project in Zanzibar. Spatial Collective began work with the island's land commission in 2018 when its researchers used drone imagery captured by the Zanzibar Mapping Initiative, a project led by the island's land commission.

Using small drones, the initiative took high resolution imagery of 500,000 buildings on the archipelago, said Muhando. Spatial Collective approached authorities about building on that data to simplify the often slow, frustrating process of applying for proof of land ownership.

Now, Zanzibar's land commission is working to finalize the digitized title deeds after a consultation period and hopes to roll the process out through the whole of the island in the coming months.

A lack of formal documentation and poor implementation of land laws threaten tenure in many countries, with more than five billion people globally lacking proof of ownership, according to the Lima-based Institute for Liberty and Democracy. Less than 15 percent of homeowners in Zanzibar have documentation to signify property ownership, say government officials.



A man hold the tablet used to collect data in Shakani in Zanzibar to help issue title deeds for islanders. —Reuters

The hope is that the project can help overcome the hurdles that made issuing title deeds through Zanzibar's outdated, paper-based system a long and arduous process, said Shawana Soud Khamis, land adjudication officer for the local land commission. The new system should cut down on surveyor expenses, boundary disputes and delays in residents bringing in forms and documentation, she said.

It will help the government properly issue land tax, a valuable revenue generator that has been difficult to enforce in the past, Khamis added. And the initiative could give the islanders, especially those in vulnerable groups like women, long-overdue assurance that they have legal protection against evictions, she said. "We have seen women suffer because men take over (their) land. Women don't always have inheritance and can lose everything - their homes and their farms," said Khamis. "We need to solve this problem."

The project, called Securing Tenure on Zanzibar, goes through the same steps for issuing title deeds as the traditional process, only much faster, said Muhando. Spatial Collective trained 10 community members to assist with all the data collection and paid them for their work, he explained, with grants from organizations such as Cities Alliance, a global partnership fighting urban poverty. — AFP

France will apply 'digital tax' despite US retaliation threat

PARIS: France will require online technology giants to pay a new "digital tax" on their 2020 earnings, the finance ministry said yesterday, despite Washington's warning that it could retaliate with new tariffs on French imports. "The companies subject to this tax have been notified," a ministry official said, referring in particular to the US firms Google, Amazon, Facebook and Apple, which the US says are being unfairly targeted by the levy.

The French move risks escalating a long-running fight over how to make American tech multinationals pay a larger share of their taxes in the countries where they operate. Under EU law, American companies can declare their profits from across the bloc in a single member state-in most cases low-tax jurisdictions such as Ireland or the Netherlands.

Under pressure to take a harder line, France enacted its digital tax in 2019, which calls for a three percent levy on the profits from providing online sales for third-party retailers, as well as on digital advertising and the sale of private data.

But Paris reached a deal with the administration of President Donald Trump to suspend the tax while seeking a global digital tax deal under the auspices of the Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD). But Trump has warned that punitive duties of 25 percent on \$1.3 billion worth of French products, including the country's renowned cosmetics and handbags. In October, the OECD acknowledged that it would not reach a deal on a new global standard for taxing digital firms this year as hoped, largely because of US opposition to the proposals. — AFP

Five things to know about the iconic Dow stock index

NEW YORK: In hitting 30,000 points for the first time, the Dow Jones Industrial Average crossed yet another threshold in its seemingly inexorable climb to ever-loftier heights.

More than 100 years old

The Dow is one of the oldest equity indices in the world. It was created nearly 125 years ago by Dow Jones & Company, founded by journalists Charles Dow and Edward Jones, which also publishes The Wall Street Journal. The index is today managed by S&P Dow Jones Indices. The index was calculated for the first time in May 1896 and comprised 12 holdings, including a leather company, a sugar refinery and a tobacco producer.

Twelve years before the DJIA, Charles Dow had established the Dow Jones Transportation Average, which still measures transport industry valuations.

Rise and crises

The index has mostly risen since its inception, but the trend has been interrupted with often dramatic swoops. Some of the more infamous examples include the crash associated with the Great Depression of 1929, the plunge of "Black Monday" in October 1987 and the upheaval of the 2008 global financial crisis. The index hit 10,000 points in March 1999 during the internet "bubble" era and 15,000 points in May 2013 as the US economy recovered from the Great Recession.

Surge under Trump

When Donald Trump took office in January 2017, the Dow stood around 20,000 points. Its more than 10,000 point climb since then marks an increase of 50 percent. Trump has often taken credit for the index's rise, including Tuesday, when he called 30,000 a "sacred" number that he attributed to his administration's efforts to develop coronavirus vaccines. But even with the Dow's records under Trump, it has also encountered plenty of turbulence. After approaching 30,000 points in February, the index plunged during the worst of the coronavirus shutdowns soon thereafter, briefly sliding below 19,000 points.

Who's who of US economy

Since 1928, the Dow has consisted of 30 big companies intended to reflect the key sectors of the US economy including, energy, health, technology, housing and finance. Today's index includes Apple, Boeing, Coca-Cola, Disney, McDonald's and Nike.

One quirk of the index is the weighting it gives to equities with higher share prices. That is one reason Boeing, currently around \$218 per share, accounts for about five percent of the Dow, even though its market value is well below that of many of the other members. The lineup of the index changes occasionally. The conglomerate General Electric had the longest run in the index from 1896 to 2018 before being bumped out.

An out-of-date measure?

Some investors consider the Dow to be an obsolete index because of the quirky way it is calculated and the limited number of companies in the group. These critics typically prefer the S&P 500, which was created in 1957 and comprises 500 large equities from across the US economy, or the Nasdaq, which is focused on technology companies. The Dow lacks some of today's most influential companies, including Amazon, Facebook and Google parent company Alphabet. However, the index is still probably the best known by the general public in the United States when it comes to gauging the highs and lows of Wall Street. — AFP

Classifieds

Thursday, November 26, 2020

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Expected Weather for the Next 24 Hours

BY DAY: Fair with light variable wind changing to light to moderate south easterly wind with speed of 08 - 32 km/h and some scattered clouds will appear.

BY NIGHT: Rather cold with light to moderate freshening gradually south easterly wind with speed of 10 - 40 km/h and some high clouds will appear.

WEATHER WARNING			No Current Warnings		
STATION	MAX. EXP.	MIN. REC.	SFC. CHART 25/11/2020 0000 UTC		
KUWAIT CITY	25 °C	14 °C			
KUWAIT AIRPORT	23 °C	08 °C			
ABDALY	24 °C	08 °C			
BUBYAN	24 °C	10 °C			
JAHRA	24 °C	11 °C			
FAILAKA ISLAND	- °C	- °C			
SALMIYAH	23 °C	17 °C			
AHMADI	- °C	- °C			
NUWAISIB	25 °C	10 °C			
WAFRA	23 °C	07 °C			
SALMY	22 °C	09 °C			

4 DAYS FORECAST						
DAY	DATE	WEATHER	Temperatures		Wind Direction	Wind Speed
			MAX.	MIN.		
Thursday	11/26	Warm and Partly cloudy to cloudy with a chance for rising dust with a chance for rain that might	27 °C	14 °C	SE-S	20 - 50 km/h
Friday	11/27	Warm and Partly cloudy to cloudy with a chance for rising dust with a chance for rain that might	26 °C	19 °C	SE	12 - 45 km/h
Saturday	11/28	Warm and Partly cloudy to cloudy with a chance for rain that might be thundery at times	26 °C	17 °C	SE	12 - 42 km/h
Sunday	11/29	Fair and Cloudy to partly cloudy with a chance for rain that might be thundery at times	22 °C	18 °C	SE-NW	12 - 45 km/h

PRAYER TIMES	
Fajr	04:57
Sunrise	06:20
Zuhr	11:35
Asr	14:31
Sunset	16:50
Isha	18:11

RECORDED YESTERDAY AT KUWAIT AIRPORT	
MAX. Temp.	23 °C
MIN. Temp.	12 °C
MAX. RH	69 %
MIN. RH	19 %
MAX. Wind	N 36 km/h
TOTAL RAINFALL IN 24 HR.	0 mm

All times are local time unless otherwise stated. U.P.O

Hospitals

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

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Airlines

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Jazeera Airways	177
Turkish Airlines	1884918
FlyDubai	22414400
Qatar Airways	22423888
KLM	22425747
Royal Jordanian	22418064/5/6
British Airways	22425635
Air France	22430224
Emirates	22921555
Air India	22456700
Air India EXPRESS	22438185/4
Sri Lanka Airlines	22424444
Egypt Air	22421578
Swiss Air	22421516
Saudia	22426306
Middle East Airlines	22423073
Lufthansa	22422493
PIA	22421044
Bangladesh Airlines	22452977/8
Oman Air	22958787
Turkish Airlines	22453820/1

