

Friday Times

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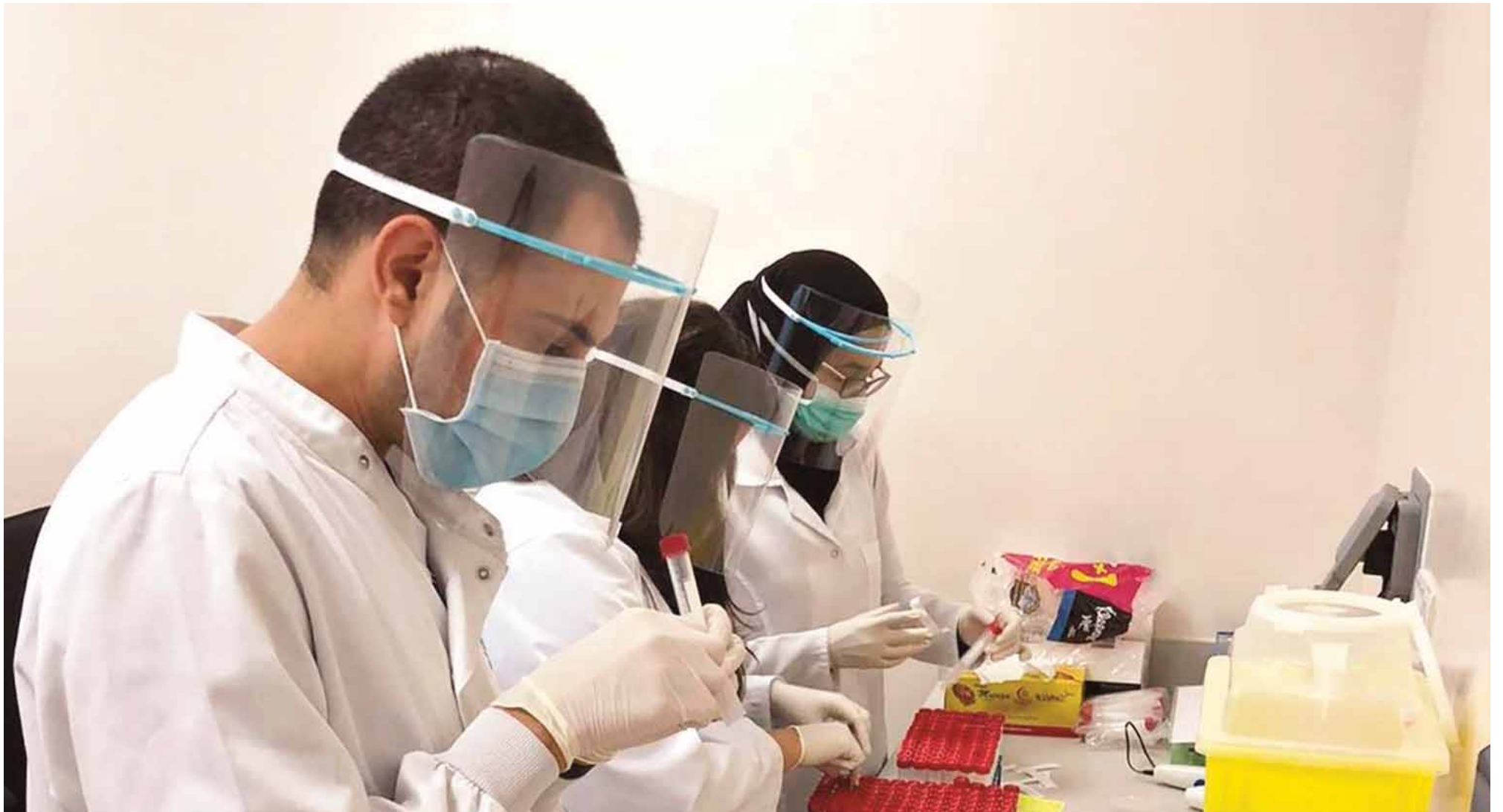
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Local

Don't be shy to select your gift



JUST KIDDIN', SERIOUSLY

By Sahar Moussa

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Kuwaitis in general are known to spend a lot of money on gifts, especially at weddings, graduations and on welcoming a new baby. Sometimes people gift useless presents that end up in the drawer untouched or unused - that's why it is very important to ask the person you are gifting what they need before you buy it.

I know it is inappropriate for people to specify what they want for their birthdays, weddings, baby showers or any other occasion, but if you ask me directly what I want for my birthday or any celebration, I will answer without any hesitation - money.

I know a lot of people would like to answer the same, but they are too shy to admit it because it's kind of a social taboo. But seriously - who doesn't like to receive money anytime and anywhere, even if the amount is very little!

I believe nowadays everybody needs extra money - a small amount of money is better than receiving a gift that you don't use or need. It doesn't matter how much money you receive - small amounts from several people will add up, and you will end up with a decent amount of money. Gold is also a fantastic present you can gift people no matter how small the item is - at the end of the day, 'gold is gold' and it never ever loses its value even after decades.

Another good way for gifting is to ask if there is a list, and this is recommended for baby showers and weddings, because - admit it - nowadays preparing for a new baby or getting married is very, very expensive. Trust me on that! When I first learned I was pregnant, I had no idea what the baby "must-have items" were until I did my research and asked experienced moms, which made my head spin. Luckily, my sister-in-law created a list for me and sent it to all family members to help me out in this mission, otherwise I would have been in big trouble.

For newlywed couples, usually there is a wedding list or a bank account number, which can be a great support for the bride and groom. As for new graduates, putting money in their bank account instead of bringing a useless present is an excellent way to encourage them and teach them the importance of saving money for their future.

For children's birthdays, the best investment is to open a savings account. You can deposit money on any other occasion as well, and in no time the amount will add up, which will be a kind of security for their future. But there's no doubt that presents such as toys are very important for children - you can see the glow in their eyes - apart from money.

Briefly, what I'm trying to say is that investing in a beneficial gift such as money or gold is the best present you can ever give to anyone, and my advice is to stop being shy about what you really want as a gift. I do understand that sometimes a certain gift can have a lot of sentimental meaning to it that can really make a big difference to some people, but if I am ever asked to choose a gift, money will be my first choice. Maybe some people will say I'm being materialistic, but I am not - I am only being realistic!

Photo of the Day



A woman visits the bird market in Rai. — Photo by Yasser Al-Zayyat

Ignorance is not bliss



IN MY VIEW

By Abdellatif Sharaa

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I cannot believe how ignorant most of us human beings can be! Please, just a second - do not get angry because of the abovementioned statement! We are told not to drive at high speeds, but we still do. We are told not to use mobile phones while driving, but we still do. We are told not to eat while driving, but we still do. We are told not to smoke, but we still do.

Very few of us pay attention to how and where we get rid of the trash that we produce. In many cases I find a trash dumpster that is half empty, while the trash around it can fill three dumpsters. Stray animals need food, and they find it in abundance in the bags, that are more likely not closed tightly, or just about, so their contents will be spread all over the place by animals and the wind.

We complain about the presence of rats - plentiful in some areas; this is a problem that existed some time back in the previous century, and it is not as bad as it was then. I hope the authorities can fight this menace as quickly as possible so that it does not escalate. Of course

our behavior contributes to the existence of the problem and to resolving it, so follow cleanliness measures in your neighborhood.

Let us shed our laziness, inactivity and reckless behavior behind our backs, and let us be our own helpers! Be courteous when driving - paying attention to the road does not make one a lesser driver. Keep your phone aside, and do not use it even hands-free, because your attention will not be as it should.

Keep your cigarette in the pack, because you will have enough time to smoke it later. It is easy to burn yourself and even your vehicle if a small ember drops for one reason or another, apart from causing a possible traffic accident. This besides keeping your lungs clean, and if you listen carefully, you will hear them saying "thank you".

Please let us keep our communities clean, or at least our neighborhoods, free of all harmful things.

God bless you all.

Kuwait Times

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Local

SIDE HUSTLES BLOOMING IN KUWAIT DURING PANDEMIC

By Ben Garcia

Amidst terminations and an economic downturn during the coronavirus pandemic, many expats found several alternatives to survive. When Yvette, a mother of three, was terminated at the beginning of the pandemic, she turned her passion for baking into a home-based business. "When I was terminated from work, I was devastated. But I immediately knew what was next in store for me. I know we were going to survive because I am a fighter," she told Kuwait Times.



"Even before the pandemic, I was known in the Filipino community for my cheesecakes. A few days after I was terminated, I posted on my Facebook account that I was starting a home-based cheesecake business. I started getting many orders, at first from people I knew, and later from

strangers too," Yvette said.

Yvette is one of many such side hustle entrepreneurs, employed in Kuwait but laid off during the pandemic, they've turned to their favorite hobby or freelance business idea to bring in income until they can return to regular work.

Selling cheesecakes was a lucrative business at the beginning of the COVID-19 outbreak, but orders started to decline during the lockdown as families realized that the pandemic was here to stay. "I noticed the change in people's attitude in buying cakes or other food items during the lockdown. Maybe I was affected by other people selling similar products during the lockdown, or perhaps those who were buying from me before were now making their own cheesecakes. I heard people had shifted their attention to plants. So I started researching about the best indoor plants," Yvette said.

"I contacted a friend working at a nursery in Rai, who helped me select the best indoor plants. I started posting them on social media and got an immediate response. I realized plants were the new trend as they are stress relievers, so along with selling cheesecakes, I began selling plants, particularly table plants," she said.

Yvette is married to a Filipino who works at an American camp in Kuwait, but he is

still waiting to rejoin the workforce. "Many workers were not allowed to enter American bases because of the coronavirus, which means they have no salary as well. So I needed to do something for our family to put food on the table daily. Seven months without work is a long time for many of us, because we still need to eat and pay the rent," she said. "Without income, we will die."

The most favored and bestselling plants nowadays have shifted from lucky plants to table plants like bonsai and cactus, said Yvette. "The plants I buy from my friend come in dull plastic pots or ugly baskets, so I place them in beautiful vases and sell them accordingly. I am getting more orders now," she explained.

Paying attention to packaging is the best way to win more customers - the product will look better and valuable, so price will no longer matter to many clients. "I know the mindset of many Filipino customers - they are very picky. They will buy the most expensive shoes or bags and don't care



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much for the price. Even if they don't have enough money, you will see them in the latest branded shoes, queuing alongside Kuwaitis," Yvette pointed out.

Ronnie (not his real name), an entertainment manager, accepted a cleaning job to survive. Ronnie said that his company informed the staff to look for alternative jobs since phase five of the plan to return to normalcy hasn't been approved yet. "We were informed by our boss to look for other jobs since it's unclear when our work - related to children's entertainment - will resume. We are out of jobs for the past seven months now," he told Kuwait Times.

The children's entertainment sector has been shut since March due to the coronavirus outbreak. "In the past few months, I've been going with a friend to clean Kuwaitis' houses. I make KD 1 per hour. At least I am earning something to eat and pay the rent," Ronnie said. He said he is surviving because his wife started to work and has been getting a salary since July. "I've applied and am waiting for a call from companies," he added.



Leni, who works at a fashion retail shop in Al-Kout Mall, uses her spare time to sell anything she can. She buys food from a well-known Filipino restaurant and resells it. "During the lockdown, we did not get anything from our company - not even part of our salaries. So I contacted several of my friends to sell anything I could. I got food items from a restaurant; sometimes I cooked; even earning half dinar per item is good enough. It's not a regular job, but it helps to survive," Leni told Kuwait Times. "The hardest period of my life in Kuwait was during the lockdown, but I kept my composure because I have four kids back home in the Philippines. So I really do not mind doing anything for the survival of my family," she added.

Yvette buys plants from nurseries and repackages them in beautiful containers.



Local



Pain, frustration: Expats lose jobs to new rules and COVID

By Chidi Emmanuel

After working for 24 years in Kuwait, Charley Lyon received the dreaded letter that many expats fear amid the economic downturn, coronavirus pandemic and new residency laws. Lyon is among thousands of expat workers in the government sector who

were being laid off.

As part of its Kuwaitization policy, Kuwait is replacing expats with locals in the government sector. The government has also stopped issuing work permits to expats over 60 years of age without a university degree. These new rules have had a huge impact on the lives of thousands of expats in the country, leaving many with no choice

but to pack their bags and leave.

Gulf countries are facing an exodus of foreign workers as the coronavirus pandemic pushes out foreign workers. In the midst of the COVID-19 and financial crunch, the National Assembly approved a draft law to slash expat numbers over the next five years.

As the budget deficit widens and



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economic conditions worsen, Kuwait is grappling with an economic downturn as COVID-19 continues to wreak havoc around the world. The combined shock of collapsing oil prices, the pandemic and joblessness is reshaping labor policies in the region, thus bringing anti-foreigner sentiments to the fore again.

While Kuwait's expats struggle to secure their jobs, the government is calling for an increase in workforce nationalization in government entities. "Why will foreigners take the jobs meant for us (Kuwaitis)? They can work anywhere - but not in the ministries," argued Abdullah, a 26-year-old Kuwaiti.

Buttressing Abdullah's viewpoint, Fatma, an unemployed Kuwaiti woman, complained of the difficulty in competing with foreign workers for jobs in the private sector. "Foreign workers can work longer for less, unlike us Kuwaitis. So most companies prefer to hire non-Kuwaitis. This leaves

us with only one sector (the public sector). I think this is why the government introduced Kuwaitization, so as to give unemployed Kuwaitis an opportunity," she explained.

For Lyon, justice and fairness should override anti-expat sentiments. "It is understandable that ministries would give preference to locals for jobs during these tough times, but it would be fair to consider the efforts of the old staff who have put in their best to build this country," Lyon, 61, and some of his co-workers who were laid off recently lamented, as they worry about their future.

Expats make up the majority of the population of Kuwait. Residency is tied to employment and Kuwait does not easily offer citizenship routes to non-nationals. "We have been here (in Kuwait) legally for over 20 years. It will be difficult to go back and start afresh in our home countries. More so, Kuwait's residency is linked to the work permit - when you lose your job,

you automatically lose your residency. I worry about my children who are still in school. The three-month notice will not be enough to relocate them," Mustapha, an Egyptian expat who recently lost his job, said in dismay.

Abdurazak Hamad, an African expat, is in a dilemma. "I feel miserable leaving my family behind. I don't want to go alone, but I can't make my wife quit her KD 450 job since she is now the sole breadwinner. Starting afresh in my home country at this age (62) will be very difficult. I wish I can get a permit (residency) to stay here with my family," said Hamad, who was recently sacked.



File photos show foreign workers applying to leave Kuwait during the amnesty.
— Photos by Yasser Al-Zayyat

Local

News in brief

Shabu dealers arrested

KUWAIT: The interior ministry arrested two men with 10 kg of shabu (methamphetamine). After receiving a tip, detectives arranged to purchase some of the drug. The first suspect was arrested during the exchange and led police to the second suspect at a residence in Kabd, where more drugs were found. Both men were sent to concerned authorities.



Wedding organizers summoned

KUWAIT: The interior ministry has summoned those responsible for issuing wedding invitations in violation of current health ministry measures prohibiting all public and private gatherings. MoI also warned it will take legal measures against those who invite others or participate in any gathering.

Live-fire drills from Oct 25-29

KUWAIT: The Kuwait army command said the navy will carry out live ammunition drills from Oct 25 until Oct 29 from 7:00 am until 3:00 pm at the sea shooting range, which is 16.5 nautical miles east of Julaia to Qarouh island, and 6 nautical miles east of Ras Al-Zoural to Um Al-Maradem Island. The command urged citizens and expats to exercise caution.



Fight erupts after robbery

KUWAIT: The interior ministry's relations and security information department reacted to a video on social media showing a fight between several persons in Sabah Al-Salem, who used sharp objects, and cars colliding. It said a youth told police the fight broke out after several persons stole KD 370 from him in an armed robbery. Police are looking for those involved for further legal action.

Major oil projects in works

KUWAIT: Kuwait will commission two major oil sector projects worth \$30 billion by the end of the year. The Al-Zour refinery in South Kuwait with a capacity of 615,000 bpd and the Clean Fuel Project, one of the largest refining projects in Kuwait's history, will launch near the end of 2020.

Kuwait records 9 COVID deaths, 889 new cases

KUWAIT: Kuwait's confirmed coronavirus cases in the past 24 hours increased by 889 to 119,420, with nine people succumbing to the disease, raising the death toll to 730, the health ministry said yesterday. It said 126 people are currently receiving intensive care out of a total of 7,976 patients hospitalized. Some 8,045 swab tests were conducted in the past 24 hours, taking the total to 857,707. Earlier, the ministry said 798 people recovered from the virus, upping the total number of those who have overcome the disease to 110,714. —KUNA



Interior minister meets Indian ambassador

KUWAIT: Deputy Prime Minister, Interior Minister and Minister of State for Cabinet Affairs Anas Al-Saleh received Indian Ambassador to Kuwait Sibi George on Wednesday in his office, according to a press release issued by the Indian Embassy. The ambassador thanked the minister for hosting the Indian community in Kuwait.

George and Saleh discussed bilateral relations between the two countries and means of further enhancing and strengthening them. They also reviewed various aspects of existing bilateral cooperation. Mutual matters of interest, including topics pertaining to the Indian diaspora, latest developments related to the COVID-19 pandemic and bilateral cooperation to fight the pandemic were also discussed during the meeting, the statement added.



KUWAIT: Interior Minister Anas Al-Saleh receives Indian Ambassador to Kuwait Sibi George.