EMERGENCY ☎ 112

Word Search

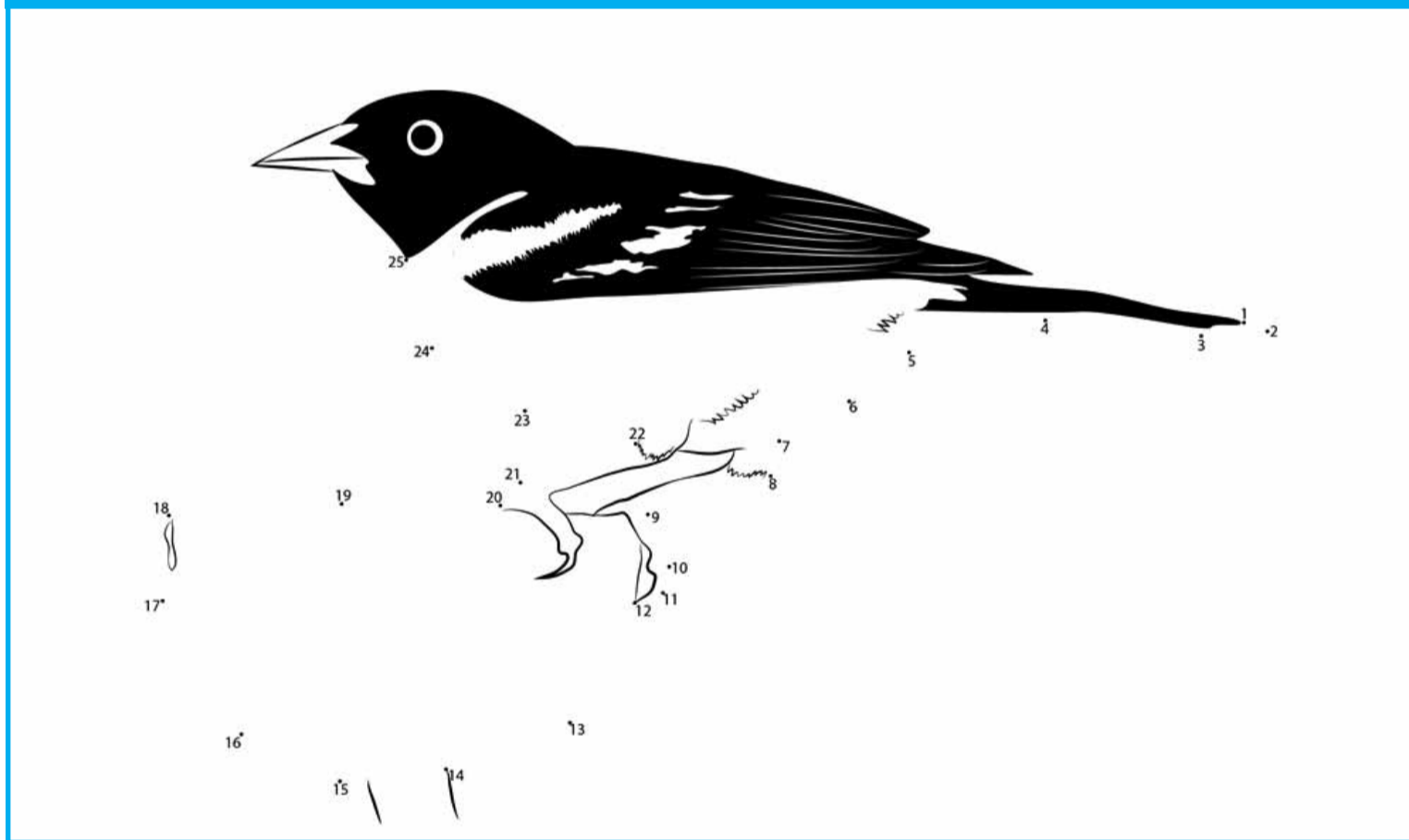
Marketing

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

ADVERTISE
 ANALYTICS
 BRAND
 BUYER
 CHANNEL
 CONSUMER
 CONTENT
 COST
 CUSTOMER
 DEMOGRAPHIC
 DEVELOP
 DISCOUNT
 DISTRIBUTION
 END-USER
 FORECAST
 FUNNEL
 IMAGE
 LABEL
 LAUNCH
 MAIL ORDER
 MARKETING
 MOTIVATION

PACKAGING
 POINT OF SALE
 POSITIONING
 PRODUCT
 PUBLIC RELATIONS
 REGISTERED
 RESEARCH
 SALES
 SELLER
 SPONSOR
 TRADEMARK

Join the Dots



STAR TRACK

<p>Aries (March 21-April 19) You aren't the only one who can solve your problems, Aries. Trust that there are others who are capable of understanding. Those who want to help you are motivated only by love, with no ulterior motives. It's in your nature to be skeptical, but these people do exist. And guess what? You could communicate with one of them today!</p>	<p>Cancer (June 21-July 22) Devote the day to your children or partner, Cancer. You may protest that it's too hard to find the time to give them the attention they deserve. You don't have time for yourself, much less anyone else. In any case, you will probably feel torn between what is expected of you and what you feel you can realistically give. If you want to dispel the inner tension, take care in the choices you make in the next few weeks.</p>	<p>Libra (September 23-October 22) Your thin skin feels even thinner than usual today, Libra. If you happen to witness a violent outburst in the street, at work, or on television, you suddenly become aware of your vulnerability. Don't let it frighten you into hiding. As one of the few remaining guardians of the world's dwindling reserves of kindness, you have a responsibility.</p>	<p>Capricorn (December 22-January 19) There's no point in trying to make sense of today, Capricorn. Much of what happens occurs on an unconscious level and defies any rational explanation. You may have had a dream last night worthy of professional interpretation. If you can bear turning off your intellect, this could be a very profitable day for you.</p>
<p>Taurus (April 20-May 20) Have you noticed how delays seem to occur more often, Taurus? Today will be no exception. Something you've been waiting for has been delayed yet again. It may be that the order form got lost or that there was some unforeseeable delay in sending it to you. Even with your mild-mannered Taurus temperament, you're beginning to be a little irked! Sit tight. All will be resolved shortly.</p>	<p>Leo (July 23-August 22) A friend or family member is slowly poisoning your relationship, Leo. A misunderstanding between the two of you will ultimately prove beneficial in the long run. Why? It makes you realize how uncomfortable you are with vague, ill-defined relationships. Today would be a good day to write a letter to the person in question. You're likely to find the results gratifying.</p>	<p>Scorpio (October 23-November 21) People sometimes say that you're a little aggressive in your approach, Scorpio. But today you feel a little tired of leading the charge on the battlefield. You can learn a lot from your friends who can teach you to think of things in relative terms without allowing yourself to become emotionally involved in every situation. Try to relax for a change!</p>	<p>Aquarius (January 20- February 18) This is a confusing period for all of us, Aquarius. But no doubt you've noticed this. In such circumstances, some people become more rigid than ever because they resist dramatic change. They try to hold on to tradition. Your Aquarius sensitivity makes you very receptive to the past, but current conditions should inspire you to let go of some of your convictions.</p>
<p>Gemini (May 21-June 20) Get outside and get moving, Gemini! If you can manage to take the day off, this would be a good time to release some energy. You used to enjoy competition when you were little. Remember how exhilarating it was to be the first to the top of the hill? You will find your life greatly enriched if you could find a way to rekindle similar feelings.</p>	<p>Virgo (August 23-September 22) You've been a social butterfly lately, Virgo! The sociable phase you're currently in demands a great deal of energy. You're attracted to some of your new acquaintances but irritated by others. One in particular causes you real anxiety today. You have two choices. Either abandon your new group of friends entirely or expel the person who's causing you trouble.</p>	<p>Sagittarius (November 22-December 21) You may be a bit oversensitive today, Sagittarius. It's possible that you will be irritable and conflicted as you begin to suspect that long-term projects may not be finished. The time has come to take stock. There is likely a good reason that you've been unable to complete that project you undertook several months ago. Advice from others should steer you in the right direction.</p>	<p>Pisces (February 19-March 20) What do you have to lose, Pisces? The planets are shaking you in the hopes of ridding you of your old objectives to make way for new growth. You feel doubt where once there was only certainty. When you consider the worst that can happen, it may help you to realize that what you're clinging to really isn't all that important. It's time to let go and begin anew.</p>

Lifestyle | Features



In this file photo singer Beyoncé Knowles performs onstage during the 2011 MTV Video Music Awards at Nokia Theatre L.A. LIVE in Los Angeles, California. — AFP photos



In this file photo Singer Taylor Swift accepts the award for the Album of the Year onstage during the 58th Annual Grammy music Awards in Los Angeles.



In this file photo Roddy Ricch performs at SUMMERSFEST 2019 at The Novo by Microsoft in Los Angeles, California.



In this file photo British singer-songwriter Dua Lipa poses as she arrives for the amfAR 26th Annual Cinema Against AIDS gala at the Hotel du Cap-Eden-Roc in Cap d'Antibes, southern France.

GRAMMY NOMINATIONS 2021: SNUBS, QUIRKS AND TWISTS

The short lists for the 63rd annual Grammy awards that celebrate music's best feature an eclectic mix of pop powerhouses, feisty chart-toppers and little-known underdogs. And, as usual, there was a laundry list of eyebrow-raising snubs and a bunch of straight up oddball nods. Here's a look at the kookier nominations and head-scratchers in this year's Grammy race:

Snubs

The Recording Academy notably sidelined Canadian R&B singer The Weeknd, an artist with three Grammys to his name. His Day Glo-nostalgia hit "Blinding Lights" achieved global success, and the artist born Abel Tesfaye is set to headline the high-octane Super Bowl halftime show early next year. But despite being widely tipped as a possible 2021 frontrunner, The Weeknd didn't receive a single nomination. It was another year, another letdown for K-pop, an international phenomenon the Academy has been glacial to accept.

The sensation BTS is up for a single award in the pop categories, meaning it was shut out of the general field even though its English-language hit "Dynamite" was considered a strong contender for Record or Song of the Year. And the South Korean girl group Blackpink-which in recent years collabo-

rated on bangers with Cardi B, Lady Gaga and Dua Lipa was surprisingly left out of the Best New Artist race. Gaga was relegated to the pop categories as was Harry Styles, whose trippy pop album "Fine Line" and its provocative track "Watermelon Sugar" garnered positive reviews.

After dropping a widely praised album after a 14-year hiatus and a name change, The Chicks were also ignored, as was Bob Dylan, who this year released his first collection of original music in nearly a decade. Fiona Apple-whose classic "Criminal" won her Best New Artist in 1997 — scored three nominations in the rock and alternative categories but was mysteriously dropped from the top fields. The famously reclusive songwriter released her fifth studio album "Fetch The Bolt Cutters" in the pandemic's early days-a career-defining work many critics called a "masterpiece."

Quirks

Though most of the rap categories featured of-the-moment stars, Best Rap Album was decidedly throwback, with older artists Nas, Freddie Gibbs, Jay Electronica, D Smoke and Royce Da 5'9" commanding the field. The move seemed surprising for a genre brimming with young, streaming-friendly talent-but

it's not unlike the Academy to reward the timeworn and technique-driven. A little less than a month after his chaotic presidential bid ended, Kanye West notched a 2021 Grammy nomination-but it had nothing to do with rap. No, the artist who shook hip-hop with his 2004 album "The College Dropout" is up for Best Contemporary Christian Music Album, in recognition of his ode to evangelism "Jesus Is King." The late 2019 album paints a portrait of the artist as a saved man, coming in a year that saw West tour with his impromptu "Sunday Service" performances, a church-esque concert series featuring gospel choirs.

The spoken word category that regularly features unexpected Grammy contenders-both Michelle and Barack Obama are past winners-this year includes journalists Rachel Maddow and Ronan Farrow. Red Hot Chili Peppers' bassist Flea is also nominated for his memoir, as is Meryl Streep for her reading of the children's book "Charlotte's Web," and Ken Jennings, star of "Jeopardy," for reading the memoir written by the beloved game show's late host Alex Trebek. "Eurovision" got an unlikely shoutout this time around, as the soundtrack for a comedy film about the kitschy contest was nominated for Best Compilation Soundtrack For Visual Media.

Twists

British anthemic pop-rock band Coldplay-whose songs are perennial favorites of television show soundtracks and political campaigns-scored a surprise Album of the Year nomination for its eighth studio work, "Everyday Life." And the still relatively obscure act Black Pumas are back, after the Texan psychedelic soul duo last year snagged a surprise nomination for Best New Artist. This year, they bested chart-toppers including Lady Gaga, The Weeknd and Styles along with critical darling Apple to snag Record and Album of the Year nods. The 2021 field features a number of posthumous nominations, including two for the revered American songwriter John Prine, who died of coronavirus complications in April.

Leonard Cohen, who died in 2016, received a Best Folk Album nomination for "Thanks for the Dance," a collection of raw vocals the Canadian legend's son finished for him. And Brooklyn drill rapper Pop Smoke-who was shot dead in the Hollywood Hills in February 2020 — received one nomination for Best Rap Performance for "Dior." The late artist will compete in that category with another rapper who died young: Nipsey Hussle, who won two posthumous awards last year, is up for "Deep Reverence," which he collaborated on with Big Sean. — AFP



In this file photo Britain's Prince Harry, Duke of Sussex (right), and his wife Meghan, Duchess of Sussex, pose for a photo with their newborn baby son, Archie Harrison Mountbatten-Windsor, in St George's Hall at Windsor Castle in Windsor, west of London. — AFP

Meghan Markle reveals miscarriage in July

Meghan Markle has revealed she suffered a miscarriage in July this year, writing in the New York Times yesterday of the deep grief and loss she endured with her husband Prince Harry. The Duchess of Sussex, who married the British prince in 2018, had the couple's first child, Archie, the following year. In the piece in the Times, the 39-year-old wrote that she had just changed her son's diaper when she felt a sharp cramp and fell to the ground. "I knew, as I clutched my firstborn child, that I was losing my second," she wrote. Writing of the "unbearable grief" of miscarriage, Markle said it was a conversation that remained "taboo, riddled with (unwarranted) shame, and perpetuating a cycle of solitary mourning."

Touching on the coronavirus, the Black Lives Matter movement, and the recent turbulent presidential election, the Duchess of Sussex nevertheless offered a message of hope. "For the first time, in a long time, as human beings, we are really seeing one another." Markle-whose mother is black-also wrote of the death of Breonna Taylor, as well as the killing of George Floyd, an unarmed African American killed in police custody. "Loss and pain have plagued every one of us in 2020, in moments both fraught and debilitating."

Withdrawal from public

Markle's highly personal piece comes as she and her husband wage an increasingly public war with some media outlets over their right to privacy. But it carries with it the shadow of a previous royal bride-Harry's mother, Diana, Princess of Wales. Pressure from tabloids has dogged the British prince throughout his life, and he blames them for the death of his mother. Diana, whose treatment by the royals is shown in the

fourth season of Netflix's hugely popular "The Crown", also reportedly suffered a miscarriage in 1983 at Balmoral. Harry and Markle shocked the British establishment when they announced they were retiring from royal life.

Their withdrawal in March came after reports Markle was deeply unhappy with life inside the royal family and fed up with media intrusion. The couple, who live with their young son in California, signed an exclusive production deal with Netflix for an undisclosed fee earlier this year.

'Are you OK?'

Markle wrote that in July she realized-as she was comforted by Harry in hospital following the miscarriage-that "the only way to begin to heal is to first ask, 'Are you OK?'" Between ten and 15 percent of known pregnancies end in miscarriage, according to the US mother and childcare non-profit March of Dimes. "Some have bravely shared their stories; they have opened the door, knowing that when one person speaks truth, it gives license for all of us to do the same," Markle said. Her opinion piece comes after model and author Chrissy Teigen spoke candidly this year about a stillbirth that she and her husband, the singer John Legend, suffered.

Teigen published intimate pictures of the tragic moments after the infant, who they named Jack, died. The unvarnished post attracted praise and criticism in equal measure, but Teigen was unrepentant about her decision. "I lived it, I chose to do it, and more than anything, these photos aren't for anyone but the people who have lived this or are curious enough to wonder what something like this is like," she wrote. —AFP

Leaf-cutter ant first insect found with biomineral body armor

A well-known leaf-cutting ant grows its own body armor using biominerals, a protective power previously unknown in the insect world, scientists have discovered in research published Tuesday showing this makes the ants almost unbeatable in battle. Biomineral armor is seen in the natural world in crustaceans like lobsters as well as in other marine animals-sea urchin spines contain calcium carbonate for example-but it has not previously been found in insects.