Vietnamese envoy hails KRCS' global humanitarian efforts

KUWAIT: Vietnamese Ambassador to Kuwait Trinh Minh Manh hailed the humanitarian efforts of Kuwait Red Crescent Society (KRCS) around the world. The remarks were made to KUNA yesterday after the ambassador's meeting with KRCS Chairman Dr Hilal Al-Sayer. He expressed appreciation for the society's aid to the Vietnamese Embassy during the coronavirus crisis.

The ambassador added that they discussed providing his country with aid to face the impact of the recent floods and landslides, considered to be the worst in decades. Sayer said he was pleased with the ambassador's visit and affirmed that KRCS will continue exerting humanitarian efforts to aid those affected by natural disasters and crises everywhere. —KUNA



KRCS Chairman Dr Hilal Al-Sayer meets Vietnamese Ambassador to Kuwait Trinh Minh Manh. —KUNA



KUWAIT: The 24th batch of staff sergeants graduated yesterday in the presence of Interior Ministry Undersecretary Lt Gen Essam Al-Naham, National Guard Undersecretary Lt Gen Hashim Al-Rifae, Director of Saad Al-Abdullah Academy Maj Gen Nasser Bourisli and other officials. The graduates included 207 cadets from the interior ministry and 44 from the National Guard. Meanwhile, 902 cadets graduated from the police academy.

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Nigerian largest city under lock down as violence rages

Hariri named as Lebanon's new prime minister

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RIYADH: A woman shops for snacks at a supermarket in Saudi Arabia's capital Riyadh. Following a call by the head of the Saudi chamber of commerce Ajlan Al-Ajlan to 'boycott everything Turkish', multiple supermarket chains in the kingdom announced they were stopping the import and sale of Turkish products from pickled vine leaves to coffee and cream cheese, as rivalry between Riyadh and Ankara heats up. — AFP

Saudis shun 'made in Turkey'

Turkey-Saudi Arabia rivalry deepens

RIYADH: From pickled vine leaves to coffee and cheese, Saudi supermarkets are taking Turkish products off the shelves after calls for a boycott, as rivalry between Riyadh and Ankara heats up. The two countries have long competed for supremacy in the Muslim world, but their geopolitical rivalry intensified after Saudi agents murdered journalist Jamal Khashoggi at the kingdom's Istanbul consulate in 2018. The wealthy Gulf petro-state has sought to pressure Turkey's already struggling economy, with high-rolling Saudi tourists facing calls from nationalists last year to boycott the tourism magnet and stop purchasing property there.

Now, Turkish exporters of textiles and other goods are complaining of inordinate delays at Saudi customs, and warning that Riyadh's attempts to block the imports could disrupt global supply chains. This week, after an earlier call from the head of the Saudi chamber of commerce to "boycott everything Turkish", multiple supermarket chains announced they were stopping the import and sale of Turkish products. "This decision has come in solidarity with the popular boycott campaign," one of them, Abdullah AlOthaim Markets, said on Twitter.

Some retail chains said they would continue selling the goods until current stocks were exhausted. But at one Riyadh supermarket, an AFP correspondent saw salesmen scrambling to clear entire shelves of products made in Turkey, such as coffee, chocolates and jars of pickled vegetables. Egyptian-made feta sat on a refrigerated shelf marked for Turkish cheese. "This is a very sensitive matter," the country manager of the retail chain told AFP, requesting anonymity and declining to discuss the fate of the removed products.

'Negative perception'

While the exact trigger for the new boycott remains unclear, the campaign targets Turkey's coronavirus-hit economy as it grapples with a currency in free fall. The two countries are at loggerheads over a range of regional issues, from Libya and Syria to Qatar, a key Turkish ally that faces a three-year Saudi-led economic blockade.

Wary of rattling foreign investors and amid suspicion that Turkey could lodge a complaint with the World Trade Organization, the Saudi government has sought to distance itself from the boycott. Authorities have denied placing restrictions on Turkish products and maintain that citi-

zens have led the campaign. But a joint statement from eight leading Turkish business groups this month claimed that many Saudi companies had been "forced to sign a letter of commitment not to import goods from Turkey".

The Ankara-based Turkish Contractors Association meanwhile cited "various obstacles" at ongoing Saudi projects, such as not being invited to tenders, difficulty in obtaining visas for Turkish personnel and payment delays. "It is estimated that the negative perception of Turkey resulted in business (losses) worth \$3 billion in the Middle East for our contractors last year," the association said. "Saudi Arabia, which was in second place in a list of countries with the most business in 2016-2018, has fallen to the lower tiers."

Meanwhile on social media, accounts belonging to Saudi nationalists have been whipping up a frenzy. In one cartoon that circulated widely on Twitter, a hand wrapped in the Saudi flag is pictured twisting the ears of Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan—a gesture seen culturally as a punishment for children. "Stop buying Turkish products. (Erdogan) is fighting our country with our money," read one demand in Arabic on a popular messaging app.

'Political showmanship'

"It's a kind of political showmanship," said Karen Young, a resident scholar at the American Enterprise Institute, referring to the campaign. "It's a tactic for Saudi domestic consumption, a signal by the state to citizens on how to perceive and construct an external adversary."

Observers say Ankara is unlikely to cave in to the pressure. Saudi Arabia is only Turkey's 15th biggest export market, with textiles, chemicals, furniture and steel among the main items purchased. But Saudi nationalists have warned the boycott could spread to the kingdom's regional allies. Observers have drawn parallels with how Saudi Arabia has flexed its financial muscle in diplomatic disputes with Canada, Germany and in particular Qatar, which hosts a Turkish military base, much to Riyadh's annoyance.

In June, the WTO rapped Riyadh for failing to protect the intellectual property rights of a Qatari-owned broadcaster by not cracking down on a bootlegging network. "Saudi-Turkish bilateral trade flows are not significant enough to make or break the economies of either country," said Robert Mogielnicki, a resident scholar at the Arab Gulf States Institute in Washington. —AFP

International

Deadly stabbing in Germany probed as 'terrorist attack'

20-year-old Syrian arrested amid fears of Islamist violence

BERLIN: A knife attack that killed one tourist and seriously injured another in the German city of Dresden in early October is being treated as a terrorist attack, prosecutors said Wednesday, turning fears to Islamist violence after a string of far-right attacks. A 20-year-old Syrian man was arrested on Tuesday evening and is believed to have an Islamist background, federal prosecutors in the city of Karlsruhe said, just days after the shocking, apparently religiously-motivated beheading of a teacher in France.

The suspect allegedly attacked the two tourists, who had travelled together from North Rhine-Westphalia, on October 4. One of them, a 55-year-old man, later died from his injuries in hospital. The other, aged 53, survived with serious injuries.

'Utmost vigilance'

"This act once again demonstrates the danger of Islamist violence," Interior Minister Horst Seehofer said in a statement. "Whatever the form of extremism and terrorism, the utmost vigilance is called for," he said. The suspect has a long crim-

inal record including charges of soliciting support for a foreign terrorist organization, obtaining instructions to commit a serious act of violence endangering the state, bodily injury and threats.

He came to Germany in 2015 along with hundreds of thousands of Syrian migrants and had become increasingly radicalized since 2017, when police classified him as dangerous, according to a report in *Der Spiegel* magazine. He had been living in Germany under "tolerated" status granted to people whose asylum requests have been rejected, but who cannot be deported. He had only recently been released from a juvenile detention centre, on September 29, German media reported.

Police and the public prosecutor's office in Dresden said the examination of evidence had led to the Syrian man and "raised the question of an Islamist attack". A report in the *Bild* daily said his DNA was detected on the knife, which police found near the scene of the crime in the city centre. The DNA was already stored in police databases, the report said. Responding to the news on Twitter, Justice Minister Christine

Lambrecht said "Islamist terror is an ongoing major threat to our society, which we must fight against with all our might".

Voices in Chancellor Angela Merkel's CDU party reopened the fraught question of expelling criminals to still war-torn Syria. "First Paris, now Dresden... why was this Syrian Islamist not in preventive custody or deported?" party leadership contender Friedrich Merz told news site *Spiegel Online*.

Spate of attacks

A history teacher was beheaded in France last week for showing cartoons of the Prophet Mohamed in a lesson on free speech, an attack that shocked the country and prompted a government crackdown on radical Islam. The killing also led to an outpouring of emotion and solidarity in France, with tens of thousands taking part in rallies countrywide over the weekend.

People with ties to Islamist extremism have also committed several violent attacks in Germany, the deadliest being a truck rampage at a Berlin Christmas market in December 2016 that

killed 12 people. The Tunisian attacker, a failed asylum seeker, was a supporter of the Islamic State jihadist group. More recently, an Iraqi man caused a series of motorway accidents in Berlin injuring six people, in what prosecutors described as a suspected Islamist attack. After crashing into a motorbike, he got out of his mangled vehicle and told witnesses a metal box in his car contained a "dangerous object", which police said turned out to be false.

In 2018, an Islamist and his wife were convicted of planning a biological bomb attack in Germany with the deadly poison ricin. The pair had ordered castor seeds, explosives and metal ball bearings on the internet to build the toxic bomb. The man was sentenced in March to 10 years in prison while his wife received an eight-year sentence in June. Since 2013, the number of Islamists considered dangerous in Germany has increased fivefold to 680, according to security services. The far right has often accused Merkel of having contributed to the Islamist threat by opening the country's borders to hundreds of thousands of migrants in 2015. — AFP

Hariri named as Lebanon's new prime minister

BEIRUT: Lebanon's President Michel Aoun designated Sunni Muslim politician Saad Al-Hariri as prime minister yesterday to form a new government to tackle the worst crisis since the country's 1975-1990 civil war. Hariri won the backing of a majority of parliamentarians in consultations with Aoun. He faces major challenges to navigate Lebanon's power-sharing politics and agree a cabinet, which must then address a mounting list of woes: a banking crisis, currency crash, rising poverty and crippling state debts.

A new government will also have to contend with a COVID-19 surge and the fallout of the huge August explosion at Beirut port that killed nearly 200 people and caused billions of dollars of damage. Sunni leader Hariri's last coalition government was toppled almost exactly a year ago as protests gripped the country, furious at Lebanon's ruling elite. Yesterday's nomination follows weeks of political wrangling that has delayed a deal on a new government.

Hariri was backed by his own Future lawmakers, the Shiite Amal party, Druze politician Walid Jumblatt's party and other small blocs. The Shiite group Hezbollah said it was not nominating anyone, but added it would seek to facilitate the process. "We will contribute to maintain the positive climate," Mohammed Raad, head of its parliamentary bloc, told reporters at the presidential palace. The FPM led by Aoun's son-in-law, which has the largest Christian bloc, said it would not nominate Hariri.

The second main Christian party and a staunch Hezbollah opponent, the Lebanese Forces, also declined to name Hariri, saying a veteran politician should not lead a planned cabinet of specialists. "Has this political class that took people hostage



BAABDA: Lebanon's Parliament Speaker Nabih Berri (left) President Michel Aoun (center) and former prime minister Saad Hariri meet at the presidential palace in Baabda, east of the capital Beirut, after Aoun named Hariri to form a new cabinet yesterday. — AFP

learned that they cannot continue in this way?" MP Georges Adwan said. "It is now facing a test." Former colonial power France has tried rallying Lebanon's sectarian leaders to pull the nation from crisis, but has been frustrated by the apparent lack of urgency or progress.

Hariri has presented himself as the "natural candidate" to build a cabinet that can revive the French roadmap, which set out reforms needed to trigger foreign aid. He has also said that Lebanon must agree an IMF reform program to escape the crisis. Yesterday's consultations were postponed from last week amid political rifts. Aoun is required to choose the candidate with the most support from lawmakers. Iran-backed Hezbollah and its political allies - including the party founded by Aoun and Shiite Amal - have a majority in parliament. — Reuters

In push to normalize ties, Israel delegation visits Sudan

JERUSALEM: An Israeli delegation has visited Sudan to discuss normalizing relations following the Jewish state's US-brokered deals with UAE and Bahrain, local sources in Jerusalem said yesterday. The one-day return trip on Wednesday has heightened speculation Israel could soon strike a peace deal with the Arab-led African country with which it is technically at war.

US President Donald Trump, fighting for re-election on November 2, has pushed for further deals between Israel and majority Muslim states traditionally hostile to it. A chartered plane left Tel Aviv for the Sudanese capital on Wednesday, according to the specialized air traffic website *Flightradar24*. Israeli sources requesting anonymity said that an Israeli delegation indeed went to Sudan to discuss a normalization of relations, confirming Israeli media reports. The same day, US Secretary of State Mike Pompeo said he hoped Sudan would "quickly" recognize Israel.

That call came after Trump had pledged Monday to take Sudan soon off the US state sponsors of terrorism blacklist, a legacy of the era of fallen dictator Omar Al-Bashir. Israel's top-selling daily, *Yediot Aharonot*, reported Sudan's post-Bashir transitional joint civilian and military government had internally agreed to normalize ties. "According to reports that have been received in Jerusalem, the leadership in Khartoum has made a decision in principle to that effect," the newspaper said. It reported that "an agreement has been reached between the president of the Sovereign Council, General Abdel Fattah Al-Burhan, and Sudanese Prime Minister Abdalla Hamdok, who had been opposed up until now to normalizing relations with Israel." — AFP

International

Three-man US-Russian crew returns to Earth from ISS

American, Russian cosmonauts complete a 196-day mission

ALMATY: An American astronaut and two Russian cosmonauts touched down safely on the Kazakhstan steppe yesterday, completing a 196-day mission that began with the first launch under lockdown conditions. NASA astronaut Chris Cassidy and Russian cosmonauts Anatoly Ivanishin and Ivan Vagner landed around 150 kilometers southeast of the Kazakh city of Zhezkazgan at 0254 GMT, footage broadcast by the Russian space agency Roscosmos showed.

Footage from the landing site showed a seated Cassidy bumping elbows with one member of the crew at the recovery site and saluting another after they exited the Soyuz MS-16 spacecraft, before they were taken to medical tents ahead of their onward journeys to Moscow and Houston. "How are things?" asked Cassidy in Russian, smiling. The three-man crew had blasted off minus the unusual fanfare in April with around half the world's population living under national lockdowns imposed to contain

the spread of the coronavirus. They did not face questions from a press pack in Baikonur and were not waved off by family and friends—both time-honored traditions before the pandemic.

Their pre-flight quarantine was also intensified as they eschewed customary sightseeing trips to Moscow from their training base outside the Russian capital. Their mission also coincided with the arrival at the space station in May of the first astronauts to blast off from US soil for almost a decade. The mission, carried out by tycoon Elon Musk's SpaceX company as part of NASA's Commercial Crew Program, has helped fuel talk of a new "space race" between a number of countries.

But Russia's Roscosmos, which enjoyed a lucrative monopoly on travel to and from the space station from 2011, remains the fastest player in the game in terms of travel to and from the ISS. Robert Behnken and Doug Hurley's May journey to the space station and August return

to Earth in the SpaceX craft saw the pair spend the best part of two days in transit. Cassidy, Ivanishin and Vagner's touchdown on Thursday by contrast came less than three-and-a-half hours after undocking, while a three-person crew reached the ISS from Baikonur in just three hours and three minutes last week, setting a new absolute record.

Prior to returning from his third mission in space, former US Navy SEAL Cassidy, 50, tweeted a picture of blood samples that astronauts have to submit at various points in their mission, including just before undocking. "What is the price of a return ride back to Earth?...8 tubes of blood!! The 7 shown in this picture were taken in the morning to be placed in our deep freezer, and the 8th will be drawn just prior to undock for ground processing soon after landing," sudoku puzzle fan Cassidy wrote.

First-time-flyer Vagner was a rare Roscosmos presence on the micro-blogging platform,

where most NASA astronauts have a profile. "Mama, I'm coming home," the 35-year-old tweeted on Wednesday. Ivanishin, 51, is wrapping up his third mission, after NASA's Kathleen Rubins, with whom he launched to the ISS in 2016, arrived for a second stint aboard the station last Wednesday along with Sergey Ryzhikov and Sergey Kud-Sverchkov of Roscosmos.

The ISS has been a rare example of cooperation between Moscow and Washington. Members recently reported issues with the oxygen production system, a toilet and the oven for preparing food. But Roscosmos said in a statement on Tuesday that the issues had been "fully resolved by the crew". "All the systems of the station are working well and there is no danger to the crew or the ISS." Next month will mark the 20th anniversary of the orbital lab being permanently occupied by humans, but the station is expected to be decommissioned in the next decade due to structural fatigue.—AFP

American lawmakers urge US to boycott Saudi-hosted G20

RIYADH: Forty-five American lawmakers have urged the US government to boycott next month's G20 summit in Riyadh unless Saudi authorities address key human rights concerns, according to correspondence released Wednesday. The letter from US Congress members to Secretary of State Mike Pompeo comes after European lawmakers passed a resolution this month calling for the European Union to downgrade its attendance at the summit, also over human rights. The developments are a source of embarrassment for the kingdom, the current G20 president, as it gears up to host world leaders next month at what is widely seen as a crucial event for Saudi international diplomacy. Among a suite of demands, Congress members called on Riyadh to release jailed activists including several women, end its military campaign in neighboring Yemen and provide accountability for the 2018 murder of journalist Jamal Khashoggi in Istanbul.

"As the world's leading democracy and purveyor of human rights, our government should demand dramatic changes to Saudi Arabia's dismal record of human rights violations," said the letter, seen by AFP. "Should the Saudi government fail to take immediate steps to address this record, we should withdraw from the Saudi-led G20 summit and commit to making human rights reforms a condition of all future dealings with Saudi Arabia's government."

Jan Schakowsky and Ilhan Omar, Democratic members of the US House of Representatives, were among the 45 lawmakers who signed the letter, which was supported by advocacy group Freedom Forward. There was no immediate reaction from the Saudi government or Pompeo. The administration of US President Donald Trump is a key ally and supporter of Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman, Saudi Arabia's de facto ruler.—AFP

Nuclear weapons ban treaty nears coming into force

GENEVA: An international treaty banning nuclear weapons is on the verge of coming into force, campaigners said Wednesday, with the last few necessary ratifications expected within weeks. The Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons - which bans the use, development, production, testing, stationing, stockpiling and threat of use of such weapons - was adopted by the UN General Assembly in July 2017 with the approval of 122 countries.

Since then, 84 states have signed the treaty, which will come into force 90 days after 50 of those signatories ratify the document. The 75th anniversary of the nuclear bomb attacks on Nagasaki and Hiroshima, marked in August, has seen a wave of countries ratify in recent months. They include Nigeria, Malaysia, Ireland, Malta, and most recently Tuvalu on October 12, bringing the number up to 47.

A 48th country is expected to ratify in the coming days, with others thought to be on the brink of doing likewise within weeks. "This is a really big deal that the treaty is about to enter into force," said Beatrice Fihn, the executive director of the International Campaign to Abolish Nuclear Weapons (ICAN). "It could be in a matter of days. It's really quite imminent, we think." ICAN, a coalition of non-governmental organizations, won the 2017 Nobel Peace Prize for its key role in bringing the treaty to fruition.

'Historic milestone'

"That these countries have done this, despite the pandemic and enormous pressure from nuclear-armed states, is really quite impressive," Fihn told reporters at the United Nations in Geneva. "This would be a really historic milestone. This treaty will complete the bans on weapons of mass destruc-



TOULON: This undated handout picture shows new French navy nuclear attack submarine Suffren, a Barracuda class, during tests in Toulon's harbor. —AFP

tion. It will stand next to the ban on biological weapons and chemical weapons."

Thailand, Mexico, South Africa, Bangladesh, New Zealand, Vietnam and the Vatican are among the countries who have already ratified the treaty. The clutch of nuclear weapons-possessing states, including the United States, Britain, France, China and Russia, have not signed the treaty. However, campaigners hope that it coming into force will have the same impact as previous international treaties on landmines and cluster munitions, bringing a stigma to their stockpiling and use, and thereby a change in behavior even in countries that did not sign up.

Nuclear-armed states argue their arsenals serve as a deterrent and say they remain committed to the nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty, which seeks to prevent the spread of nuclear weapons. Fihn said the surge of ratifications around the 75th anniversary of the Hiroshima and Nagasaki attacks came with states keen to see the treaty implemented within the lifetime of the last remaining survivors. "They should see the day when nuclear weapons become banned," she said.—AFP

International

Nigeria's largest city under lock down; violence rages

African Union 'strongly condemns' violence

LAGOS: Shops were shuttered and streets empty yesterday as Nigeria's largest city Lagos was locked down under curfew after unrest flared following the shooting of protesters. Amnesty International said at least 12 people were killed by the Nigerian army and police in a brutal crackdown on protesters Tuesday that drew international condemnation. Vice President Yemi Osinbajo said his "heart goes out" to the victims of the shooting as well as policemen and others who have lost their lives in several days of turmoil in Africa's most populous country.

"The pain of these terrible events is palpable in our towns and cities, and some losses are irreplaceable, but we can and will get justice for all of them," a statement said. President Muhammadu Buhari has not yet directly commented on the shooting, drawing fierce criticism for his silence. Nigeria's army has dubbed as "fake news" reports that soldiers opened fire on demonstrators. Police Minister Muhammad Maigari Dingyadi told the BBC that troops were not ordered to open fire on protesters. "I cannot say who is involved in the shooting... definitely not the police. Soldiers have already spoken about this, they are denying their involvement," he said.

'Premeditated' act

Pictures and videos from the attack were widely shared on social media, unleashing a wave of anger at the authorities. Buildings including police stations and the National Port Authority were torched and clashes erupted in several locations on Wednesday. Smoke

could still be seen hanging over the sprawling city of 20 million people yesterday while schools and shops were shut under a round-the-clock curfew ordered by the authorities.

Demonstrations erupted in Nigeria on October 8 over brutality by the police's loathed Special Anti-Robbery Squad (SARS). The protests quickly spiraled into broader demands for change as promises of reform failed to stem the anger and violence flared. At least 56 people have died across the country since the demonstrations began, with about 38 killed nationwide on Tuesday alone, according to Amnesty.

The United Nations, European Union and Britain have all called for those responsible for the killings to be held responsible. The UN High Commissioner for Human Rights Michelle Bachelet said reports lights were turned off and surveillance cameras removed at the scene before the attack suggested it was "premeditated, planned and coordinated". Protests have been held in South Africa and London over the shooting, with a string of major celebrities throwing their weight behind the calls for justice.

AU condemns violence

Meanwhile, the African Union Commission chairman yesterday strongly condemned deadly violence in Nigeria's biggest city Lagos and called on all parties to "privilege dialogue". Moussa Faki Mahamat "strongly condemns the violence that erupted on 20 October 2020 during protests in Lagos, Nigeria that has resulted in multiple deaths

restaurants to takeaway only and extended a ban on visits between households. "It's devastating to see us locked down again... during our busiest line-up for the Christmas period," Dublin antique jeweler John Farrington told AFP this week. The novel coronavirus has killed at least 1,126,000 people since emerging in China late last year, according to a tally from official sources compiled by AFP. Global GDP is expected to contract 4.4 percent in 2020, the International Monetary Fund said.

Germany, once a European success story for its virus response, leapt to a record 11,287 new infections in 24 hours, soaring past the previous high of just over 7,800 set last Friday. Faced with the sharp rise, authorities have toughened anti-pandemic measures, such as banning large gatherings and making face masks compulsory on certain streets in Berlin. In a symbol of Germany's woes, Health Minister Jens Spahn - a chief ally of Chancellor Angela Merkel who has been praised for his calm stewardship during the pandemic - tested positive and went into home isolation. —AFP



LAGOS: A general view of smoke arising from the Ikoyi prison that is on fire in Lagos yesterday. Gunshots could be heard yesterday and smoke was seen billowing from a prison in central Lagos as fresh unrest rocked Nigeria's biggest city after the shooting of protesters. —AFP

and injuries", his office said in a statement distributed yesterday morning. "The Chairperson appeals to all political and social actors to reject the use of violence and respect human rights and the rule of law," the statement said.

At least 56 people have died across the country since the protests began on October 8, with about 38 killed nationwide on Tuesday alone, according to Amnesty. Human Rights Watch also corroborated reports that the Nigerian army had opened fire on protesters Tuesday in "a shooting spree". The use of lethal force by security forces drew interna-

tional condemnation, with the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights Michelle Bachelet saying reports suggested it could have been premeditated.

The Nigerian army has on Twitter called reports of soldiers firing on protesters "fake news". Faki's statement yesterday did not specifically denounce the security forces' actions. It said he welcomed Nigeria's decision to disband the police's loathed Special Anti-Robbery Squad (SARS). Anger over abuses committed by the unit erupted into widespread protests some two weeks ago that drew thousands into the streets. —Agencies

Ireland locks down for 2nd wave as Germany smashes daily record

DUBLIN: Ireland became the first European country to enter a second national lockdown and Germany's daily cases leapt to a record high as the second wave of coronavirus spread gloom across the continent yesterday. As a COVID-19 surge gripped European countries ahead of the onset of winter, Spain added to the list of disquieting statistics when it became the first country to pass a million cases. Many European authorities have been reluctant to reimpose harsh lockdown measures, after previous restrictions caused deep recessions and widespread bitterness. But Ireland's five million people have been ordered to stay at home for six weeks, with non-essential businesses urged to shut up shop.

Irish authorities have also imposed a strict five-kilometer travel limit, limited bars and

Oman's sultan approves plan to diversify revenue

DUBAI: Oman's sultan has approved a medium-term fiscal plan to make government finances sustainable, state media said yesterday, as the coronavirus crisis and low oil prices batter state coffers. The Gulf oil producer has long had plans to reform its economy, diversify revenues and introduce sensitive tax and subsidies reform, but they dragged under the late Sultan Qaboos, who died in January after half a century in power. His successor, Sultan Haitham, approved a 2020-2024

fiscal plan that included increasing government income from non-oil sectors, state media reported, citing orders from the Sultan.

Oman will also accelerate the establishment of a social security system for low-income citizens who may be affected by the government's drive to bring down the country's debt and cut state spending, one of the orders said. Haitham also ordered 371 million Omani rials (\$964 million) of unspecified development projects to be carried out across the country. Rated non-investment grade by all major credit agencies, Oman's debt climbed to around 60% of gross domestic product at the end of 2019 from less than 5% five years earlier. On Wednesday it raised \$2 billion in its first international bond sale since July 2019. —Reuters

International

China and Vatican renew historic deal on bishops

Pope defends civil unions for gay couples

BEIJING: A secretive 2018 agreement between Beijing and the Vatican was renewed yesterday, despite strident US condemnation and warnings from underground Chinese priests loyal to Rome that they have only become more marginalized since it was signed. The deal allows both Beijing and the Holy See a say in appointing bishops in an attempt to close a schism in China's 12-million-strong Catholic community.

Washington had put intense pressure on the Vatican to scrap the agreement, saying it has failed to shield Chinese Catholics from persecution. "After friendly consultations," both sides agreed to the extension "for two years", foreign ministry spokesman Zhao Lijian told reporters yesterday. "The two sides will maintain close communication and consultation, and continue to push forward the process of improving relations."

Newly communist China severed ties with the Holy See in 1951, forcing Catholics to choose between membership of the state-run Chinese Catholic Patriotic Association or non-sanctioned churches loyal to the Pope. The Communist Party is officially atheist and exercises strict control over all recognized religious institutions, including vetting sermons. Those that operate without the Communist Party's blessing claim to have been targeted by authorities in recent years, pointing to the demolition of underground churches, persecution of members and pressure on their clergy to switch sides.

While some have hailed the Beijing-Vatican deal as a pragmatic compromise, others fear that China's underground churches will become even more marginalized. "The situation has not improved at all," one underground priest in Jiangxi province told AFP recently. The priest, who withheld his name over security concerns, said he had been banned by the government from carrying out church duties. The renewal of the agreement, he said, would leave Catholics feeling "helpless and hopeless".

Progress or setback?

There was a potential sign of that pressure earlier this month when auxiliary bishop Vincenzo Guo

Xijin of the Mindong Diocese in Fujian province abruptly resigned. A person familiar with the matter told AFP Guo had resigned in protest after coming under pressure to join the state-run church, as the 2018 deal required bishops to do. Other underground figures, including Bishop Augustine Cui Tai, remain detained or under house arrest.

The deal's supporters argue that it was never meant to address all outstanding issues, but was an important first step and largely beneficial to Chinese Catholics. "We are content with the agreement," Cardinal Pietro Parolin, the Vatican's Secretary of State, told reporters Wednesday. "But of course, problems remain that the agreement was not intended to resolve," he said. The Vatican will be braced for an angry response from Washington less than two weeks before a US election in which America's large Christian population is being wooed by President Donald Trump. Earlier this month Secretary of State Mike Pompeo called on the Vatican to be "serious" in addressing religious persecution in China - unusually forceful language directed at the pope.

Defeat for the underground

Priests and dioceses in the Chinese state church did not respond to AFP interview requests. However, one of them, Paul Han Qingping of northern Hebei province, wrote a blog post in late September supporting a renewal of the agreement. "As the barriers... have been removed, bishops in China are now able to come together more often in collaboration and consultation in solving Church issues," he wrote, but admitted that some unofficial clergy remain resistant. In a key concession to the agreement, Pope Francis recognized eight bishops appointed by China without papal approval. At least two more former underground bishops were appointed with approval from both sides, and a handful of underground bishops joined the official church this year.

Civil unions for gays

In another development, Pope Francis defended

cluding from outside the United States.

Ratcliffe said both Iran and Russia seek to "to communicate false information to registered voters that they hope will cause confusion, sow chaos, and undermine confidence in American democracy." "These actions are desperate attempts by desperate adversaries," he said. The announcement came after registered Democratic voters reported receiving personally addressed emails in the name of the Proud Boys armed militia group, and from an internet domain linked to the Proud Boys.

A number of voters in Florida and other key states in the election battle between Republican President Donald Trump and Democrat Joe Biden said they had gotten the messages. "You will vote for Trump on election day or we will come after you," the emails said. "Change your party affiliation to Republican to let us know you received our message



ROME: Pope Francis (center), Ecumenical Patriarch of Constantinople Bartholomew I (right), Italy's President Sergio Mattarella (3rd left) and the Mayor of Rome Virginia Raggi (left), wearing face masks meet at the Basilica of Santa Maria in Aracoeli prior to an inter-religious ceremony for peace in Campidoglio Square, at Rome's Capitoline Hill. —AFP

the right of gay couples to enter into legally recognized civil unions in a documentary that premiered at the Rome Film Festival on Wednesday. "These are children of God, they have the right to a family," Francis says in the film, "Francesco" by Evgeny Afineevsky, speaking in Spanish.

"What we have to create is a law of civil union, they have the right to be legally protected. I have defended that," said Francis. But the former Jorge Bergoglio has always voiced opposition to gay marriage, saying that marriage should only be between a man and woman. "Since the beginning of the pontificate the Pope has spoken of respect for homosexuals and has been against their discrimination," Vatican expert Vania de Luca told Rainews. "The novelty today is that he defends as pope a law for civil unions."

'No judgments'

After becoming pope in 2013, Francis adopted an unprecedented welcoming tone towards homosexuals, launching his famous phrase, "Who am I to

and will comply. We will know which candidate you voted for," they said. "I would take this seriously if I were you," the message ends, adding the voter's address. "Good luck. Ratcliffe, with FBI Director Christopher Wray beside him, did not explain how the Russians and Iranians had obtained the voter information, or how the Russians might be using it.

'Undermine public confidence'

But US voter registration information is widely available, with some states allowing anyone to access it, while others restrict it to political parties. US intelligence has repeatedly warned that Russia, Iran, and China to a lesser extent had taken part in social media disinformation efforts aimed at influencing US voters. In 2016, US officials say, Russian President Vladimir Putin oversaw hacking and social media operations aimed at helping Trump to election vic-

judge?" and welcoming gay couples to the Vatican on several occasions. The two-hour documentary traces the seven years of his pontificate and his travels. Among the most moving moments of the film is the Pope's phone call to a gay couple, parents of three young children, in response to a letter they sent to him saying how ashamed they were to bring their children to their local parish. Francis invites them to continue to go to church regardless of the judgment of others. Chilean Juan Carlos Cruz, an activist against sex abuse in the church, accompanied the director to the film screening on Wednesday.

"When I met Pope Francis he told me... Juan, it is God who made you gay and he loves you anyway. God loves you and the Pope loves you too," says Cruz in the film. The Russian-born Afineevsky, who attended the Pope's general audience in the Vatican on Wednesday, was nominated for an Oscar and an Emmy in 2016 for "Winter of Fire" about the 2013-2014 protests in Ukraine. In 2018 he received three Emmy nominations for "Cries from Syria" about that country's civil war. —Agencies

tory over Democrat Hillary Clinton. Iran's alleged use of the Proud Boys name in emails came after Trump refused to distance himself, and appeared to encourage, the group, which has appeared at political rallies heavily armed, and menacing others.

In early October 13 men in Michigan, some of whom identified themselves with the group, were arrested for plotting to kidnap the state's Democratic governor "instigate a civil war". Wray stressed that US election systems remained safe. "We are not going to tolerate foreign interference in our elections or any criminal activity that threatens the sanctity of your vote or undermines public confidence in the outcome of the election," he said. "We've been working for years as a community to build resilience in our infrastructure and today that infrastructure remains resilient—you should be confident that your vote counts." —AFP

US: Iran, Russia 'obtained' voter registration info

WASHINGTON: Russian and Iran have both obtained US voter information and taken actions to influence public opinion ahead of the November 3 election, Director of National Intelligence John Ratcliffe announced Wednesday. Ratcliffe said Iran specifically had sent "spoofed" emails to Americans "designed to intimidate voters, incite social unrest, and damage President Trump." He said Iran had also distributed a video that implies that people could send in fraudulent ballots, in-

International

Iowa once embraced Trump, but could now help vote him out

The country's rural Midwest has become a symbol of Trump's troubles

NEWTON, US: Though she's a Democrat, Michelle Smith understood Donald Trump's popularity in 2016 in her home state of Iowa. She lost her job about 15 years ago at a factory for appliance manufacturer Maytag in the city of Newton. The plant eventually closed altogether in 2007, taking 2,000 jobs with it.

"I think people saw, 'Oh, he's not a politician. He's somebody new. He's a businessman. Let's give him a chance for economic development,'" said Smith. She says her situation has, however, not improved since the New York real estate mogul won the White House four years ago—and in fact may have worsened. "I have no more money than I had four years ago," said Smith, who now works in a call center and is head of the Democratic Party for Jasper County, which includes Newton.

"I can tell you that my (health) insurance cost more than it did four years ago."

If the polls are correct, Iowa, in the country's rural Midwest, has become a symbol of Trump's troubles as he seeks reelection on November 3. While Barack Obama won Jasper County in both 2008 and 2012, Trump touched a nerve here in the last election.