Researchers stumbled across the discovery while investigating the relationship between the fungus-growing ant species *Acromyrmex echinator* and antibiotic-producing bacteria that helps them protect their crops. They noticed that the larger worker ants, known as majors, have a "whitish, granular coating" over the surface of their bodies, according to co-author Cameron Currie, professor of Bacteriology at the University of Wisconsin-Madison. He said Hongjie Li, the lead author of the report published in Nature Communications, "became fascinated with the crystals" and discovered it was a biomineral layer that develops as the ants mature, increasing the hardness of their exoskeleton and covering nearly the entire body.

While researchers do not know for certain why the ants have this unusual armor, Currie told AFP they suspect it has a lot to do with the soldier ants of another species of fungus-growing ants, *Atta cephalotes*. The two species will often engage in territorial "ant wars", which the researchers simulated in lab-based battles. "When the Acro majors are without their armor the Atta soldiers quickly cut them into pieces, literally," Currie said.



This handout picture shows an *Acromyrmex echinator* worker (right) extending her mandibles over an *Atta cephalotes* soldier (left), the largest worker caste within the leaf-cutter ant colonies. — AFP

KEY NOMINEES FOR THE 2021 GRAMMY AWARDS

Here is a list of nominees in the major categories for the 63rd annual Grammy Awards, which will be handed out on January 31, 2021. Beyoncé leads the pack with nine nominations, followed by Taylor Swift, Dua Lipa and rapper Roddy Ricch, all with six, organizers announced Tuesday.

Album of the Year

Jhene Aiko, "Chilombo"
Black Pumas, "Black Pumas (Deluxe Edition)"
Coldplay, "Everyday Life"
Jacob Collier, "Djesse Vol. 3"
Haim, "Women In Music Pt. III"
Dua Lipa, "Future Nostalgia"
Post Malone, "Hollywood's Bleeding"
Taylor Swift, "Folklore"

Record of the Year, recognizing overall performance on a song

Beyoncé, "Black Parade"
Black Pumas, "Colors"
DaBaby featuring Roddy Ricch, "Rockstar"
Doja Cat, "Say So"
Billie Eilish, "Everything I Wanted"
Dua Lipa, "Don't Start Now"
Post Malone, "Circles"
Megan Thee Stallion featuring Beyoncé, "Savage"

Song of the Year, recognizing songwriting

Beyoncé, Denisia Andrews, Stephen Bray, Shawn Carter, Brittany Coney, Derek James Dixie, Akil King, Kim "Kardence" Krystiuk and Rickie "Case" Tice, "Black Parade"
Roddy Ricch and Samuel Gloade, "The Box"
Taylor Swift and Aaron Dessner, "Cardigan"
Post Malone, Louis Bell, Adam Feeney, Kean Gunesberk and Billy Walsh, "Circles"
Dua Lipa, Caroline Ailin, Ian Kirkpatrick, Dua Lipa and Emily Warren, "Don't Start Now"
Billie Eilish and Finneas O'Connell, "Everything I Wanted"
H.E.R., Dernst Emile II and Tiara Thomas, "I Can't Breathe"
Julia Michaels and JP Saxe, "If The World Was Ending"

Best New Artist

Ingrid Andress
Phoebe Bridgers
Chika
Noah Cyrus
D Smoke
Doja Cat
Kaytranada
Megan Thee Stallion

Best Music Video

Beyoncé, "Brown Skin Girl"
Future featuring Drake, "Life Is Good"
Anderson .Paak, "Lockdown"
Harry Styles, "Adore You"
Woodkid, "Goliath"

Best Rap Album

D Smoke, "Black Habits"
Freddie Gibbs & The Alchemist, "Alfredo"
Jay Electronica, "A Written Testimony"
Nas, "King's Disease"
Royce Da 5'9", "The Allegory"

Best Rock Album

Fontaines DC, "A Hero's Death"
Michael Kiwanuka, "Kiwanuka"
Grace Potter, "Daylight"
Sturgill Simpson, "Sound & Fury"
The Strokes, "The New Abnormal"

Best Pop Vocal Album

Justin Bieber, "Changes"
Lady Gaga, "Chromatica"
Dua Lipa, "Future Nostalgia"
Harry Styles, "Fine Line"
Taylor Swift, "Folklore"

Best Alternative Music Album

Fiona Apple, "Fetch the Bolt Cutters"
Beck, "Hyperspace"
Phoebe Bridgers, "Punisher"
Brittany Howard, "Jaime"
Tame Impala, "The Slow Rush"

Best Global Music Album

Antibalas, "Fu Chronicles"
Burna Boy, "Twice as Tall"
Bebel Gilberto, "Agora"
Anoushka Shankar, "Love Letters"
Tinariwen, "Amadjar" — AFP

Lifestyle | Features



Maryam Al-Balushi feeds her pets in her home.



Maryam Al-Balushi feeds her pets in her home Oman's capital Muscat.

Mus-cats: Omani woman juggles 500 felines



Maryam Al-Balushi feeds her pets in her home.



Maryam Al-Balushi fondles one of her cats at her home.



Maryam Al-Balushi feeds her pets in her home Oman's capital Muscat. — AFP photos

More than a dozen cats and dogs vie for Maryam Al-Balushi's attention as she hands out treats on a bed in her home in Oman's capital Muscat. Despite complaints from neighbors and mounting expense, she has accumulated 480 cats and 12 dogs, describing her pets as a mood-lifter and better companions than her fellow humans. "I find that animals, especially cats and dogs, are more faithful than humans," she said as cats jumped on and off a nearby scratching pole.



Maryam Al-Balushi feeds her pets in her home.

Orphaned at a young age, Balushi has grown her menagerie over the past decade, identifying with her furry friends, many of which were rescued from hard lives on the street. Oman has seen an upswing in stray and abandoned animals in recent years, local media report, despite penalties of \$25 for dumping a pet. Animal welfare activists have advocated a program of

"trap, neuter, release" to bring down the number of strays. Balushi spends about \$7,800 monthly to care for the creatures, 17 of which are blind, diligently feeding and cleaning them as well as taking them to the veterinarian for medical attention. Her home is now full of cages, with Balushi letting them out to exercise and play in rotation.

'Lifeline'

"It all began in 2008 when my son bought a small Persian cat," said Balushi, 51, a retired civil servant, wearing a dusky pink abaya and immaculate makeup. "Like many mothers, I refused to look after it as I did not like animals and my son did not pay it much attention or look after its hygiene." But two years later Balushi found herself looking after another cat and her approach was transformed. "I found myself totally immersed. I took care of her entirely, feeding her, bathing her and spending a lot of time with her," she said.

Word spread about Balushi's newfound love of animals and departing expatriates would leave their pets on her doorstep while animal shelters would re-settle their charges with her. After buying her own home in 2014 following complaints about her growing collection, she was able to take on more animals. Balushi was inspired by a former neighbor who used to feed strays with household scraps. She says her impressive collection of cats and dogs has helped her stave off depression-as well as earning her an impressive following on Instagram. "I was in a dark place and they were the lifeline that rescued me," she said. — AFP

KAMBUZIA PARTOVI, IRANIAN FILM WRITER-DIRECTOR, DIES OF CORONAVIRUS

Movie director Kambuzia Partovi, who scripted the only Iranian film to win a Golden Lion in Venice, died on Tuesday of the novel coronavirus, the Islamic republic's film body said. Partovi, one of the "most influential filmmakers of Iranian children's cinema", died in Tehran's Dey hospital aged 64, the Farabi Foundation said in a message of condolence on its website. Born in Rasht in northern Iran, Partovi began his directing career in the 1980s with "Mahi" ("The Fish") and quickly became an important figure in Iranian children's cinema-but he did not limit himself to the genre.