He won Jasper by 18 percentage points over his Democratic rival Hillary Clinton. But this time, polls show Trump neck-and-neck with former vice president Joe Biden in the state, putting it in the column of key battlegrounds expected to decide who will be

in the Oval Office come January.

'State is changing'

Many voters in Newton have cast their ballots early, and officials expect record numbers will do so in the end. Craig Elthof initially supported Senator Bernie Sanders for the Democratic Party's presidential nomination, but has since lined up behind Biden.

"The state is changing, and I do think, too, that we've had a chance to see four years of Trump in action," he said after casting his ballot. "And his record is not good. If you're paying attention, it's not good at all."

Republican voters however couldn't see it more differently, reflecting the deeply polarized state of the country. "I feel President Trump has done a good job with pretty much everything—the economy," said Keith Eckhart, a retiree who also voted early.

"There's a little question around the coronavirus, but I don't think Biden would have done anything different. In fact, I think he would have done a lot worse." Thad Nearmyer, head of Jasper's Republican Party, said it was time to move forward with an economic recovery following coronavirus closures—and that Trump is the person for the job. "The economy is a huge, huge concern," he said, even though "there's been a little bit of spread around" of coronavirus. — AFP



This combination of file pictures created on October 21, 2020, shows US President Donald Trump during the first presidential debate with Democratic Presidential candidate former Vice President Joe Biden at Case Western Reserve University and Cleveland Clinic in Cleveland, Ohio. — AFP

Obama warns against complacency over Biden poll lead

PHILADELPHIA: Former US president Barack Obama excoriated Donald Trump and warned on Wednesday against complacency despite favorable opinion polls during his first public rally in support of Democratic challenger Joe Biden ahead of the November 3 election.

At the drive-in rally in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, one of a handful of battleground states expected to decide the election, Obama lashed out at Trump's behavior and declared him "incapable of taking the job seriously." But he also issued a stark reminder of 2016, when opinion polls showed Hillary Clinton as the clear favorite—only for her and her supporters to be shocked by a Trump victory on election day.

"We can't be complacent. I don't care about the polls," the former two-term president told the rally outside a baseball stadium. "There were a whole bunch of polls last time. Didn't work out. Because a whole bunch of folks stayed at home. And got lazy and complacent. Not this time. Not in this election." He told supporters that too much was at stake to have four more years of Trump leading the nation, seeking to contrast his successor—a Republican real estate mogul and ex-reality TV star—with his former vice president. "This is not a reality show. This is reality," Obama said.

"And the rest of us have had to live with the consequences of him proving himself incapable of taking the job seriously." He pointed to Trump's running roughshod over previous norms, including his retweets of conspiracy theories, and accused him of



PHILADELPHIA: Former US President Barack Obama addresses Biden-Harris supporters during a drive-in rally in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania on Wednesday. — AFP

mishandling the US response to the coronavirus pandemic.

"Our democracy's not going to work if the people who are supposed to be our leaders lie every day and just make things up," he said. "And we just become numb to it."

Earlier, at a roundtable with Black community organizers in Philadelphia, he said "the pandemic would have been tough for any president, we haven't seen something like this for 100 years."

The coronavirus has killed over 220,000 people in the United States and seriously wounded the world's largest economy, prompting fierce criticism of the president's handling of the crisis.

"We can't afford another four years of this," Obama said. While Obama was in Pennsylvania, Trump visited North Carolina, another of the battleground states, where he riled up the crowd with popular campaign themes, such as his law-and-order platform. "If Biden wins, the flag-burning demonstrators in the street will be running your federal government," Trump told spectators gathered at a municipal airport in the city of Gastonia. — AFP

US election: What you need to know right now

WASHINGTON: President Donald Trump has a final shot at making his case for re-election before a vast audience of Americans when he faces off against challenger Joe Biden in the last televised debate before Election Day.

- Former President Barack Obama, stumping for Biden, made a scathing attack on Trump's record in office.

- US intelligence agencies say Iran and Russia have tried to interfere in the 2020 presidential election.

- Biden's plan to raise corporate taxes would have a modest impact on profits at the big U.S. banks and probably not before 2022, analysts say.

- Republicans scored legal victories on election rules when the Supreme Court allowed Alabama to ban curbside voting and an Iowa court upheld a rule making it harder to fix problems with absentee ballot requests less than two weeks before the election.

- Lawyers at Jones Day, a firm that has earned millions of dollars as outside counsel to Trump's re-election campaign, have donated nearly \$90,000 to Biden's campaign since last year compared to \$50 to Trump's campaign, according to Federal Election Commission data.

As Trump has pulled the United States inward under his "America First" presidency, China has had only halting success at capitalizing on a global leadership vacuum, presenting openings for a more internationalist Biden administration if he wins the White House. — Reuters

International

Nagorno-Karabakh peace hopes slim before Washington talks

Pompeo to host Armenian and Azeri ministers today

BAKU/YEREVAN: Hopes of ending nearly a month of bloodshed in the mountain enclave of Nagorno-Karabakh looked slim yesterday as Azeri and ethnic Armenian forces fought new battles on the eve of talks in Washington.

Plans for US Secretary of State Mike Pompeo to meet the foreign ministers of Azerbaijan and Armenia on Friday raised hopes this week that the two former Soviet republics would agree to end their deadliest fighting since the mid-1990s. But those hopes have been dented by the continued heavy fighting in and around Nagorno-Karabakh, a breakaway territory that is inside Azerbaijan but controlled by ethnic Armenians, and by angry rhetoric from both sides.

Hundreds of people have been killed since fighting flared on Sept. 27, raising fears of a wider war drawing in Turkey and Russia and increasing concern about the security of pipelines in Azerbaijan that carry Azeri gas and oil to world markets. Armenian Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan said on Wednesday he could see no diplomatic resolution of the long-running conflict at this stage.

In a transcript of comments to the Nikkei newspaper published yesterday, Azeri President Ilham Aliyev said the prospects of reaching a peace settlement were "very remote". Reiterating Azerbaijan's main condition for ending the fighting, Aliyev demanded promises that his country will be handed back control of Nagorno-Karabakh, which broke away as the Soviet Union collapsed.

"So our main objective at these discussions will be to find out whether the Armenian leadership is ready to liberate our territories or not, and if ready, then when?" he said. Armenians regard Nagorno-Karabakh as part of their historic homeland and accuse Azerbaijan of making a land grab in the recent fighting. Aliyev said he would not rule out "cultural autonomy" for ethnic Armenians in Nagorno-Karabakh but not say what he meant by this.

More fighting

Russia has brokered two ceasefires since Sept. 27 but neither has held. Azerbaijan reported fighting in several areas on Thursday, including territories near the line of contact that divides the sides. It also said Armenia had fired three ballistic missiles at three regions inside Azerbaijan but Armenia denied this. Armenia reported fighting in several areas, and Nagorno-Karabakh officials said the town of Martuni and nearby villages in the enclave had been shelled. Azeri forces, bolstered by weapons bought from Turkey, say they have made territorial gains in the latest fighting, though Nagorno-Karabakh says its forces have repeatedly repulsed attacks. Pompeo said on Wednesday he still hoped a diplomatic solution could be found as the United States, France and Russia press on with mediation efforts they have led for decades. He said the "right path forward is to cease the conflict, tell them to de-escalate, that every country should stay out". — Reuters



GANJA: A man walks among the debris of destroyed buildings hit by shelling during the ongoing military conflict between Armenia and Azerbaijan over the breakaway region of Nagorno-Karabakh, in a residential area of the city of Ganja, Azerbaijan, yesterday. — AFP

Biden supporters flock to Arizona to rally vote

PHOENIX: After losing her housekeeping job at a California hotel, Iris Acosta grabbed her most comfortable pair of walking shoes and headed to Arizona to drum up support for Joe Biden.

Acosta is part of a small army of union workers who have rushed to Arizona—a battleground state won by Donald Trump in 2016 but considered a toss-up this time around—in the hope of tilting the vote in favor of the veteran Democrat. Her union Unite Here Local 11 — which represents workers in hotels, airports, restaurants and sports arenas—endorsed Biden and encouraged about 100 Los Angeles area members to move temporarily to Phoenix to canvass for him.

While Biden is a sure bet in California, Arizona is a far harder prize for the former vice president to win. "We're here because we want this state to turn blue," said Acosta, who hails from Honduras.

For her, the November 3 election will not only decide the future of America, but also her own future, given her temporary immigration status which, like for many others, has been called into question by the Republican incumbent. Sporting a mask and face covering under a beating sun, the 54-year-old spoke with AFP as she crisscrossed a working class neighborhood of Phoenix, where the Latino vote could make the difference in tight races. No one answers the door at the first house or the second. One resident says she hasn't received her ballot yet, while another voter who identifies as a Republican says he is not sure which candidate he will back.

Acosta listens and hands over campaign flyers detailing Biden's policies on health issues and his promise to do a better job than Trump on managing the coronavirus crisis. — AFP

US welcomes Kyrgyzstan's detention of crime boss

BISHKEK: The United States yesterday welcomed Kyrgyzstan's detention of an alleged crime boss who Washington says is a major force in drug trafficking, after the Central Asian country's new government pledged to fight organized crime. Kyrgyzstan has launched a drive against organized crime after Sadyr Japarov took over as acting president last week following unrest, in a move analysts say is partly aimed at deflecting allegations that the new leadership had links to criminal groups. Kyrgyzstan's state committee for national security said Thursday that Kamchibek Kolbayev had been detained as part of an investigation into organized crime.

Kolbayev's group is "part of the broader Brothers' Circle transnational criminal organization composed of leaders and members of several Eurasian criminal groups", according to the US State Department. The State Department has offered a \$1 million reward for information that can help disrupt Kolbayev's network. In a statement Thursday, the US embassy said it welcomed Kolbayev's detention and added that it hoped Kyrgyz authorities would "prosecute and continue to detain this dangerous criminal leader in the interest of public safety".

Kyrgyzstan's state committee said its investigation was "aimed at obtaining details of the criminal activities of (Kolbayev) and related persons from the criminal space". A video released by the committee showed security officers armed with automatic weapons running into a high-end gym and detaining Kolbayev, who straightened the collar on his coat before he was handcuffed. The scenes were accompanied by dramatic music. — AFP

Indonesia activists push for probe into pastor shooting

JAKARTA: Indonesian activists called yesterday for deeper investigation into the killing of a Papuan pastor, a day after a top security official said a government fact-finding mission had found signs of possible involvement by state forces. Indonesia's military has denied allegations by church groups that it was behind last month's fatal shooting of pastor Yerima Zanambani, but a 14-day probe into the incident has indicated security forces may have played a part in the killing. "We want a legal, lawful follow-up that is clear going forward," Latifah Anum Siregar, director of the Democratic Alliance of Papua, told a news conference. "I'm worried the fact-finding team's results are the climax, and maybe the case will later be opaque."

Indonesia's chief security minister, Mahfud MD, on Wednesday said the report, which is non-binding, had been sent to police and the attorney general's office and would be resolved "according to law and without any favors". He said security forces may have had some involvement in the Pastor's death, but did not elaborate. "Information and facts that the team has gathered on the ground show an alleged involvement of state forces, even though it could also have been perpetrated by a third party," said Mahfud.

Military spokesman Colonel Gusti Nyoman Suriastawa in a statement said the military appreciated the findings and promised there would be no cover-up. The shooting occurred around the same time that two soldiers and a civilian were killed in the same area of the Intan Jaya region, incidents the probe found were perpetrated by armed Papuan groups. West Papua has been riven by separatist conflict since the former Dutch colony was incorporated into Indonesia, following a controversial United Nations referendum in 1969. — Reuters

International

India, US set for military pact on satellite data during Pompeo visit

Pompeo to visit Indonesia after spy plane rebuff

NEW DELHI: India is closing in on an agreement with the United States that will give it access to satellite data for better accuracy of missiles and drones, government and industry officials said. The two sides are expected to announce the pact during the visit next week of US Secretary of State Mike Pompeo and Defense Secretary Mark Esper for talks in New Delhi with Indian counterparts Subrahmanyam Jaishankar and Rajnath Singh.

US companies have sold India more than \$21 billion of weapons since 2007 and Washington has been urging the Indian government to sign agreements allowing for sharing of sensitive information and encrypted communications for better use of the high-end military equipment.

Prime Minister Narendra Modi's cabinet discussed the final draft of the Basic Exchange and Cooperation Agreement on Geospatial Cooperation on Wednesday, an Indian government source said. An accord would provide India with access to a range of topographical, nautical and aeronautical data, a defense industry source said.

It would also allow the United States to provide advanced navigational aids and avionics on US-supplied aircraft to India, the defense source said. "It is a foundational agreement, which the US has signed with many of its partners for greater interoperability," the

source said. India has traditionally been hesitant about getting drawn into a US-led security alliance. But tensions have risen dramatically this summer.

This week New Delhi agreed to invite Australia into next month's naval exercises scheduled with the United States and Japan. "In tandem, the moves signal a new level of strategic convergence between the two democracies and a break from India's 'non-aligned' past," said Jeff Smith, a South Asia expert at the Heritage Foundation, about the proposed pact. Already there is robust intelligence sharing between US and India, a second government official said.

Mike Pompeo will visit Indonesia next week, his first trip to the country since its leadership rejected a US proposal to host its spy planes. Pompeo will address an Islamic youth group conference on religion and civilization in Jakarta, Indonesia's foreign minister Retno Marsudi said yesterday, without providing further details of his itinerary. Earlier, Pompeo told reporters in Washington that he hoped to meet with Retno and Indonesia's President Joko Widodo, commonly known as Jokowi, on the trip. The visit comes amid an escalating US-China rivalry that is being vigorously contested in Southeast Asia, especially in the South China Sea, which China claims as almost entirely its own territory. The claim is opposed by many regional states, including Indonesia. — Reuters



WASHINGTON, DC: US Secretary of State Mike Pompeo puts on a facemask after a press conference at the State Department in Washington, DC, on Wednesday. — AFP

Children killed in Afghan air strike that hit mosque

KUNDUZ, Afghanistan: An air strike by the Afghan military that hit a mosque killed 11 children and a prayer leader, local authorities said yesterday, in an account disputed by the national government.

The assault in a village in the northeastern province of Takhar on Wednesday came amid clashes between suspected Taliban fighters and Afghan security forces in the area, according to provincial police spokesman Khalil Aseer. "The air strike was carried out when the victims were busy studying the Holy Koran," Aseer said, adding a prayer leader was killed alongside the 11 students. He said 14 people were wounded. Mohammad Jawad Hejri, the spokesman for the Takhar provincial governor, also said the strike had killed children.

But the ministry of defense—who confirmed the strike was carried out by the Afghan air force—denied it had left civilians dead. "Twelve Taliban including several of their commanders were killed," it said.

Afghanistan's Vice President Amrullah Saleh said news that children had died in a mosque "was baseless". "We have undeniable evidence that those who killed our se-

curity forces... were killed," he wrote on Facebook. "Those who spread rumors will be dealt with legally."

The ministry of defense said it had appointed a team to probe allegations of civilian casualties. The Afghan military has a fledgling air force and small attack planes capable of conducting close-air support for troops on the ground. Heavy fighting with the Taliban in Takhar since

Tuesday has left at least 25 security personnel dead. Despite joining peace talks with the Afghan government in Qatar last month, the Taliban have only increased violence in a bid to wield leverage in the negotiations.

The top US envoy to Afghanistan, Zalmay Khalilzad, said earlier this week that fighting is threatening the peace process. — AFP



KABUL: An Afghan Air Force helicopter flies over ahead of the arrival of Afghanistan's President Ashraf Ghani for the introduction of ministerial nominees at the Parliament in Kabul on Wednesday. — AFP

News in brief

UK gives \$63m for Rohingya

LONDON: Britain yesterday announced new funding for Rohingya refugees languishing in camps in Bangladesh after they fled ethnic violence in Myanmar, and urged other donors not to forget their plight at a UN conference. Foreign Secretary Dominic Raab outlined a further £47.5 million (\$63 million) in aid, both for the Rohingya and to help Bangladesh deal with the coronavirus pandemic and its frequent natural disasters. —AFP

US-Taiwan arms sale

BEIJING: China yesterday threatened to make a "legitimate and necessary" retaliation over the US sale of \$1 billion worth of missiles to Taiwan as Beijing becomes increasingly strident over its claims to the self-ruled island. The US State Department said on Wednesday it had approved the sale of 135 air-to-ground missiles to Taiwan in a move Taipei's defense ministry said would build its combat capabilities. —AFP

West Bengal COVID-19 cases

KOLKATA/MUMBAI: The Indian state of West Bengal reported its biggest daily tally of new COVID-19 infections as thousands of people thronged the streets for a major Hindu festival that began last week. India has seen a sharp drop in infections since a September peak, but experts have warned it could see a resurgence during Durga Puja this week, and Diwali, the festival of light, in mid-November. West Bengal's health ministry reported 4,069 new COVID-19 cases late on Wednesday. India currently has a total of 7.71 million cases, the second highest in the world. — Reuters

International

'CIA'-like street food vendors first on scene to feed Thai protesters

Cooking for democracy: Gatherings bring a food festival vibe

BANGKOK: With an intelligence network so good they have been compared to the CIA, Thai street vendors are often first on the scene at "guerilla" democracy protests in Bangkok, where they hawk sour meat and fishballs to a democracy-hungry crowd. After a government crackdown last week, protest groups have begun keeping the venues for their demonstrations demanding the resignation of Premier Prayut Chan-O-Cha secret until the last minute, in a bid to outsmart authorities.