In this file photo Iranian director Kambuzia Partovi holds his Silver Bear for Best Script award he received in place of Jafar Panahi (not pictured) for the movie "Parde" ("Closed Curtain") during a press conference following the 63rd Berlinale awards ceremony in Berlin. — AFP

As a scriptwriter, Partovi worked with several well-known Iranian filmmakers, including Abbas Kiarostami, Jafar Panahi and Majid Majidi. He won four scriptwriting awards from Tehran's Fajr Festival, the most among his peers. He also co-wrote the script for Majidi's 2015 epic "Muhammad", the most expensive film in the history of Iranian cinema. The biopic, which portrays the childhood of the Muslim prophet, was slammed as a "hostile act" and a "distortion of Islam" by the top cleric in Saudi Arabia, Iran's regional rival. In 2000, Partovi co-wrote "The Circle", which tackles difficulties facing Iranian women. It was the first and so far only Iranian film to win the Golden Lion at the Venice Film Festival. Partovi's later film "Cafe Transit", which tells the story of a widow who decides to run her late husband's truck-stop restaurant, was selected to represent Iran at the Oscars in 2007. In 2013, Panahi and Partovi won the Silver Bear for best screenplay at the Berlin film festival for "Parde" ("Closed Curtain"), made secretly in defiance of a ban by the Tehran authorities. —AFP

HUNGARY IN 'SOROS' SPAT WITH GEORGE CLOONEY

Hungary accused Hollywood star George Clooney of "limited" knowledge of politics Tuesday after the actor cited Prime Minister Viktor Orban as an example of "hate and anger" in the world. "We like George Clooney as an actor... (but his) knowledge of history and politics seems to be somewhat limited," said Foreign Minister Peter Szijarto on his official Facebook page. Earlier, government officials accused Clooney of being a puppet of US billionaire George Soros, a beto-nore of Orban's due to the financier's alleged pro-immigration lobbying. "Soros uses every opportunity to attack the Hungarian government. It is rather frustrating that there are actors, even non-political actors, who carry out such political intent for Soros," said Ors Farkas, a government spokesman.

Several pro-Orban media outlets showed a photo of the actor alongside Soros's son Alexander. The spat was sparked by a video interview Clooney gave to GQ magazine last week, in which he spoke about his newest film, The Midnight Sky. He cited Orban and Hungary as a current example of "hate and anger". "We weren't in the middle of a pandemic when (the film shooting) happened, but there were still all these other elements, these elements of how much hate and anger all of us are experiencing at this moment of history, all over the world - go to Bolsonaro in Brazil, or Orban in Hungary, look around, lots of anger and hate," he said.—AFP



George Clooney

Mysterious obelisk in US desert draws wild theories

A mysterious metal obelisk found buried in the remote western United States desert has inflamed the imaginations of UFO spotters, conspiracy theorists and Stanley Kubrick fans around the world. The shiny, triangular pillar-which protrudes approximately 12 feet from the red rocks of southern Utah was spotted last Wednesday by baffled local officials counting bighorn sheep from the air. After landing their helicopter to investigate, Utah Department of Public Safety crew members found "a metal monolith installed in the ground" but "no obvious indication of who might have put the monolith there." "It is illegal to install structures or art without authorization on federally managed public lands, no

matter what planet you're from," warned the agency in a tongue-in-cheek press release Monday.

News of the discovery quickly went viral online, with many noting the object's similarity with strange alien monoliths that trigger huge leaps in human progress in Kubrick's classic sci-fi film "2001: A Space Odyssey." Others remarked on its discovery during a turbulent year that has seen the world gripped by the Covid-19 pandemic, and optimistically speculated it could have a different function entirely. "This is the 'reset' button for 2020. Can someone please press it quickly?" joked one

Instagram user. "Up close it reads: 'Covid vaccine inside'" wrote another.

Although officials have refused to disclose the object's location out of fear that hordes of curious sightseers would flock to the remote wilderness, a Reddit user said they had managed to geolocate the obelisk using surrounding rock formations. Sharing the Google Earth location-where a small structure can be seen, roughly six miles from the nearest road-the user said the structure was first photographed by Google in 2016. Bret Hutchings, the pilot who happened to fly over the obelisk, speculated that it had been planted by "some

new wave artist." Some observers pointed out the object's resemblance to the avant-garde work of John McCracken, a US artist who lived for a time in nearby New Mexico, and died in 2011.

On Tuesday a spokeswoman for his representative David Zwirner said it was not one of McCracken's works, but possibly by a fellow artist paying homage. However later in the day Zwirner gave another statement in which he suggested the piece was indeed by McCracken, meaning it had lain undiscovered in the desert for nearly a decade. "The gallery is divided on this," Zwirner said. "I believe this is definitely by John." He added: "Who would have known that 2020 had yet another surprise for us. Just when we thought we had seen it all. Let's go see it."

Either way, Hutchings admitted it was "about the strangest thing I've come across out there, in all my years of flying." "We were kind of joking around that if one of us suddenly disappears, then the rest of us make a run for it," he told local news channel KSLTV. — AFP



This video grab image shows a mysterious metal monolith that was discovered in Utah after public safety officers spotted the object while conducting a routine wildlife mission. — AFP

Sports

Photo of the day



Abdo Feghali performs during Red Bull Car Park Drift UAE final at Dubai Festival City in Dubai. —Photo taken from www.redbullcontentpool.com

Chadwick to go off-road with Veloce in Extreme E

No slowing down for record-breaking Hamilton

LONDON: Jamie Chadwick, the first champion in the all-female W Series, has been bitten by the rally bug after testing the electric SUV she will race for the Veloce team in Extreme E next year. The new electric off-road series, which aims to raise awareness about climate change, starts up in the Saudi Arabian desert in March, with further rounds in Senegal, Greenland, Brazil and Argentina. Each of the 10 competing teams must enter a male and female driver, and Veloce confirmed Chadwick yesterday. "It's really, really taken my interest," the Briton, who is also a Williams F1 development driver and hopes to retain the role despite the team's recent change of ownership, told Reuters.

"I'm under no illusions about how much I'm going to have to learn. It's a lot of fun but also a discipline that I've now engaged a lot more with. "There's a style that's required that could actually really suit me ... the Extreme E format is really short, sharp and intense so the physicality of it isn't as bad as some of the track stuff. "It's definitely something I'd like to do more of and I'm keen to develop my off-road horizons." The 22-year-old said she would be interested also in eventually entering the Dakar Rally, the endurance event that had a female winner in German Jutta Kleinschmidt in 2001 when held in Africa.

Chadwick has yet to confirm other plans for 2021, with the W Series due to support Formula One at eight races but yet to publish a calendar. The 2020 campaign was written off due to the novel coronavirus pandemic. Three of the planned Extreme E races clash with Formula One's dates. Chadwick is backed by New Zealand-based, high-performance car maker Rodin and she said that could also lead to another opportunity elsewhere. "The first focus is

obviously Extreme E. At the moment I'm committed to all five rounds but we'll have to see what other calendar clashes might come into play and then we can make a decision," she said.

Chadwick is racing in regional Formula Three in Italy this year but results have been disappointing and she is unlikely to return even though teams can run an extra car for a female driver. Extreme E aims to promote sustainability and raise awareness with races in some of the world's most remote and harsh environments that are suffering from global warming and pollution. Seven-times Formula One world champion Lewis Hamilton and former team mate Nico Rosberg have entered teams, although neither will race. Other teams are the US-based Andretti United and Chip Ganassi Racing.

Record-breaking Hamilton

Meanwhile, Lewis Hamilton heads into Sunday's Bahrain Grand Prix as the most successful driver in Formula One history, and now a seven times world champion, but the Briton will not be slowing down as he aims to round out a record-breaking season in style. The Mercedes driver clinched the title at the previous race in Turkey to equal Michael Schumacher's record seven, having already surpassed the Ferrari great's tally of 91 race wins.

With three races to go and 10 wins from 14, Hamilton is on course for his most successful campaign yet and become only the third driver after Schumacher and Sebastian Vettel to win 13 times in a season. "Now it's a bit more chilled but I still have three races ahead of me that I want to win," said Hamilton, who has not previously

won more than 11 races in a single year. Hamilton has won three times around the 5.4km Sakhir desert track, including last year after a loss of power robbed Ferrari's Charles Leclerc of an almost certain victory.

With Mercedes dominant, the Briton is favorite again but team mate Valtteri Bottas will be out to stop him. Bahrain marks the start of a whirlwind floodlit Middle Eastern triple-header that wraps up the season. A second race, the Sakhir Grand Prix, follows at the same venue but around the shorter outer circuit a week later before the finale at Abu Dhabi's Yas Marina.

While the titles are already decided, other battles are still being fought. Mexican Sergio Perez, Leclerc and Australian Daniel Ricciardo are separated by just four points in the battle for fourth overall. Racing Point, McLaren, Renault and Ferrari, separated by just 24 points, are fighting for third in the constructors' table. There could also be a flurry of driver announcements. Thailand's Alexander Albon is yet to be confirmed alongside Max Verstappen at Red Bull with Perez and Germany's Nico Hulkenberg in the frame as potential replacements.

Japanese Formula Two racer Yuki Tsunoda looks set to replace Russian Daniil Kvyat alongside Pierre Gasly at Red Bull-owned AlphaTauri. American outfit Haas are yet to announce their 2020 drivers with Ferrari-backed Formula Two championship leader Mick Schumacher, son of Michael, in the frame. Hamilton, out of contract at the end of the year, is also yet to sign a new deal with Mercedes. Sunday's race, like most this season, will be closed to fans due to the COVID-19 pandemic but organizers are putting aside a limited number of grandstand seats for the families of health workers. —Agencies

News in brief

Kawasaki clinch J League title

TOKYO: Kawasaki Frontale clinched a third J League title in four years with a 5-0 thrashing of nearest rivals Gamba Osaka yesterday. A hat-trick from 34-year-old Akihiro Ienaga and further goals from Brazilian Leandro Damiao and substitute Manabu Saito wrapped up the title with four matches remaining. Osaka came into the match in second place, with the near-impossible task of closing a 14-point gap on Kawasaki. However, the home side never looked in any danger. Following championships in 2017 and 2018, Kawasaki have now won three of the last four J League titles. Securing another league triumph has been seen as imperative for Kawasaki this season so they can send club stalwart, 40-year-old midfielder Kengo Nakamura, into retirement with another title. Nakamura came on as a late substitute to much applause from the 11,370 fans allowed in Todoroki Stadium. —AFP

Domestic abuse policy in tennis

LONDON: Former world number one Andy Murray has joined Novak Djokovic in urging men's tennis governing body ATP to come up with a policy on domestic abuse following allegations made against German Alexander Zverev by his ex-girlfriend Olga Sharypova. In an interview, former tennis player Sharypova said Zverev was emotionally and physically abusive to her. The US Open runner-up has repeatedly denied the allegations. In a delayed response to the allegations against the 23-year-old Zverev, the ATP said it condemned "any form of violence or abuse". Top-ranked Serbian Djokovic, who resigned as ATP's player council chief earlier this year, last week said that the ATP should look to adopt its own policy on domestic abuse, similar to those in American sports, regardless of legal proceedings. —Reuters

Greece coach Schip tests positive

ATHENS: Greece coach John Van't Schip has tested positive for coronavirus and will self-isolate for two weeks, the country's football federation announced on Tuesday. "Now is the time to rest and recover. I'm feeling okay with light symptoms," the former Dutch international winger said on the federation's Twitter account. Schip took over the Greek national side last August on a two-and-a-half year contract and recently led the team to a second-place finish in Nations League Group C3. The 55-year-old Canadian-born former Genoa and Ajax player played 41 times for the Dutch national team from 1986 to 1995. After completing his career as a player, Schip coached Dutch clubs PEC Zwolle, Ajax and Twente, as well as Australia's Melbourne City twice, either side of a spell with Guadalajara in Mexico. He was also the assistant coach for the Netherlands national team from 2004-2008. —AFP

Heat and Adebayo near deal

MIAMI: Bam Adebayo and the Miami Heat are near a five-year deal worth \$163 million, according to multiple reports. Adebayo's deal would include a player option for a sixth year pushing the maximum value to \$198.5 million. The 23-year-old was an All-Star last season, his first as a starter with the Heat, when he finished with 15.9 points per game and also averaged 10.2 rebounds and 5.1 assists. Miami selected Adebayo with the 14th overall pick in the 2017 NBA Draft. Heat president Pat Riley told Field Level Media at the 2020 All-Star Game in Chicago that the "sky really is the limit there," after Adebayo won the All-Star Skills Challenge at the United Center. He was voted runner-up in the NBA's Most Improved Player award balloting in 2020 behind Brandon Ingram of the New Orleans Pelicans. He was named Second Team All-NBA Defensive Team at the conclusion of the 2019-20 season. —Reuters

Ibis Hotel hold reception in honor of Jahra Sports Club



KUWAIT: Ibis Hotel held a reception in honor of Jahra Sports Club under the patronage of Sheikh Mubarak Abdallah Al-Mubarak Al-Sabah accompanied by his sons Sheikhs Abdallah and Ahmad and

his nephew Humoud Mohammad Abdallah Al-Mubarak, club chairman Nawaf Jadayed, Secretary General Khalaf Al-Sahou, Kuwait national team manager and other officials. A shirt signed by the



club players was presented to the hotel for sponsoring the club during the current season. Memorial shields were exchanged by the two parties at the end of the reception.

Shooters compete in Kuwait shooting event

By Abdellatif Sharaa

KUWAIT: HH The Crown Prince Sheikh Mishal Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah Annual Championship competition in the Olympic skeet, trap, 10 meter air pistol and rifle, 25 meter rapid pistol, 50 meter rifle in addition to the Olympic archery at Sheikh Sabah Al-Ahmad Olympic Shooting Complex continues today at Sheikh Sabah Al-Ahmad Olympic Shooting Complex.

Competitions in the skeet and trap events will start today for both men and women, that in addition to the women's air rifle and pistol. Official training for the men's trap and skeet as well as the 50 m three position rifle will also start today from 9:00 am. Winners of the women's 10 meter air pistol and rifle will be determined by day's end. Chairman of the Higher Organizing Committee, President of Arab and Kuwait Shooting Federations Engr Duajj Khalaf Al-Otaibi thanked HH The Crown Prince Sheikh Mishal Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah for his support.

The closing ceremony will be held Saturday in the presence of the Capital Governor Sheikh Talal Al-Khalid Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah. He said the tournament marks the start of the local season. Eng Duajj Al-Otaibi said that participation at this tournament is free of charge for all ranges and arrangement were made to ensure compliance with the health requirements against coronavirus.



Sports

Cleaning up: Domestic workers take Hong Kong cricket by storm

SCC Divas shaking up Hong Kong's sleepy cricket scene

HONG KONG: After a long week cooking and cleaning in the cramped households of Hong Kong, a group of Filipino domestic helpers are using their Sunday off for an unlikely hobby: cricket. And they're proving rather good at it. Despite no background in the game, scant coaching and very little time, the SCC Divas have made a startling impact, winning Hong Kong's development league twice in their first two seasons and going unbeaten since stepping up to the main divisions this year.

Along the way, they've inspired the Philippines' first national women's cricket team, providing seven of its players, while shaking up Hong Kong's sleepy cricket scene, a remnant of British colonialism. "We are all domestic helpers. Some are new players, having their first time holding a cricket ball," said Josie Arimas, 52, captain and founder of the SCC Divas. The satisfying clunk of bat on ball, at the scenic Po Kong Village Cricket Ground overlooked by green hills and tower blocks, is a world away from daily life for the Divas. Many of them work from 6am till midnight, six days a week, scrubbing, shopping and looking after kids, to support their own children and families left behind in the Philippines. They get "no rest. They're tough", said Arimas.

Six hours off a month

Tales of abuse and exploitation abound among Hong Kong's 400,000 foreign domestic workers, most of them from the Philippines or Indonesia. One domestic worker watching the Divas said that rather than the government-mandated rest day every week, her employer gives her just six hours off a month, and makes her sleep in the living room. For Divas player Liza Avelino, cricket is a chance to escape the difficulties of everyday life. "It's very relaxing, it makes my day worthwhile," she said. "It's good to be active and you forget all stress and the troubles and everything." During this month's 45-run win over the Cavaliers, a team from the venerable and well-heeled Hong Kong Cricket Club, the Divas' skills honed in baseball, a popular sport in the Philippines, were in evidence.

Positive hitting helped set a challenging total of

167-6, before the Divas restricted the Cavaliers to 122-4 with some energetic fielding including two side-on, direct hits on the stumps. The team was cheered on throughout by a vocal band of team-mates and supporters, who picnicked by the boundary rope and operated the scoreboard. "They're so passionate about it. They all come here and they all watch and they make a day of it," said Cavaliers captain Tracy Walker, an independent board member of Cricket Hong Kong. "They get one day off a week, and what do they do? They come and sit and watch, cheer along, train whenever they can. It's pretty impressive."

'Very empowering'

Just three years after their founding in 2017, the Divas have already formed a development team, SCC Pinay, and aim to be a lasting force in Hong Kong cricket. Team manager Amimesh Kulkarni, who founded the team with Arimas and raises sponsorship to pay for dues, equipment and other expenses, says the aim is to provide a positive pastime for domestic workers on their day off. "The Filipinos have that gathering culture.