But protesters have quickly noticed that they are often second on the scene, behind food vendors setting up their carts and readying themselves for a busy night of brisk sales. Meatball seller Rattapol Sukpa says he stays ahead of the curve by monitoring Facebook for hints of the latest locations, and is in constant contact with other vendors who tip each other off.

"My earnings were good before, but selling at the protest sites, you'd sell out faster than usual," the 19-year-old told AFP as he set up near Victory Monument. Business has been booming since the protest movement kicked off in July, with the vendors now a regular feature on the sidelines.

A post calling on people to come and rally at a new protest venue on Tuesday carried a picture of a food cart with the caption "Let's send the CIA there first". The bonanza has also given Rattapol a better work-life balance, he said, enabling him to sell out his entire cart by 8 pm instead of the usual midnight closing time. Protesters are calling for serious changes to Thailand's status quo—an overhaul of Prayut's administration, a rewrite to the military-scripted constitution and reforms to the kingdom's unassailable monarchy.

But their gatherings also bring a food festival

vibe. Sour meat and rice sausage balls, a delicacy of Thailand's northeast provinces, hang like beaded necklaces from a street vendor's push cart, ready to be fried up and served with cabbage in plastic bags. Also on the menu are hotdogs, soups, cold drinks, pickled fruits and satay sticks.

Cooking for democracy

Some vendors have their cooking stations attached to their motorbikes, making it easier to high-tail to the rally zones. Selling food to captive crowds often numbering in the tens of thousands is increasingly lucrative, said Anucha Noipan, a fried chicken vendor who used to make \$97 a day.

"But since I've started selling at the protest sites, I have doubled my income to about 6,000 baht (\$192) a day," the 21-year-old said. New to the scene after leaving a job as a rubber farmer, Anucha says he agrees with the movement's demands and wouldn't sell his crispy fried chicken at rival rallies fronted by royalist supporters. "I do not think I have the same point of view on politics with the Yellow Shirts," he said, referring to a term used for the pro-monarchy bloc.

Tensions ratcheted last week, with police deploying water cannons against protesters in Bangkok's central shopping district, drawing widespread condemnation from Thai society as images of the attack pinged across social media. As his chicken thighs sizzle in a frying pan, Nattapol Saingarm said he is conscious of the risks of doing business in such a dicey environment. But the economy's freefall in the face of a coronavirus pandemic has left him without a choice. "I used to be scared" of a police crackdown, he told AFP. "But I've been coming every day so I've gotten used to it." — AFP

People's Republic of China and the Chinese Communist Party. "The United States is publicly recognizing that reality through these designations," she said. The six organizations newly designated as foreign missions are Yicai Global, Jiefang Daily, Xinmin Evening News, Social Sciences in China Press, Beijing Review and Economic Daily.

The State Department earlier enforced rules on nine better-known outlets including the Xinhua news agency and China Global Television Network. China has denounced the regulations and retaliated by expelling US citizens who work for major news organizations including The New York Times, The Washington Post and The Wall Street Journal. China's foreign ministry on Thursday slammed the latest moves on its US-based media as "unreasonable actions" that were "based on a Cold War mentality and ideological bias." "China will make a legitimate and necessary response to this," ministry spokesman Zhao Lijian said at a regular press briefing.

Some media rights advocates, while accepting that Chinese outlets are beholden to the state, have voiced unease about the US measures, saying that they give Beijing a pretext to kick out journalists who have done valuable investigative work on human rights and the origins of COVID-19. — AFP



BANGKOK: Grilled sausages, hotdogs, soups, cold drinks, pickled fruits and satay sticks are just some of the snacks on the menu. — AFP

US tightens rules on more Chinese media outlets

WASHINGTON: The United States on Wednesday tightened rules on six more Chinese media organizations, saying that they are propaganda outlets that answer to the state. The fresh move against Chinese media was met with anger in Beijing, which said it would take "necessary" countermeasures, without specifying which US outlets it might target inside its territory. It was the third round of US designations of Chinese outlets as "foreign missions," which requires them to report details on their US-based staff and real estate transactions to the State Department.

US Secretary of State Mike Pompeo told a news conference Wednesday that the affected outlets will face no restrictions on their reporting. "While free media around the world are beholden to the truth, PRC media are beholden to the CCP," State Department spokeswoman Morgan Ortogus said, referring to the

Australian police probe Vatican cash transfer in Pell case

SYDNEY: Australian police are investigating allegations a large amount of money was transferred to Australia by a Vatican rival of Cardinal George Pell in an apparent bid to help convict him of child sex abuse. An Italian newspaper earlier reported that 700,000 euros (US\$830,000) was transferred to Australia to secure witnesses against Pell in his criminal trial.

An Australian Federal Police spokeswoman said aspects related to the allegations had also been referred to the anti-corruption watchdog in the state of Victoria, where Pell worked, without elaborating.



Cardinal George Pell leaves HM Prison Barwon in Geelong, Australia. — Reuters

Italian broadsheet Corriere della Sera reported this month that Pell's Vatican rival Giovanni Angelo Becciu was allegedly behind a plot to smear the Australian cardinal.

Becciu—who was forced to resign by the pope last month following accusations of embezzlement and nepotism—vehemently denied the claim. It was not clear from the report who may have benefited from the alleged payments. The boss of Australia's financial intelligence agency AUSTRAC recently confirmed the organization had also looked into the claims and handed information on to police.

"I can confirm AUSTRAC has looked into the matter and we've provided information to the AFP (Australian Federal Police) and to Victoria Police," AUSTRAC chief executive Nicole Rose told a Senate committee in Canberra. Police were now "undertaking a review" of information given to them by the agency, an Australian Federal Police spokeswoman told AFP on Wednesday.

Pell was convicted in December 2018 of sexually abusing two choirboys when he was the archbishop of Melbourne. He strenuously denied the charges and the High Court in Australia overturned his conviction in April this year after hearing his second appeal. The cardinal is still facing a civil suit brought by the father of one choirboy who died in 2014. — AFP

Lifestyle

Friday Times

FRIDAY, OCTOBER 23, 2020

www.kuwaittimes.net

Picture of a coronavirus mask and suit seen on a mannequin at a retail store selling Halloween merchandise at Sonora market in Mexico City. — AFP

Scientists find secret to 'uncrushable' bug's strength

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Artist and director Robin Frohardt poses at The Plastic Bag Store, a public art installation and immersive film by Robin Frohardt in Times Square on Wednesday in New York. —AFP photos



A man walks by the The Plastic Bag Store, a public art installation and immersive film by artist and director Robin Frohardt in Times Square.

Grocery store made entirely of plastic



Some of the art is seen on display at The Plastic Bag Store.

In between the flashing lights, restaurants and retail stores that are iconic to Times Square, New Yorkers will soon be able to experience a new attraction. At first glance, it may look like a regular grocery store, but every single item in “The Plastic Bag Store” is made from - you guessed it - plastic. From the vegetables to the deli meats, the store, which is located at 20 Times Square, is fully stocked with items made from discarded, single-use plastics. Attendees will experience plenty of surprises such as hidden rooms, a transforming set and a short film. The exhibit is the brainchild of Brooklyn-based artist Robin Frohardt and is presented by Times Square Arts.

“The Plastic Bag Store’ is a visually rich, tactile, and humorous experience that hopefully encourages a different way of thinking about the foreverness of plastic, the permanence of the disposable and that there is no ‘away’ when we throw something out,” said Frohardt. “It is my attempt to make something authentic and human from that which is mass-produced. There is great humor to be found in the pitfalls of capitalism and I find that humor and satire can be powerful tools for social criticism, especially with issues that feel too sad and overwhelming to confront directly.”

Frohardt filled the store’s shelves with nearly 10,000 pieces of single-use plastic items, which she collected over the course of many years from friends, her building and things she found on the street. According to the Center of Biological Diversity, Americans use around 100 billion plastic bags a year, and it was this excessive use that prompted Frohardt to draw attention to the problem. “I got the idea just in a regular grocery store watching someone bag and double bag and triple bag all of my groceries that we’re already inside of bags. It just struck

me as incredibly absurd how much plastic packaging is being used,” said Frohardt, who spoke to CBS News from a room decorated with plastic bags.

“Most of this single-use plastic is designed for its convenience. And so, you use it for only seconds, and then you throw it away. So it’s out of sight out of mind. But because it doesn’t decompose, it doesn’t really go anywhere. It’s still here, it’s still somewhere. So that little red stir stick you stirred creamer into your coffee in a bank in 1995 is possibly floating out in the ocean somewhere,” said Frohardt. “So I just kind of wanted to, instead of throwing all this stuff away, just collect it and keep it in one place and sort of give people a sense of how much waste there is.”

The exhibit’s opening coincides with New York’s ban on single-use plastic bags, which takes effect Monday. The order had been delayed due to the coronavirus pandemic. Seven other states across the nation have already banned single-use plastic bags, but Frohardt said more needs to be done.

“A lot of the solutions are going to have to come on a policy level, and it’s going to have to come from the people who are producing the plastic. But they’re not going to make those changes until there’s enough public outrage,” said Frohardt, who plans to travel with the exhibit in the future. “And I think that that’s growing, I think people are starting to understand more and more. It’s not that hard to imagine a world without plastic, because we did it for thousands of years.” “The Plastic Bag Store” will open from October 22 to November 7. While you can’t purchase any of the items on display, the free exhibit requires advance reservations.

—www.cbsnews.com

Lifestyle | Features

Banksy's take on Monet masterpiece sells for £7.6 million

An oil painting by British street artist Banksy parodying a Claude Monet masterpiece sold in London on Wednesday for £7.6 million, the second highest price at auction for the mysterious artist. The oil on canvas work, "Show Me the Monet", a modern take on Monet's impressionist classic "The Water-Lily Pond", sold for £7,551,600 (\$9.8 mn, 8.4 mn euros) at Sotheby's following a bidding battle. "The hammer came down after five determined collectors battled for nearly nine minutes to drive the final price beyond its estimate of £3,000,000-5,000,000 to become the second highest price for the artist at auction," Sotheby's said.

The sale comes a year after a Banksy painting depicting the British parliament populated by chimpanzees smashed the record for the street artist by fetching nearly £9.9 million. On that occasion the 2009 work entitled "Devolved Parliament" attracted a 13-minute battle between 10 different bidders. "Show Me the Monet" was created in 2005, as part of a collection called "The Crude Oils" and had first been shown publicly in only Banksy's second gallery exhibition. The painting transforms Monet's masterpiece depicting a Japanese-style

bridge in his famous garden at Giverny into a modern-day fly-tipping spot. Instead of an idyllic lily pond, the composition shows discarded shopping trolleys and a fluorescent orange traffic cone floating in the water beneath the bridge.

"Ever prescient as a voice of protest and social dissent, here Banksy shines a light on society's disregard for the environment in favor of the wasteful excesses of consumerism," said Alex Branczik, Sotheby's European Head of Contemporary Art. "Recent years have seen seminal Banksys come to auction, but this is one of his strongest, and most iconic, to appear yet," he added. Banksy has become a household name since the turn of the century, after his iconic graffiti paintings began to appear overnight on buildings and at sites around the world. The artist's identity remains shrouded in mystery even as his works have begun to attract increasingly high sums at auction. Meanwhile he continues to use his art in stunts that generate huge publicity. In 2018 his "Girl With The Balloon" partially shredded itself as the hammer came down at Sotheby's, becoming the retitled "Love Is In The Bin". —AFP



A gallery worker poses with an artwork entitled *Show me the Monet* by British street artist Banksy during a photo call for Major Contemporary Art Auction at Sotheby's Galleries in central London. —AFP



Dubbed "Farmers' dinner in the open air", the picture sold Wednesday represents a village scene from the early 17th Century.

Rare Brueghel the Younger painting sold in Belgium

A Belgian auction house said Wednesday it had sold a painting by Flemish renaissance artist Brueghel the Younger, marking a rare home-territory transaction for the master. The work by the painter born in Brussels in 1564 was sold for 280,000 euros (\$332,000) after its owners passed away, the Legia Auction house said. Experts say that fewer than 10 of Brueghel the Younger's paintings change hands each year around the world—almost never in his home country. Dubbed "Farmers' dinner in the open air", the picture sold Wednesday represents a village scene from the early 17th Century. It was found in a chateau near Huy in Wallonia as the deceased owners' estate was being tallied up.

The heirs—a total of eight children—had no idea that the family art collection passed down through at least three generations included such a renowned painter, Legia founder Vincent de Lange told AFP. "They themselves had

no idea how this picture came to be there, because it goes back to the time of their great-grandparents," he said. "The painting was in a sort of storeroom adjoining the house, out of the light and in a fairly constant temperature, so it's been very well preserved," de Lange added. Just two of the children are taking on the chateau, but all agreed to sell the Brueghel artwork through an auction house when its value was estimated at between 300,000 and 400,000 euros.

De Lange blamed the "Covid effect" for the final price falling short of that valuation Wednesday, with only one online bidder expressing interest. Pieter Brueghel the Younger (1564-1637) painted many festive scenes of village and country life. He was the eldest son of Pieter Brueghel the Elder (1525-1569), considered one of the great masters of the Flemish school alongside Jan van Eyck, Jerome Bosch and Pierre Paul Rubens. —AFP

Magician and debunker of the paranormal James Randi dies

Escape artist and magician James Randi, who spent decades investigating and debunking faith healers, mind readers, psychics and other fraudsters and charlatans who claimed paranormal powers has died, his foundation said. He was 92. "We are very sad to say that James Randi passed away yesterday, due to age-related causes. He had an Amazing life. We will miss him," the James Randi Educational Foundation said in a brief statement. Born Randall Zwing in Toronto, Canada, in 1928, Randi was a child prodigy with an IQ of 168 and interested in magic from a young age, The Washington Post said.

From the 1940s he worked as a stage magician and escape artist, eventually calling himself "The Amazing Randi". As an escapologist he had held two Guinness World Records—for beating Harry Houdini's time for being sealed in an underwater coffin, one hour and 44 minutes, and for being encased in a block of ice for 55 minutes. While he enjoyed amazing audiences with his feats of escapology and sleight of hand, Randi had no time for so-called psychics and faith healers, exposing numerous fraudsters with his inside knowledge of a magician's tricks. As public fascination with the paranormal grew in the 1970s, Randi, along with sci-fi writer Isaac Asimov and astronomer Carl Sagan, co-founded what is now known as the Committee for Skeptical Inquiry to investigate claims of paranormal phenomena and promote scientific inquiry.

One of his most famous targets was Israeli self-professed psychic Uri Geller, who claimed to be able to bend spoons with the power of his mind. In 1973 Johnny Carson invited Geller on "The Tonight Show" and asked him to demonstrate his powers on a range of props but the flustered Geller was unable to, claiming he "didn't feel strong." Ahead of the show, the skeptical Carson, who had been a magician himself, had asked Randi for advice to expose any trickery. "I told them to provide their own props and not to let Geller or his people anywhere near them," Randi said.



James Randi in front of a painting done by his partner, the artist Jose Alvarez. —Jeff Minton for The New York Times

I'm a charlatan'

On a radio show in 1964 Randi had offered \$1,000 to anyone who could show scientific evidence of paranormal powers. The sum grew over the years and through his James Randi Educational Foundation, the debunker offered \$1 million to anyone who could demonstrate evidence of paranormal abilities under scientific scrutiny. "The difference between them and me," Randi told The New York Times in July 1981, "is that I admit that I'm a charlatan. They don't. I don't have time for things that go bump in the night."

In 1980s Randi also famously exposed so-called faith healer Peter Popoff, showing that the televangelist was secretly using a radio earpiece to receive specific information about members of the congregation and their illnesses which he then claimed was revealed to him by God. Fellow magicians and skeptics paid tribute to Randi. "My inspiration, my hero, my mentor, my friend. I will talk to him the rest of my life and my memory of him will answer," illusionist Penn Jillette, of Penn and Teller, said on Twitter, with a picture of himself with the bushy-bearded Randi.

"At some personal risk he bravely unveiled psychic and clairvoyant con-artists who claim mystical powers in order to scam the public. He did it with style, grace & humor," theoretical physicist Lawrence Krauss said on Twitter. "We've lost one of the greats. He left the world better than he found it," said Bill Nye, "The Science Guy." Randi wrote several books debunking paranormal phenomena and other hoaxes. —AFP

Lifestyle | Features

Scientists find secret to 'uncrushable' bug's strength

Looking like it was forged in apocalyptic fires, the diabolical ironclad beetle has a formidable reputation for being able to withstand being stabbed or run over by a car. Now scientists have found a jigsaw-like mechanism in their exoskeletons that helps the little creature tolerate forces up to 39,000 times its own body weight. Their discovery could have implications for engineering and robotics, experts say, and even challenge the position of cockroaches as models of insect indestructibility. The beetle, which no longer has its ancestors' ability to fly away from predators, has developed crush-resistant exoskeletal forewings-called elytra-as a form of protection, according to the new study published in the journal *Nature*.

The beetle, which is roughly two centimeters (just under an inch) long, is an oak-dwelling fungivore primarily residing on the western coast of North America. In spite of its ferocious name, it tends to scuttle into a hiding place or play dead when attacked, helped by its rough textured, craggy black body that gives it the appearance of a small rock. "Beyond feigning death, this beetle has a remarkable ability to withstand crushing and piercing strikes from predators, and even the occasional automobile," the study said. It said they are so tough that entomologists often bend the steel pins they use when they try to mount the beetles in display cases. Scientists from the United States and Japan looked at the structure of the beetle's elytra, which allow it to withstand forces of up to 149 newtons-approximately 39,000 times its body

weight. They found was significantly more than other similar beetles could tolerate.