So if one comes, a few come. One player started spending time here, and now we have 32," Kulkarni said. "My aim is finally about 200. It is going to happen in the next couple of years." Alvina Tam, Cricket Hong Kong's director of development and a Cavaliers player, said the Divas had added a new element to the sport in the city, which is dominated by the expat and South Asian community. "What they brought into women's cricket in Hong Kong was their sense of unity, the sense of teamwork and working together," said Tam.

"And at the same time they can still maintain a very friendly attitude towards the opposition as well. I think that's a very good show of sportsmanship." For the Divas players, separated from their families and living far from home, the team also serves as a support network, according to Avelino. "It's not just about sport, it's also about having a family to meet up with. It's a very close kinship, a sisterhood," she said. "Being away from home, to have a group of people doing the same thing is very empowering. We love it and we look forward to doing it on Sunday." —AFP



HONG KONG: The SCC Divas cricket team, made up of domestic helpers from the Philippines, pose for a team photo ahead of their game against the Hong Kong Cricket Club Cavaliers in Hong Kong.



HONG KONG: Photo shows a member of the SCC Divas cricket team (left) batting against the Hong Kong Cricket Club Cavaliers in Hong Kong. —AFP photos

Seattle Sounders roll on; Nashville and New England record upsets

LOS ANGELES: Defending champion Seattle Sounders continued their impressive march through another postseason on Tuesday, while Nashville SC and the New England Revolution scored upsets in a pair of Eastern Conference playoff clashes. Raul Ruidiaz delivered a goal and two assists as the Sounders advanced with a 3-1 victory against the shorthanded Los Angeles FC on a rainy evening in the Pacific Northwest.

Ruidiaz, of Peru, has eight goals and six assists in seven career North American Major League Soccer postseason games. Nicolas Lodeiro and Jordan Morris each added a goal and an assist as the second-seeded Sounders reached the Western Conference semi-finals where they will face FC Dallas. Seattle goalkeeper Stefan Frei stopped a penalty shot by Carlos Vela who returned Tuesday from an injury.

LAFc were missing four starters, including Diego Rossi, of Uruguay. The MLS Golden Boot winner and MVP finalist Rossi, Brian Rodriguez (Uruguay), Jose Cifuentes (Ecuador) and Diego Palacios (Ecuador) travelled to South America for World Cup qualifying earlier this month and all four tested positive for the coronavirus. Because of their depleted roster, LAFc were forced to give a bigger role to 16-year-old rookie Christian Torres, who spent last season in the club's academy program.

Eduard Atuesta scored the only goal for LAFc in the loss.

Meanwhile, Tajon Buchanan scored a first half goal and Carles Gil delivered two assists as visiting New England Revolution shocked top seeded Philadelphia Union 2-0. Adam Buksa also scored for the Revolution who beat Philadelphia for the first time in six tries this season to reach the league quarter-finals where they will face fourth seeded Orlando City on Sunday. "We knew we had a fighting chance to beat them. We are happy to do that," said Canadian Buchanan.

He scored in the 30th minute to give the Revolution a 2-0 lead. The ninth overall pick in the 2019 draft dribbled in alone and beat goalkeeper Andre Blake with a right-footed shot. "I just wanted to go at him one on one," said Buchanan. "I am happy it went in the back of the net. I try to bring fight and energy to these games." This was also the first loss of the season at home for Philadelphia who captured the Supporters' Shield as the league's top regular-season team for the first time in franchise history. Blake, the MLS goalkeeper of the year, was playing his first game since suffering a broken hand.

The eighth seeded Revolution have now won two straight playoff games after beating the Montreal Impact 2-1 on Friday. Also, Daniel Rios' goal in extra time gave seventh seeded Nashville SC a 1-0 victory over host Toronto FC in East Hartford, Connecticut. In the 108th minute of play, Hany Mukhtar made a nice move to get open in a crowd and to blast a shot. Goalkeeper Quentin Westberg made the save, but Rios was there for the easy tap-in goal. Nashville, who are in their first season of existence, advance to visit the third-seeded Columbus Crew in the next round on Sunday. —AFP



SEATTLE: Nicolas Lodeiro #10 of Seattle Sounders and Latif Blessing #7 of Los Angeles FC battle for possession in the second half during Round One of the MLS Cup Playoffs on November 24, 2020. —AFP

Holders Lyon draw Juventus in last 32 of women League

LAUSANNE: Record seven-time winners Lyon will begin the defense of their women's Champions League title against Juventus in the last 32 while last season's runners-up Wolfsburg were drawn Tuesday against Serbian club ZFK Spartak. Lyon defeated twice former champions Wolfsburg 3-1 in the final in August to capture the trophy for a fifth successive year.

However, the team that has dominated women's football in France and in Europe in recent years was brought back down to earth last week as a 1-0 loss away to Paris Saint-Germain ended a run of 73 matches without defeat. PSG, beaten by Lyon in the semi-finals of the 2019-20 competition, have been paired with Gornik Leczna of Poland and Barcelona were pitted against Dutch outfit PSV Eindhoven. Two English clubs, Chelsea and Manchester City, also enter the competition next month for the ties played over December 9-10 and 15-16.

Chelsea, who reached the last four of the tournament in 2018 and 2019, will meet Benfica while City play Swedish club Gothenburg. Chelsea were awarded the 2019/20 Women's Super League title on a points-per-game basis ahead of City after the season was curtailed due to the coronavirus pandemic. Glasgow City, quarter-finalists last term, will take on Slavia Prague after winning both of their qualifying rounds on penalties. This season's edition will be the last to use to a two-legged knockout format, with the 2021-22 competition adopting a 16-team group stage similar to the men's format. —AFP

Ibrahimovic drops Sweden return hint ahead of Euros

STOCKHOLM: AC Milan striker Zlatan Ibrahimovic said yesterday that he missed playing for Sweden and hinted that he may be open to a return to the national side for next year's Euros. The 39-year-old, who retired from international football after the World Cup in 2016, opened the door for a return after being awarded Sweden's Footballer of the Year award for an astonishing 12th time. "If you ask me I'll be honest: yes, I miss the national team," he told Swedish daily Aftonbladet. "It's no secret."

"The one who does not miss it, he has already finished his career. And I have not finished my career." Ibra, who scored 62 goals in 116 internationals, has been in impressive form for AC Milan since his summer move, heading the Serie A scoring charts with 10 goals already this season. He was more opaque, however, when asked directly how would he respond if coach Janne Andersson called him. "Give me time, I have to think about it," said Ibrahimovic.

Without him, Sweden qualified directly for the Euros where they will face Spain, Poland and Slovakia there. But a poor Nations League campaign

which produced one win and five losses, and resulted in relegation from the A Group has rekindled thoughts of an Ibrahimovic return. In November, he posted an old photo of himself on social media, wearing a Sweden shirt and the captain's armband with the phrase "Long time no see". Andersson appeared less enamored of the idea when he was also cornered by Aftonbladet. "I'm pretty annoyed," said Andersson. "He told me in 2016 that he wanted to retire and I respected his choice. So now it's up to him."

"If he wants to be involved in the national team again, to change his mind, he must say it clearly. In this case, it will be up to me to decide. "I would be lying if I said I was surprised. I'm impressed and struck by how he continues to have that hunger on the pitch, that quality in everything he does. "He's a great athlete, by far the best Swedish player of all time. What he does is amazing, I can only congratulate him." Ibrahimovic is currently injured after scoring twice in Naples at the weekend but he insists he will not be out of action for long. "It's nothing serious," he said. "Just one or two weeks." —AFP



AC Milan's Swedish forward Zlatan Ibrahimovic

English Football League chief hails 'lifeline' for coronavirus-hit clubs

LONDON: English Football League chairman Rick Parry says the government's decision to allow fans back into grounds is a "lifeline" for lower-league clubs who have struggled to survive during the coronavirus pandemic. Up to 4,000 people can return to outdoor sports stadiums in parts of England classified as at low risk from Covid-19 from December 2, a decision that affects football, rugby, horse racing and other sports.

Parry told the BBC he was looking forward to getting fans back in more substantial numbers but it was a "welcome start". "At League One and League Two level (third and fourth tiers) it could be very significant," he said. "It's not just the money, it's a very welcome return to an atmosphere, and if we get 4,000 at League Two level it would be very welcome. It can be a very welcome lifeline."

The EFL is considering moving some of its fixtures scheduled for December 1 to the following day in order to get fans in. Parry admits that clubs face some logistical hurdles. —AFP

14 Fall of All Blacks? Defeats pile pressure on coach and captain



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15 SCC Divas shaking up Hong Kong's sleepy cricket scene



Juventus, Chelsea, Sevilla book last 16

Barca stroll into last 16 after thrashing Dynamo Kiev



RENNES: Rennes' French forward Sehrou Guirassy (2nd right) scores his team's first goal during the UEFA Champions League Group E football match between Stade Rennais FC and Chelsea FC on November 24, 2020. —AFP

PARIS: Juventus, Chelsea and Sevilla all claimed last-gasp wins as they qualified for the Champions League last 16 on Tuesday, while Martin Braithwaite grabbed a double in Barcelona's 4-0 victory at Dynamo Kiev as they also secured a place in the knockout rounds. They are the first teams to make it out of the group stage, doing so with two games to spare, on a night which saw Erling Braut Haaland, Neymar, Cristiano Ronaldo and Bruno Fernandes all get among the goals.

There was no Lionel Messi for Barcelona, with the Argentine rested for the trip to Ukraine, but Ronald Koeman's side got the job done to make it four wins from four in Group G. All the goals came in the second half, with Sergino Dest opening the scoring before Danish striker Braithwaite added another and then converted a penalty to make it 3-0.

On as a substitute, Antoine Griezmann wrapped up the win on the night young centre-back Oscar Mingueza, Brazilian midfielder Matheus Fernandes and teenage American winger Konrad de la Fuente were all blooded in the first team. "We've achieved our objective," said Koeman. "We looked hungry and scored four goals. Important players were able to rest and

the youngsters deserved their minutes."

Morata, Giroud strike late

Juventus joined Barcelona in qualifying from Group G but the Italian champions needed a stoppage-time header by substitute Alvaro Morata to beat Ferencvaros 2-1 in Turin and seal their progress. Albanian international Myrto Uzuni put the Hungarians ahead but Ronaldo drilled in the equaliser before half-time, meaning he has scored in 15 consecutive Champions League seasons.

Chelsea are through from Group E after edging Rennes 2-1 in France, with Olivier Giroud coming off the bench to head in an injury-time winner. Serhou Guirassy had cancelled out Callum Hudson-Odoi's breakaway opener. Last season's Europa League winners Sevilla will not get to defend their trophy as they advanced to the last 16 of Europe's elite club competition and did so with a 2-1 win over Krasnodar in Russia, in a rare game played before a sizeable crowd.

Ivan Rakitic's drilled strike put the Spaniards in front only for the Brazilian Wanderson to equalize, but Munir El Haddadi won it for Sevilla five minutes into added time. Sevilla and Chelsea are level

on 10 points but Frank Lampard's side go to Spain next week, when the winner will secure top spot. Manchester United are in pole position in Group H after a first-half Fernandes brace set them on their way to a 4-1 victory over Istanbul Basaksehir that made up for a 2-1 defeat in Turkey last time out.

The opener by Fernandes was a thunderous strike from outside the box, while the second was a tap-in after a horrible error by Mert Gunok in the away goal. Marcus Rashford added a penalty, but there was a fightback from the away side, with Deniz Turuc's free-kick crossing the line before David de Gea could claw it away. Edin Visca crashed a shot off the bar, but Daniel James made sure of the victory on the counter-attack. "It's a Champions League night at Old Trafford, you'd expect them to enjoy themselves," United manager Ole Gunnar Solskjaer said of his team. "We scored some very nice goals, I'm pleased."

Haaland's frightening record

Solskjaer's side are three points clear of both Paris Saint-Germain and RB Leipzig, after an early Neymar penalty gave the French side a 1-0 win over their



KIEV: Barcelona's German goalkeeper Marc-Andre ter Stegen warms up before the UEFA Champions League group G football match between Dynamo Kiev and Barcelona on November 24, 2020. —AFP

German visitors. PSG go to Old Trafford next week. Borussia Dortmund need just one more point to qualify from Group F following a 3-0 win over Club Brugge as the prolific Haaland netted twice either side of a Jadon Sancho free-kick in Germany.

Haaland has 16 goals for the season, and has now scored 16 Champions League goals in just 12 appearances. Messi had two goals and Ronaldo none

after the same number of appearances. "Erling is a fantastic player. He works hard on and off the pitch and he deserves everything that's coming his way," said Sancho. In the group's other game Ciro Immobile was on target twice, including from a penalty, as Lazio beat Zenit Saint-Petersburg 3-1 in Rome, a result which eliminated the Russians. Marco Parolo also netted for Lazio, with Artem Dzyuba scoring for Zenit. —AFP

Rivals to play in Arab tournament in Qatar

DOHA: Saudi Arabia, the UAE, Bahrain and Egypt will compete in the 22-nation Arab Cup tournament in Qatar in 2021, despite their political and economic boycott of Doha, FIFA said Tuesday. The competition, to be staged from December 1 to December 18, 2021, will be vital for Qatar to test key infrastructure ahead of the 2022 World Cup, opportunities for which have been limited by the coronavirus crisis.

"We are delighted that all 22 teams from across the Arab world have agreed to take part in the FIFA Arab Cup 2021, which will be held in FIFA World Cup Qatar 2022 stadiums, and we are looking forward to seeing the region's best teams battle it out," said FIFA President Gianni Infantino in a statement. Saudi Arabia, Egypt and the United Arab Emirates, along with Bahrain which will also participate, abruptly broke off ties with Qatar in 2017 over their claims that Doha was supporting radical Islamist movements and backed Iran, denied by Qatar.

In 2017 the three Gulf countries opposed to Qatar boycotted a regional tournament due to be held in Doha, only participating after the venue was switched to Kuwait. However in 2019, the countries agreed to participate in the same competition in Qatar, reversing an earlier decision to stay away. Time to stage large-scale test events ahead of 2022 is running out. Qatar's delayed Education City stadium launched on June 15, not with a major test fixture but with a virtual inauguration and has yet to host a public match.

Of the eight grounds Qatar will use for 2022, only the new Al-Janoub stadium, inaugurated in May 2019, the refurbished Al-Khalifa International venue, and Education City have so far hosted major public fixtures. The Qatar Airways International Cup, a mini tournament of four European nations planned as a warm-up for Euro 2020, had been scheduled for late March but also fell victim to COVID-19. Qatar will host the coronavirus-delayed Club World Cup from February 1 to 11, 2021. —AFP

Guardiola, Klopp welcome COVID-19 fan-return plan

LONDON: Pep Guardiola and Jurgen Klopp on Tuesday welcomed the UK government's decision to allow fans back into stadiums, a move described by the English Football League chief as a "lifeline" for smaller clubs. Lower-league clubs, who do not enjoy the TV riches of the Premier League, have been struggling to make ends meet, with supporters shut out during the coronavirus pandemic. But under plans unveiled on Monday, up to 4,000 people will be able to return to outdoor sports stadiums, depending on levels of Covid-19 in the area, from December 2.

Manchester City boss Guardiola welcomed the potential limited return of fans. "If they believe it is the best, we will do it and hopefully it will work," he said. "If the government has decided, they must have listened to the scientists and doctors." Liverpool manager Klopp also welcomed the development, but said he had questions about the logic being applied to the numbers involved. "The

problem is, I just struggle to put faith in any kind of announcements," he said. "I don't understand why it is only 2,000 people in a 60,000 stadium. But I am not surprised. It's good news, good sign. I'll take it, 100 percent."

English Football League chairman Rick Parry told the BBC he was looking forward to getting fans back in more substantial numbers but it was a "welcome start". "At League One and League Two level (third and fourth tiers) it could be very significant," he said. "It's not just the money, it's a very welcome return to an atmosphere, and if we get 4,000 at League Two level it would be very welcome. It can be a very welcome lifeline."

The EFL is considering moving some of its fixtures scheduled for December 1 to the following day in order to get fans in. Premier League chiefs have welcomed Monday's announcement but made it clear that only a return to bigger crowds would ease the sport's financial problems. Brighton chief executive Paul Barber said the return of a small number of fans will be "more symbolic than financial" for Premier League clubs.

Barber believes Brighton's Amex Stadium needs to be at least 25 percent full with 7,500 fans before matches would start to become financially viable. "It's welcome news. It's a little bit earlier than we expected. But it's a good first step towards some degree of normality," he said. —AFP