'Compressible robots'

Using advanced imaging techniques, the researchers saw that the beetle has a series of interlocked jigsaw-shaped joints in its elytra and found that the shape of these blades and their laminated microstructure acted to toughen the exoskeleton. They concluded that the strong yet flexible structure allows the beetles to hide under rocks or contort themselves into tight spaces in tree bark for shelter, bearing extra weight without damaging their internal organs. The researchers then used 3D printing and simulations to investigate whether this geometric structure could be used as a mechanical fastener for joining different materials-such as plastics and metal-similar to that required in turbines in the aerospace industry.

The study found that these diabolical ironclad beetle-inspired designs provided enhanced strength and significantly increased toughness compared to a commonly used engineering joint. Po-Yu Chen, in the Department of Materials Science and Engineering at Taiwan's National Tsing Hua University, said the weight the insect was able to withstand was roughly 10 times higher than the biting forces generated by potential predators. "Cockroaches have a similar shape-changing ability, which has inspired the design of a compressible robot that can squeeze into, and move within, tight

'Uncrushable'

Diabolical ironclad beetle
Phloeodes diabolicus

Defence:

- Plays dead
- Tries to look like a small rock
- Virtually uncrushable!

Impact and crush-resistant elytra (hardened forewings)

Can survive forces up to 149 newtons, or approximately 39,000 times its bodyweight!

Habitat:
Oak-dwelling fungivore
Western coast of North America

Found under the bark of hardwood and coniferous trees



Known to survive being driven over by a vehicle

Source: Rivera et al, *Nature.com*, Oct 21/bugguide.net AFP

spaces. Such robots could be used to search for survivors in collapsed buildings after disasters," he said in a commentary in *Nature*. Po-Yu Chen, who was not connected to the research, said more research was needed into the structure's potential engineering uses, but said the diabolical ironclad beetle "might now inspire new designs for compressible robots, or for armored vehicles". "And the authors' work demonstrates that you should never underestimate the capabilities of insects," he added. — AFP

Bollywood star Sanjay Dutt says 'victorious' in cancer fight



Sanjay Dutt

Sanjay Dutt, one of Bollywood's top stars, said Wednesday he had emerged "victorious" after being diagnosed with cancer earlier this year. "Today, on the occasion of my kids' birthday, I am happy to come out victorious from this battle and be able to give them the best gift I can-the health and well-being of our family", Dutt said on Instagram. "My heart is filled with gratitude as I share this news with all of you today," the 61-year-old star said, one week after confirming the diagnosis. He gave no other details of his treatment however. In August, Dutt said he was "taking a short break for some medical treatment", triggering weeks of media speculation. The actor, nicknamed "Deadly Dutt", is one of Bollywood's most bankable and most controversial names.

Dutt shot to fame in a string of 1980s action movies in which he performed his own stunts. But the star also struggled with substance abuse, including heroin and cocaine, said to have been sparked by the pain of losing his mother, Indian screen icon Nargis Dutt, to cancer. He returned to make more hits in the late 1980s and early 1990s including "Jeete Hain Shaan Se" ("We Live with Style"), "Saajan" ("Beloved") and "Khal Nayak" ("Villain"). His life took a dramatic turn when he was arrested following the Mumbai bombings in March 1993 that killed 257 people. — AFP

Foods of the future set to green taste buds

Biodegradable chewing-gum, a chick-pea dessert and drinks made from cocoa shells were all singled out for recognition by a food fair focused on ecology and affordability this year. Although the SIAL international food fair had to be cancelled because of the coronavirus pandemic, it did judge and award trophies for innovative products as it has for more than 50 years. A sector often accused of offering poor quality food, loaded with fats, sugar or genetically-modified ingredients, is warming to eco-responsible social trends. Of the 500 new products tested-from black garlic to meat-like patties-SIAL jury was impressed by products rich in vegetables that were "simple" and "clear", and better for your health with fewer additives, less transformation, and developed according to ethical, environmental and social values.

The gold medal for innovation went to a frozen gnocchii by the Italian company Bocon that contained 70 percent vegetables and had a succinct list of ingredients: spinach and spirulina along with peas and green tea. A French company, Triumph, won the bronze medal for its vegan chewing gum that has no sugar or aspartame and breaks down within three weeks, good news for those who clean school benches and movie theatre seats. It is made with natural gum from the sapotillier tree. As far as packaging goes however, the environmental transition has slowed considerably. The culprit is plastic, which has made a strong comeback owing to consumer fears stemming from the Covid-19 pandemic. But a trend towards using second-tier food products with new or strong tastes has helped to fight wastage. Biscuits made with brewers' spent grain are gaining ground, for example. And the Swiss firm Koko Joo won the start-up prize for a non-alcoholic beverage made with cocoa bean shells. — AFP



In this file photo US musician Keith Jarrett applauds his fans at the end of a jazz concert "Piano solo" at La Fenice theater in Venice as part of the Veneto Jazz 2006 event. — AFP

Jazz pianist Keith Jarrett unlikely to perform again after strokes

One of the world's most vaunted jazz and classical pianists, Keith Jarrett, revealed Wednesday he likely won't perform publicly again after a series of strokes. The 75-year-old whose "Kohn Concert" album is among the best-selling piano records ever-told *The New York Times* that two strokes in 2018 temporarily paralyzed him. "My left side is still partially paralyzed," he said. "I'm able to try to walk with a cane, but it took a long time for that-took a year or more." Today the pianist can only play with one hand. "When I hear two-handed piano music, it's very frustrating, in a physical way," Jarrett said. "If I even hear Schubert, or something played softly, that's enough for me. Because I know that I couldn't do that. And I'm not expected to recover that."

"The most I'm expected to recover in my left hand is possibly the ability to hold a cup in it." The announcement shocked the music world, which for decades has counted Jarrett among its most illustrious and groundbreaking artists in jazz and classical performance and composition. Born in Allentown, Pennsylvania, Jarrett was a prodigy, beginning piano lessons before his third birthday. In 1964 he moved to New York where he played with the drummer Art Blakey, later jamming with legends including Miles Davis. — AFP

Borat preys on Giuliani and Trump fans in outrageous sequel

Borat is back—and the fictional Kazakh journalist's new film spells bad news for Holocaust deniers, Donald Trump supporters and the president's personal lawyer Rudy Giuliani. "Borat Subsequent Moviefilm," out today on Amazon Prime, is the sequel to British comedian Sacha Baron Cohen's 2006 smash hit mockumentary, which grossed \$260 million, earned an Oscar nomination and spawned endless poorly punctuated catchphrases. While the plot is under wraps, word of Baron Cohen's latest outrageous ambushes on unsuspecting participants has spread like



In this file photo a bus stop ad on 5th Avenue for the upcoming movie "Borat 2," featuring actor Sacha Baron Cohen, ahead of its release on October 23. — AFP

wildfire, with Giuliani issuing an angry denial Wednesday after being tricked into a fake hotel room "interview" with an attractive and flirtatious young woman.

In the film, the encounter appears to leave the 76-year-old former New York mayor in a highly compromising situation, caught quite literally with his hands down his pants in the bedroom. Giuliani said Wednesday the scene was "a complete fabrication." "I was tucking in my shirt after taking off the recording equipment. At no time before, during, or after the interview was I ever inap-

propriate," he tweeted. "If Sacha Baron Cohen implies otherwise he is a stone-cold liar."

Filmed in secret this summer as the United States' coronavirus lockdown eased, the follow-up movie again sees Baron Cohen hoodwink members of the US public and politicians via his bumbling and highly offensive reporter alter-ego. Giuliani, a close Trump ally who introduced the president's speech to accept his party nomination this August, told the New York Post he had thought the hotel meeting was a serious interview about the Trump administration's response to the Covid-19 pandemic. "I only later realized it must have been Sacha Baron Cohen. I thought about all the people he previously fooled and I felt good about myself because he didn't get me," Giuliani told the publication, adding he was a "fan of some of his movies."

He is far from the only Republican target left red-faced by the movie. Baron Cohen described in a recent TIME op-ed how he feared for his life after crashing a gun-rights rally in Washington state for the movie. The film's loose premise sees Borat-disgraced by the first film's events—offered a chance to redeem himself and his country by presenting a gift to Vice President Mike Pence, who also appears briefly in the movie.

'We salute Trump'

A viral marketing campaign is well underway, including a parody Kazakhstan government Twitter account with messages including "We salute Trump for crush COVID given to him by Democrats" and congratulating "Vice Pussygrabber Mikhael Pence" on his debate performance. Baron Cohen appeared in character Monday on Jimmy Kimmel's late night show, grilling the comedian with a "normal Kazakh plague questionnaire" before conducting an unorthodox physical exam on his host for coronavirus. While Kimmel was in on the gag, many of Baron Cohen's victims in the movie are once again unwitting members of the public. Multiple subjects of the original including a pair of brash, drunken college students sued the filmmakers for conning them into appearing in the movie. — AFP

Paul McCartney to release new lockdown album

British pop legend Paul McCartney revealed Wednesday he will release the third in a trilogy of self-titled solo albums this year, after resurrecting unfinished music during the coronavirus lockdown. The former Beatle's latest record "McCartney III", which will be unveiled on December 11, follows months of work at his home studio in Sussex in southern England on previously started and new songs. It has all been written, produced and performed by McCartney, who said he hadn't been planning to release an album in 2020 until the pandemic forced him to stay at home for months. "I had some stuff I'd worked on over the years but sometimes time would run out and it would be left half-finished so I started thinking about what I had," McCartney said, in comments published by Britain's Press Association news agency.

"Each day I'd start recording with the instrument I wrote the song on and then gradually layer it all up, it was a lot of fun," the 78-year-old McCartney added. "It was about making music for yourself rather than making music that has to do a job. So, I just did stuff I fancied doing. I had no idea this would end up as an album." Its release coincides with the 50th anniversary of his first self-titled solo endeavour, released as the "Fab Four" went their separate ways in 1970. A follow-up, "McCartney II", came a decade later. The latest collection of tracks was mostly built from



Paul McCartney

live takes of McCartney on vocals and guitar or piano, before overdubbing with his bass playing and drumming, according to PA. It said McCartney had returned to an unreleased track from the early 1990s, "When Winter Comes", which was co-produced by The Beatles' late producer George Martin.

Pictures for the album were shot by McCartney's daughter, the photographer Mary McCartney, with additional images by his nephew Sonny McCartney and some that he took himself on his phone. Keeping the photography in the family mirrors how the pop icon illustrated earlier solo albums, with his late wife Linda McCartney shooting the artwork for "McCartney II". Linda also took many of the photos displayed on the gatefold cover of the original 1970 "McCartney" album. — AFP



Spike Lee

Academy holds first virtual ceremony to honor young filmmakers

The Oscar-awarding Academy hosted its first ever virtual award ceremony Wednesday, with Spike Lee among those presenting honors to pandemic-era student filmmakers. The Student Academy Awards are a key program of the Hollywood film industry's top body, which has already delayed next year's Oscars as speculation builds that the glitzy main ceremony may also take place remotely. "I'm hopeful, as we all are, that this will also be the last virtual Student Academy Awards," said Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences president David Rubin, signaling desire that the industry can soon return to normal.

"Just as inflection points like the Cold War and 9/11 shaped the perspective of past generations of filmmakers from Stanley Kramer to Kathryn Bigelow, 2020 — a year like no other—will no doubt forever influence what your generation sees through the camera lens." Students honored at the online ceremony described how lockdowns around the world had affected their finishing touches to movies shot as part of their academic programs. "I did change the sound of what my film would have been," said Pilar Garcia-Fernandezesma, who won the top animation prize for her film "Ciervo" after moving back in with her parents. "I ended up putting flute in my film, when I probably wouldn't have done, because I had access to my middle school flute lying around in my bedroom."

Allison Waite, honored for her documentary about a Black teen shot dead in a Los Angeles convenience store, said despite the challenges of the pandemic, "being silent at this moment was not productive." "With things happening in the US, with George Floyd and Breonna Taylor, there's so much discussion to be had," she said. Past student winners include Lee, "Back To The Future" filmmaker Robert Zemeckis and upcoming 007 director Cary Fukunaga. A record 13 of the 18 winners were women in this year's version of the awards, which were first held in 1972. The coronavirus pandemic has shuttered movie theaters and wreaked havoc on Hollywood's release calendar. The Oscars are due to take place April 25, eight weeks later than previously scheduled. Last month's Emmys took place largely online. — AFP

THE BEST ICE HOTELS, IGLOOS AND SNOW VILLAGES OPEN IN 2020



Cozy up in the coldest hotels in the world. — Iglu Dorf

By Daniel Fahey

In longitudes where long johns are all but compulsory and rugged alpine regions where the snow tumbles down sideways, creative grizzled folk brave the cold to cut and chisel and craft chunks of frozen water into sparkling ice hotels, uplift overnight igloos and snow-covered villages for mere non-mountain mortals to sleep over. We've trailed to the dark ends of the Earth to find the best ice hotels for 2020. Here's where to get your Elsa on this winter.



Ice sculpture in a hotel suite, designed by Ekaterina Barsukova and Vladimir Barsukov. — Asaf Kliger

1. Iglu Dorf - Gstaad, Switzerland

Built using traditional igloo techniques, but with tunnels connecting each of the 11 rooms, it takes around 3000 hours to create the Iglu Dorf hotel in Gstaad, Switzerland each winter. With breathtaking views out across the crucible of the vast Bernese Alps and its crown of fir trees, this slice of wonderful isolation can be enjoyed by up to six guests in a room overnight.

With a sauna and swimming pool just outside as well as homemade mulled wine and a traditional hot cheese fondue, this is Switzerland in its purest mountain mode. Iglu Dorf also builds overnight igloos in Davos-Klosters, Stockhorn and Zermatt in Switzerland as well as on Zugspitze in Germany, and the Khtai ski area in Austria. Visit Iglu Dorf from December 23-April 1.

2. Icehotel - Jukkasjarvi, Sweden

First built in 1989 in Jukkasjarvi, Sweden, this is the original Icehotel. It's crafted annually from 2500 two-ton blocks of snice (snow and ice) plucked from the vast meandering Torne River. At the end of the season it simply melts and the water returns to the river. But whilst it's up, its shimmering catenary arches and individually-designed rooms with snow statues and ice artwork make it a startling imaginative triumph. Located in northern lights territory, high up into the Arctic Circle, guests can also try husky sledding, snowmobiling and snowshoeing. For the artistic, there's ice sculpting as well. Can't wait for winter? The Icehotel 365 offers 20 suites, an ice bar and an art gallery all year round. Plus it's run entirely on renewable energy. Icehotel is open from December 11.

Lifestyle | Travel

Friday, October 23, 2020

3. Arctic SnowHotel - Rovaniemi, Finland

Rovaniemi's Arctic SnowHotel is in Lapland, where Santa Claus kicks back for 364 days each year. Standing on the toes of the Arctic Circle, this part of Finland cycles through eight seasons, but it's the sparkling magic of winter that's most alluring: a calming white-scape of thick, crunchy snow; the swirling purples and greens of the northern lights; the excitable yap of huskies waiting to pull their sledges. But hidden amongst these miles and miles of white wilderness is Arctic SnowHotel, a fully-functioning 30-room igloo that's built afresh each winter using ice from the nearby Lake Lehtojarvi. The bedrooms are built of snow and ice, as is the bar, the restaurant and the chapel. Snow saunas and outdoor hot tubs also help make the most of this winter wonderland. Arctic SnowHotel is open December 15-March 31.

4. Sorrisniva Igloo Hotel - Alta, Norway

Sculpted deep beneath the magnetic gaze of the aurora borealis, the world's northernmost ice hotel in Alta, Norway, is also one of the biggest. Some 250 tons of ice and

7000cu meters of snow are used each year to freshly carve its 20 double rooms, three family rooms and five suites. Located on the banks of the Alta River, a short snow sled from the Cathedral of the Northern Lights, the Sorrisniva Igloo Hotel also has uplit ice sculptures, an ice bar and even its own ice chapel for couples hoping to melt hearts. The beds have reindeer leather as a natural sleeping mat and sleeping bags capable of withstanding temperatures of -22°F (-30°C), but the sauna (no, not located inside the ice hotel) opens at 7am each morning. Just in case. Sorrisniva is open December 20-April 7.

5. SnowVillage - Kittila, Finland

Created from 350 tons of crystal clear natural ice and 20,000 tons of snow, this extravagant SnowVillage in Kittila, some 125 miles (200km) into the Arctic Circle, is crafted with the care and precision of a medieval church. Decorated with ornate ice sculptures that change year-on-year, each work is lit up in the swirling colors of the aurora borealis. As its name suggests, this isn't just an ice hotel. There's a restaurant made from glacier-clear ice, a chiseled ice bar that gleams like a diamond, and a beautiful ice



Keep warm in the on-site snow bar. — Schneedorf Igloo

chapel too. Each snow suite has been individually designed and brought to life and, yes, there are saunas nearby as well. SnowVillage is open from December 21-April 4.

This is Japan's only ice hotel.
— Ice Village Tomamu



6. Schneedorf Igloo - Hochotz, Austria

The Otztal in Tyrol is one of those striking Austrian gram-oramas: a sweeping valley of glittering chalets dwarfed by the brooding dark hulks of snow-covered schist and gneiss striding starward. But up here, nestled some 2670ft up the mountainside in the ski region of Hochotz, you'll find Schneedorf Igloo. Beneath what looks like a fresh dump of plump white snow is actually a hotel with enough room for 44 people to survive a blizzard overnight. The silence is rejuvenating at night as the temperatures drop and the constellations start to twinkle against winter's blueberry-dark sky. Dinner is gooey cheese fondue and the on-site snow bar has enough potent liqueurs to keep guests warm until sunrise. Thankfully, the igloo toilets here are heated. Schneedorf is open Wed-Sun from December 26-April 4.

7. Ice Village Tomamu - Hokkaido, Japan

Japan's only ice hotel is a shades-down dazzler. Surrounded by uplit birch trees, the exclusive genetically-domed igloo sleeps just two people a night on its stylish ice beds, with an outdoor arctic bath and a heated dressing room to keep their lucky bones warm.

Located at Tomamu in Hokkaido, near the smooth wide runs of Tomamu ski area, the temperatures regularly tumble to -22°F (-30°C). That may sound like visitors are consciously choosing to be cryogenically frozen, but it also means that Ice Village Tomamu guests have access to an ice rink, an ice slide, an ice instrument room, an ice chapel, an ice bar, an ice sweetshop, an ice bakery and - you've guessed it - an atelier that only uses ice. Ice Village Tomamu is open December 10-March 14.



You could have a frosty wedding ceremony.— Sorrisniva Igloo Hotel

8. Hotel de Glace - Saint-Gabriel-de-Valcartier, Canada

North America's only ice hotel is in Saint-Gabriel-de-Valcartier, Canada, and will be cutting back on the poutine this winter to present a slimmed and trimmed version of its typical regal self because of COVID-19. However, that doesn't mean the ice chandeliers and hand-chiseled snow sculptures will come crashing down - if anything, this luxurious igloo, which comes complete with an ice chapel for weddings, becomes even more exclusive.

Hosted on the outskirts of Quebec City, master craftspeople detail the igloo's fine frozen furniture, gleaming ice entranceways and curved snow roofs each year. With hot tubs and a sauna under the stars as well as real fires in each room, no guests should go to bed cold. There are even real mattresses and an isolating bed sheet to ensure a



Snuggle up in your suite.—Kaisa Siren

great night's kip. Hotel de Glace usually opens earlier than January 2, depending on the weather. Hotel de Glace is open January 2-March 21.

9. Snowhotel Kirkenes - Kirkenes, Norway

So far up the longitude meridian that there's only really Svalbard in the way of Kirkenes and the North Pole, this wonderful Norwegian snow hotel is open 365 days a year. In the cold, blizzard-blanketed winters this is reindeer and husky country: a quiet, isolated region endured by only the most hardy of creatures. But for overnight guests, it's a beautiful once-in-a-lifetime spot for a winter vacation. Inside the plump hotel itself, artists bring each bedroom to life with snowy bas reliefs of local winter animals like wolves and owls, whilst specialist ice sculptures that line the halls and ice bar area turn frozen water into glacial artworks worthy of Frieze Art Fair. Snowhotel is open year-round.

— www.lonelyplanet.com

There are real fires in the rooms at North America's only ice hotel.—Hotel de Glace



ENJOY THE NIGHT SKY WITHOUT THE COLD AT THESE INNOVATIVE ARCTIC CABINS

By Andrea Smith

New igloo-inspired bubble accommodation in Swedish Lapland allows guests to connect with the wilderness around them. The cozy cabins are the first of their type in the world and can be found at the Ice & Light Village near the Arctic Circle on the banks of the Kalix River. Situated an hour's drive from Lulea airport, the cabins include outside areas and are contained inside huge, heated bubbles.

The Ice & Light village is the brainchild of Maarit Lindvall, who began developing the project three years ago alongside her niece, Emma Stromberg, an architect from Gothenburg. She wanted to create a stay that was environmentally friendly, so each cabin is entirely self-contained, just requiring electricity for heat and light, thus reducing its impact on the local ecosystem.

"We really wanted to create the best private, cozy and relaxing space for anybody wanting to connect with Arctic nature, but not lose any of the home comforts and atmosphere you get from a Scandinavian Arctic lodge," says Emma. "Once we had the self-contained cabin designed, we wanted to wrap the whole unit in a huge clear slightly heated bubble adding to the comfort of our guests and allowing them to sit comfortably outside their cabin in the Arctic nature searching for wildlife, and of course the Northern Lights."

Each cabin sleeps two people in twin or double beds and includes an open-plan sleeping and sitting area and bathroom, all created with an unmistakable Scandinavian



The new igloo-inspired bubble accommodation is in Swedish Lapland. — Ice & Light Village photos

design. They have been decorated with images from local photographer, Lennart Astrom, who captured the region across different seasons from the frozen snowy winter to summer's abundant forests. Guests can also enjoy a fridge stocked with local treats for breakfast. A stay at the Ice & Light Village in Kalix is available all year round and costs from 1690 SEK (193 USD) per night for a two-person cabin. Rental of ice fishing equipment, snowshoeing, cross-country skis and additional activities as husky tours, snowmobile and icebreaker tours are available at an additional cost.

—www.lonelyplanet.com



Each cabin sleeps two people in twin or double beds.

The cabins are the perfect spot for Northern Lights hunting.



The cabins are inside of an igloo.

Kids Page

Word Search



Cooking with Herbs

Word Search

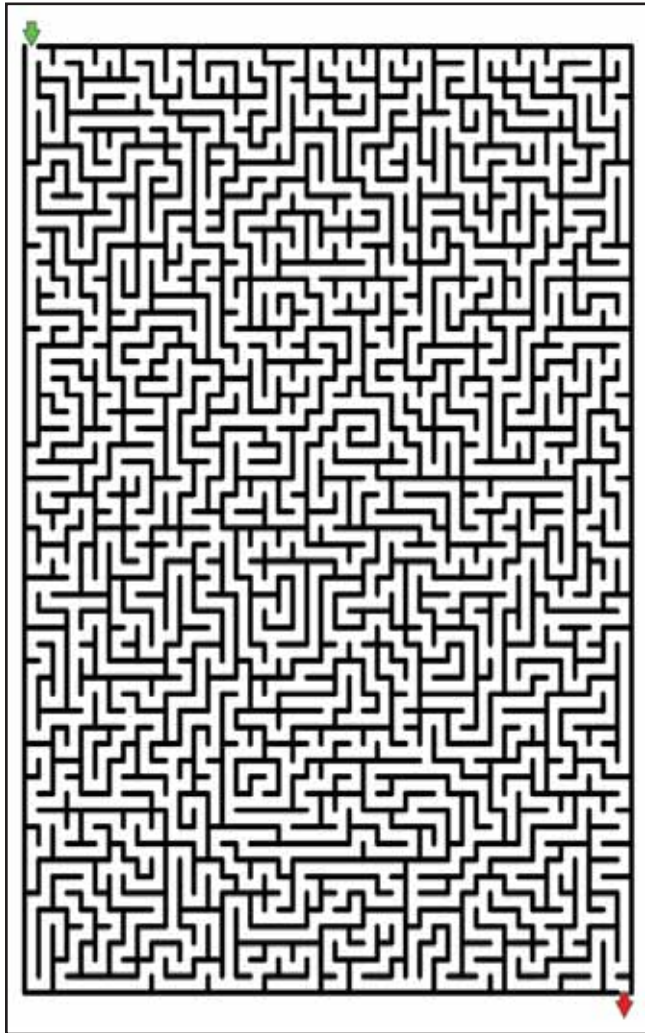
DIRECTIONS: Find and circle the herbs in the grid. Look for them in all directions including backwards and diagonally.

BASIL	M Q O E T O Z A P E E L I G R G Q J L	
BAY LAUREL	N X G G E T U Y R G M E A T O M L I D	
BORAGE	B O C W Z D I L L A Y R X Y Y X S S P	
CARAWAY	M O J I E P D E R S H U H U G A E C R	
CATNEP	L S R J L L E J G L T A N P B V H E L	
CHERVIL	A T K A O R O K W I M L E H I E D C E	
CHEVES	B K A T G R A P M G E Y M H R N Y T M	
CILANTRO	N E W R A E O G I I T A C V E N O H O	
DILL	O P K M R L E V N A V B I V Z U C M N	
EPAZOTE	M Y N Y C A J H T L F L A Y C F B W G	
FENNEL	E R O N O M G H S B D L R C R I L Z R	
GARLIC	L A W B R F L O V A G E K B X O U M A	
LAVENDER	L M G F E E U R N C A R A W A Y V J S	
LEMON BALM	Y E X N G N H T N H E U K O U X Q A S	
LEMON GRASS	Q S R B A N F N T E N R U B D A L A S	
LEMON VERBENA	A O R R N E C A T N I P P P I F Y C P	
LOVAGE	B R L G O L N L E M O N V E R B E N A	
MARJORAM	S K K W U S B I G G P A R S L E Y K N	
MINT	V V E S T R N C N A S T U R T I U M S	
NASTURTIUM		SALAD BURNET
OREGANO		SAVORY
PARSLEY		SORREL
ROSEMARY		TARRAGON
SAGE		THYME

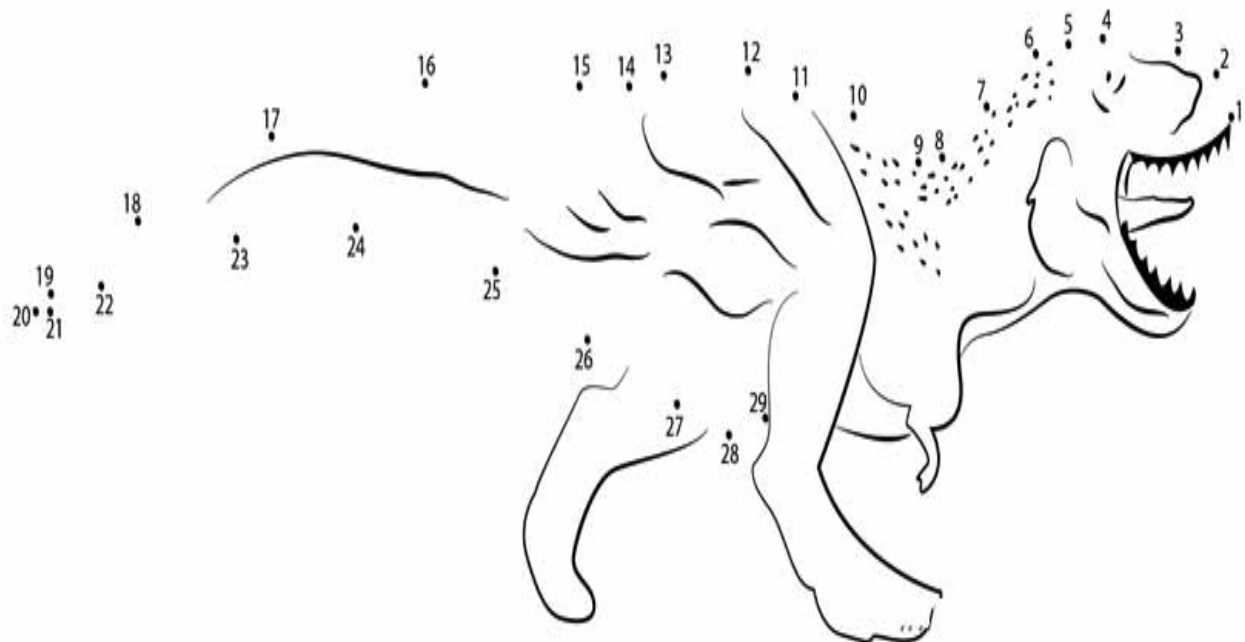
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Kids Mazes



Join the dots



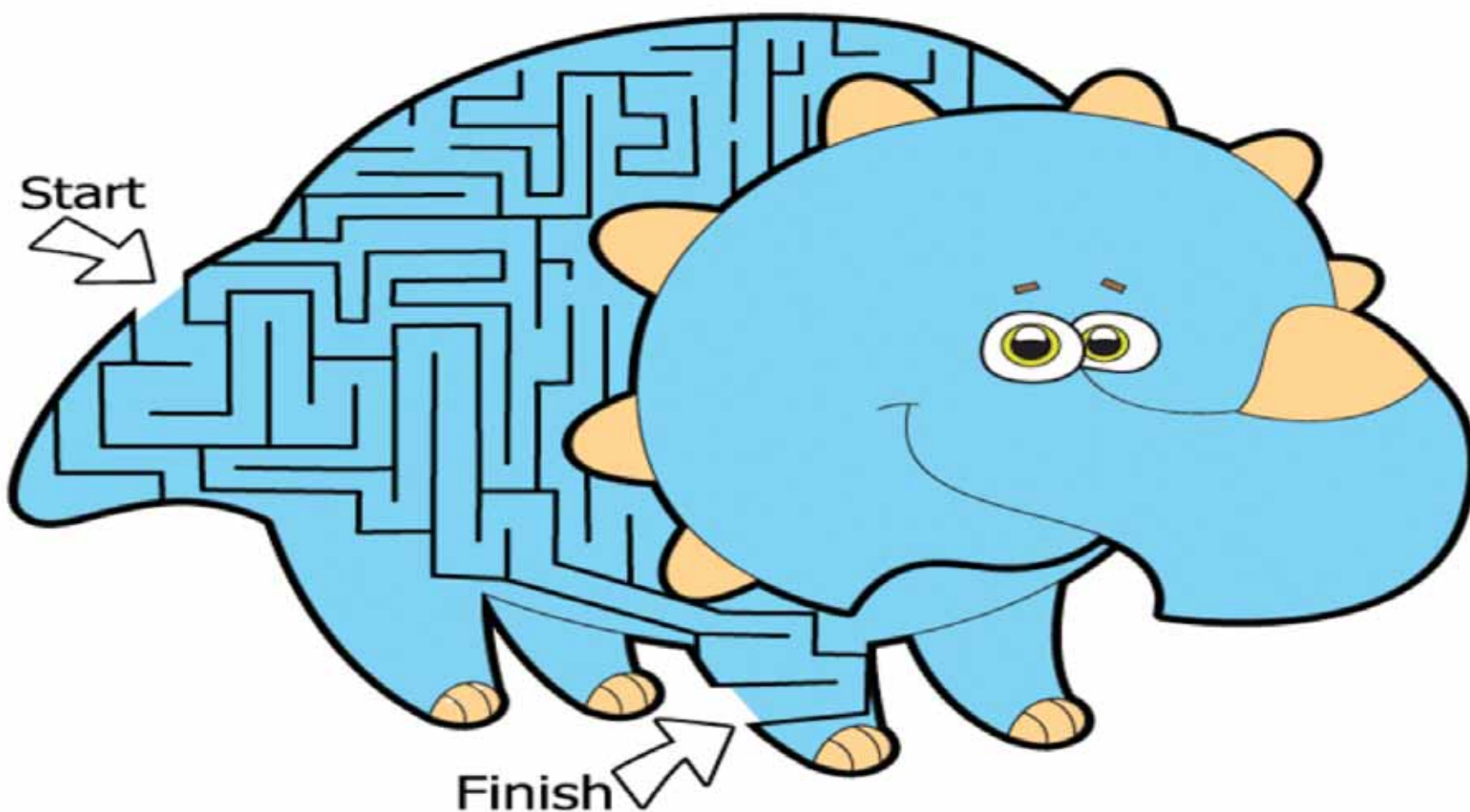
Word Scramble

Classic Sci-Fi Scramble

We've scrambled the names of 20 classic science fiction novels. Can you figure out the correct titles by unscrambling the letters?

EHT HSOEMLIDED NMA	
EDR RSAM	
ROLWSEF OFR ANLGENOR	
EHT FVORERE AWR	
ETH UNONIDFTOA LORTGIY	
DRILNORGW	
TEH SRATS MY OTTSNANIIE	
EHT MRNIATA NRHCSLCIOE	
TEH LTEF HADN OF ENSKSDAR	
A NAICLGET FRO EOBWLIIZT	
RE'DSNE EMAG	
HTE MIET HMEICAN	
RNEEAUNRMOC	
ENTIENEN R-ETOVHGIUF	
HET SSSDSPEIDEOS	
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- ◆ Hernia repair
- ◆ Surgery for reflux disease

- ◆ Minor surgeries (lipoma, sebaceous cyst, ingrowing nail)
- ◆ Hemorrhoids, fistula & anal fissure surgeries
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DR. WALEED S BUHAIMED
Consultant of General Surgery
Laparoscopic and Bariatric Surgery

Academic Certificates – Training

- Kuwait Board of General Surgery.
- (IFSO) member .
- Faculty member of (BEST).
- Member of Kuwait Surgical Association.

Scope of clinical Practice.

- Bariatric surgeries.
- Gallbladder stones surgeries.
- Abdominal wall and hernia surgeries.
- G.I. surgeries.
- Thyroid and para - thyroid surgeries.
- Anal surgeries.

email: wbuhaimed@gmail.com Tel.: 965 22269411/ Mob.: 965 99212228 Jahra, 4th Ring Road, Block 1A Floor 9-Clover Center Mazaya Building

Classifieds

CHANGE OF NAME

I, **Aisha D/o Habeeb**, have changed my name to Aisha Habib and father's name

changed to Habib Haji Abdulqadir, as per the National ID card and birth certificate for all purposes in future. (C5806)
23-10-2020



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Fax: (+965) 24348714
www.met.gov.kw

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

Expected Weather for the Next 24 Hours

BY DAY: Rather hot with light to moderate freshening at times north westerly wind to light variable wind with speed of 10 - 42 km/h with a chance for rising dust over open areas.

BY NIGHT: Fair with light variable wind to light to moderate north westerly wind with speed of 10 - 35 km/h .

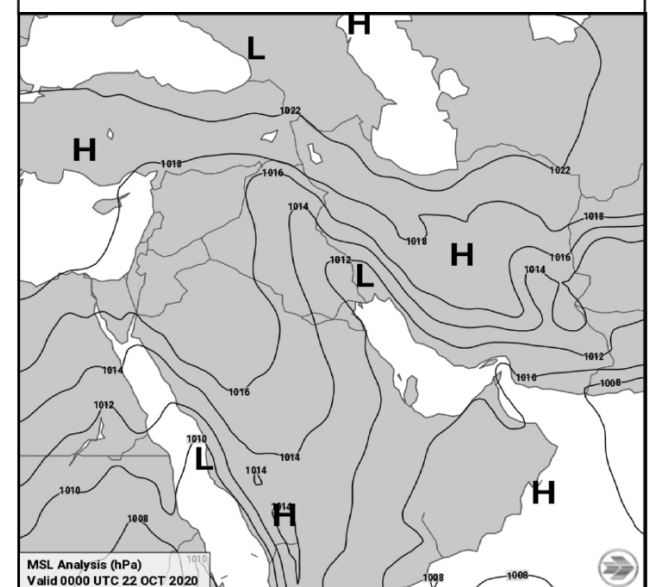
WEATHER WARNING

No Current Warnings

STATION	MAX. EXP.	MIN. REC.
KUWAIT CITY	36 °C	25 °C
KUWAIT AIRPORT	36 °C	17 °C
ABDALY	38 °C	17 °C
BUBYAN	- °C	- °C
JAHRA	37 °C	23 °C
FAILAKA ISLAND	36 °C	24 °C
SALMIYAH	31 °C	25 °C
AHMADI	- °C	- °C
NUWAISIB	35 °C	18 °C
WAFRA	37 °C	20 °C
SALMY	34 °C	20 °C

SFC. CHART

22/10/2020 0000 UTC



4 DAYS FORECAST

DAY	DATE	WEATHER	Temperatures		Wind Direction	Wind Speed
			MAX.	MIN.		
Friday	10/23	Hot to rather hot	36 °C	18 °C	NW-VRB	10 - 38 km/h
Saturday	10/24	Rather hot and Relatively humid specially over coastal areas with a chance for light fog forming	35 °C	16 °C	VRB-SE	06 - 35 km/h
Sunday	10/25	Rather hot and Relatively humid specially over coastal areas with a chance for light fog forming	35 °C	16 °C	VRB-SE	08 - 30 km/h
Monday	10/26	Rather hot and Relatively humid specially over coastal areas with a chance for light fog forming	36 °C	17 °C	VRB-SE	06 - 28 km/h

PRAYER TIMES

Fajr	04:34
Sunrise	05:54
Zuhr	11:33
Asr	14:46
Sunset	17:11
Isha	18:28

RECORDED YESTERDAY AT KUWAIT AIRPORT

MAX. Temp.	36 °C
MIN. Temp.	20 °C
MAX. RH	41 %
MIN. RH	08 %
MAX. Wind	N 25 km/h
TOTAL RAINFALL IN 24 HR.	0 mm

All times are local time unless otherwise stated.

UP.0

Business

FRIDAY, OCTOBER 23, 2020

34 Google's 'free' business model put to test in US antitrust suit



35 British Airways parent IAG flies into 1.3-bn-euro loss



36 Forgive or forget? Ohio auto workers weigh Trump record



Europe's small firms fear for survival

Pandemic could cost a million jobs in German SMEs: Study

LONDON: Over half the small and medium-sized companies which together provide jobs for two-thirds of European workers fear for their survival in the coming 12 months, according to a survey released by management consultancy McKinsey yesterday. The survey was conducted in August, before the current acceleration in new coronavirus cases across Europe that is forcing governments to impose new restrictions on activity and prompting speculation of fresh national lockdowns. The finding comes as warnings multiply of an impending wave of business insolvencies and as the International Monetary Fund and others urge the region's governments to double down on state support to help companies weather the coronavirus pandemic. The McKinsey survey of more than 2,200 companies in five countries - France, Germany, Italy, Spain and Britain - found that 55 percent expected to shut down by September next year if their revenues remained at current levels. At the current trajectory, one in 10 small and medium-sized companies were expected to file bankruptcy within six months.

"This is a substantial burden on the financial sector," report co-author Zdravko Mladenov said of just one of the knock-on impacts of such a development, which would also send jobless totals surging and stymie wider investment in the economy. Economists polled by Reuters last month forecast that the euro area economy would grow by just 5.5 percent next year after a fall of around 8 percent this year but warned that even that patchy recovery was vulnerable to a further spread of the virus. Small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) are defined as those with 250 or fewer employees.

In Europe, they employ over 90 million people but their small size makes them vulnerable to cash flow crises. In Spain, for example, 83 percent of the 85,000 businesses that have collapsed since February employ fewer than five workers. State measures across the region ranging from moratoria on bankruptcies to loan repayment holidays have until now kept thousands of struggling businesses afloat. But as those measures are in some cases wound down, Germany's Bundesbank and the Bank of England are among those warning of rising insolvencies.



DORTMUND: Members of German trade union Verdi demonstrate during a transport strike in the city of Dortmund, western Germany. Verdi, called the strike in support of a nationwide collective agreement for around 87,000 employees in local public transport. — AFP

"Policymakers need to do whatever it takes to contain the pandemic and its economic damage, and not withdraw support prematurely to avoid repeating the mistake of the global financial crisis," the IMF said in its blog this week. For companies, policies now need to go beyond liquidity support and ensure that insolvent but viable firms can remain in business," it added, citing measures to facilitate debt restructuring or make equity available to viable firms.

German SMEs

More than a million jobs could be lost this year

in small- and medium-sized enterprises—the backbone of the German economy—due to the coronavirus pandemic, a study showed yesterday. In its annual survey of the "Mittelstand" sector, the public investment bank KfW estimated that SMEs could shed some 3.3 percent of their workforce by the end of the year, equivalent to some 1.1 million jobs. There are an estimated 3.8 million such companies in Germany—predominantly family-run businesses specialized in sectors such as manufacturing, often for the export market.

They employ around 60 percent of workers — 32.3 million in 2019 — and its share in Germany's

overall economic activity is more than 71 percent. KfW said that the coronavirus pandemic was leaving "deep marks" on the SME sector. "Worries and uncertainty are always high. Sales are breaking down more than in the financial crisis," it said. The historic recession into which the virus lockdowns plunged Europe's biggest economy and the anxiety about the recovery are impacting the outlook this year for SMEs, KfW wrote. "More than one out of every two SMEs—some two million companies—are expecting a drop in revenue," with a 12-percent drop expected for the sector as a whole, equivalent to 545 billion euros. — Agencies

Business

Google's 'free' business model put to test in US antitrust suit

Govt faces challenges proving tech firm's monopoly

WASHINGTON: Google's long-running business model based on free services and advertising will be put to the test in the landmark antitrust lawsuit filed this week by the US Justice Department.

But the government is likely to face challenges proving monopoly allegations against the tech firm which grew into one of the world's most successful companies by leveraging its powerful search engine for a network of services such as maps, email, shopping and travel that feed its data-driven digital advertising. Legal experts point to the fact that it may be difficult to show Google's conduct was illegal under the long-standing "consumer welfare" standard in monopoly cases because its services are largely free.

Avery Gardiner, a former US antitrust enforcement lawyer who researches competition for the Center for Democracy & Technology, said the government appears to be skirting the question of whether Google benefits consumers by offering free services. The lawsuit "basically ignores price and focuses on quality and innovation," she said. While not entirely a new strategy, "the antitrust agencies in the past have been reluctant to move forward without evidence of price effects," Gardiner added.

Data provided by the Justice Department showed Google controls 88 percent of US search

queries, with the share in the mobile market at 94 percent, and argued that Google reinforces its monopoly with its "exclusionary" deals. With a market value over \$1 trillion, Google generated \$161 billion in revenue last year, the bulk of which comes from digital advertising including messages linked to people's search queries.

Not truly free

Christopher Sagers, a Cleveland State University law professor, said Google's use of free services is unlikely to be a serious hurdle for the government. Sagers said that Google's search "is arguably not truly free, since every search can be conceived as a transaction in which the consumer gives their attention to advertisements in exchange for search results." A key element of the case will be internet advertising which "is a product that Google definitely does not give away for free," Sagers said.

Maurice Stucke, a University of Tennessee law professor specializing in antitrust, said the case appears based not on prices but "the harm to privacy, data protection and the use of consumer data." This takes a broader view of antitrust by examining the competitive harms to the marketplace and not just prices to consumers, Stucke said. He said government lawyers have evoked the



NEW YORK: Google's offices stand in downtown Manhattan in New York City. — AFP

Microsoft case from two decades earlier which, despite the failure to break up the company, resulted in a more open technology landscape.

"The perception is that the Microsoft case unleashed significant innovation, because competitors no longer operated in the shadow of

Microsoft," Stucke said. The case joined by 11 states, all of which have Republican attorneys general, could take years to play out and comes against a backdrop of a fierce political backlash against Big Tech giants which have extended their dominance in recent years. —AFP

UK-EU Brexit talks back on as clock ticks to deadline

LONDON: European Union negotiators headed to London yesterday to resume Brexit trade talks after Britain called off a boycott, with both sides vowing to work round the clock to seal a deal in the time left. Led by chief negotiator Michel Barnier, the EU team was en route from Brussels after a dramatic breakthrough on Wednesday gave Britain an outlet to end days of brinkmanship and redouble efforts to prevent economic chaos at the end of the year.

In a joint document, Britain and the EU agreed that Barnier and UK negotiator David Frost would meet through the weekend, and continue every day if necessary beyond that to bridge their yawning differences once a post-Brexit transition ends on December 31.

However, the 10-point memo cautioned that "nothing is agreed in these negotiations until a final overall agreement is reached". Speaking to Sky News, British policing minister Kit Malthouse said he had his "fingers crossed" that the new urgency injected into the fraught talks would pay off.

"Negotiations often involve a bit of temper, and tensions, and slamming doors, and walking out," he said. "It's in the nature of a negotiation that these things become tense, particularly towards the end when you're facing a deadline."

Trawling for compromise

The breakthrough, which pushed the pound to six-week



OSTEND: Boxes filled with freshly caught fish are unload from the Den Hooppe trawler boat at the Port of Ostend. — AFP

highs on currency markets, came hours after Barnier told a session of the European Parliament in Brussels that an agreement was "within our grasp" if both sides compromised. An EU summit last week had said any compromises would have to come from Britain, angering Prime Minister Boris Johnson's government which then threatened to walk away. Barnier also said the 27-nation bloc would proceed on "the basis of legal texts", satisfying British demands for an intensification of the process to finalize a treaty.

The extent of state subsidies, how to arbitrate future differences and fishing rights remain key sticking points that could still thwart a deal being reached. A spokesperson for Johnson's government said if the talks do fail, the UK would end the transition period on a barebones arrangement with the EU governed by World Trade Organization quotas and tariffs, "and will prosper in doing so". — AFP

Sunak stumps up more help for virus-hit businesses

LONDON: British finance minister Rishi Sunak yesterday was forced to offer more financial help to businesses grappling with a resurgence of the COVID-19 pandemic, which looks increasingly likely to derail the economic recovery. Sunak told parliament the government will shoulder more of the burden for paying employees' wages for businesses that are still open but experiencing difficulty, and offer more money to hospitality companies. The move marks a turnaround for Sunak after he long resisted calls to extend the generosity of government support schemes. Opponents have said it was obvious that more help was needed and that it should have come sooner.

Britain - the worst-hit European nation during the COVID-19 pandemic with more than 44,000 related deaths - is now seeing a second wave of the virus, recording 26,688 new cases and 191 deaths on Wednesday. "I've always said that we must be ready to adapt our financial support as the situation evolves, and that is what we are doing today. These changes mean that our support will reach many more people and protect many more jobs," Sunak said.

Some sectors are now in dire straits. An official survey published earlier yesterday showed more than a third of hospitality companies are at risk of going bust. Sunak said he would offer a new grant to hospitality businesses worth 2,100 pounds per month that can be claimed retrospectively to August. He also tweaked the Job Support Scheme designed to dissuade businesses from making people redundant and instead keep workers on reduced hours. — Reuters

Business

British Airways parent IAG flies into 1.3-bn-euro loss

BA jumbo saved from scrap heap by film deal

LONDON: IAG, the owner of British Airways and Spanish carrier Iberia, dived into a loss totaling 1.3 billion euros (\$1.52 billion) in the third quarter on coronavirus fallout, it announced yesterday.

The operating loss before exceptional items compared with profit of 1.4 billion euros one year earlier, IAG said in statement ahead of a full earnings release due next week. Revenue slumped 83 percent to 1.2 billion euros in the reporting period, it added. IAG said it expects capacity in the current fourth quarter to be no more than 30 percent compared with a year earlier.

"As a result, the group no longer expects to reach breakeven in terms of net cash flows from operating activities during" the final three months of the year, IAG said. IAG said bookings had not recovered as expected owing "to additional measures implemented by many European governments in response to a second wave of Covid-19 infections".

It pointed to an increase in local lockdowns, an extension of quarantine requirements for travellers and a lack of pre-departure testing. New British Airways chief executive Sean

Doyle on Monday urged the UK government to end the quarantining of passengers arriving from abroad.

British Airways, which is slashing thousands of jobs, last week announced the sudden departure of his predecessor Alex Cruz. Doyle had been CEO at Aer Lingus, which like BA, is owned by airlines group IAG.

A British Airways jumbo jet has found a new role as a film set, saving it from the scrap heap where dozens of BA's other retired jumbos have ended up. British Airways said that one of its 747s will fly to Dunsfold Aerodrome in Surrey, southern England, later on Thursday, where the airport will preserve it as a commercial TV and film set.

Blaming the coronavirus pandemic, BA said in July it would have to retire its entire jumbo jet fleet, a source of huge regret for aero-geeks and fans of the "Queen of the Skies", the aircraft which brought long-haul flights to the masses.

At Dunsfold, the 747 will form the backdrop for interior and exterior shots and be used for training purposes, a BA statement said, adding that in future it would be opened up as an exhibi-



In this file photo, a British Airways plane sits on the apron at Bournemouth airport in southern England. IAG, the owner of British Airways and Spanish carrier Iberia, dived into a loss totaling 1.3 billion euros (\$1.52 billion) in the third quarter on coronavirus fallout, it announced yesterday. —AFP

tion for visitors.

BA's last jumbos took off from Heathrow earlier in October, the end of an era for the

world's most easily recognized jetliner with its humped fuselage, four engines and 16 main wheels. —Reuters

News in brief

S&P declares Zambia in default

WASHINGTON: Ratings agency Standard & Poor's declared Zambia's government in default on Wednesday after the African nation missed an interest payment. The mineral-rich southern African country has seen its debt surge to nearly \$12 billion this year as commodity prices have fallen amid the coronavirus pandemic. The government had sought relief from its creditors but after missing an October 14 payment on its April 2024 Eurobond, S&P cut the foreign credit rating to "SD" from "CCC-", according to the statement. —AFP

Unilever sales dip

THE HAGUE: Anglo-Dutch consumer giant Unilever said yesterday its sales declined in the third quarter, even though consumers targeted large volumes of home-based products as the coronavirus lockdown continued in many countries. Headquartered in both London and Rotterdam, the group said third-quarter sales amounted to 12.9 billion euros (\$15.2 billion), a decline of 2.4 percent from the same period last year, with currency fluctuations also negatively impacting results. —AFP

Botswana approaches World Bank

GABORONE: Botswana has approached the World Bank for budgetary support after the coronavirus crisis hurt revenue, Finance Minister Thapelo Matsheka said yesterday. Botswana has registered relatively few cases, but lockdown restrictions have disrupted economic activities and caused loss of income in key sectors such as diamond mining and sales. "We have set up a team and the World Bank has also set up a team to assist us," Matsheka told Reuters in a telephone interview. —Reuters

Goldman Sachs fined \$350m in Hong Kong over 1MDB

HONG KONG: Global financial titan Goldman Sachs was fined \$350 million by Hong Kong's securities watchdog yesterday for its role in the massive 1MDB Malaysian bribery scandal, the latest in a growing list of global punishments the firm faces. Goldman Sachs Asia — the Hong Kong-based compliance and control hub of the company — showed "serious lapses and deficiencies in its management supervisory, risk, compliance and anti-money laundering controls", Hong Kong's Securities and Futures Commission said.

The regulator added that Goldman had accepted the SFC's findings, leading to an early resolution of the disciplinary action. The SFC said Goldman's failures contributed to the misappropriation of \$2.6 billion from the \$6.5 billion that 1MDB raised in three bond offerings in 2012 and 2013.

"Goldman Sachs Asia fell far short of the standards expected of a licensed intermediary in the 1MDB case and suffered not only reputational damage from its own failures, but also brought the securities industry into disrepute," Thomas Atkinson, the SFC's Executive Director of Enforcement, said.

Goldman Sachs Asia received \$210 million — or 37 percent of the total revenue — from the 1MDB bond offerings, which was the largest share among the various Goldman Sachs entities. The SFC investigation concluded that Goldman Sachs Asia allowed the offerings to proceed despite numerous red flags not being properly scrutinized and answered.

The fraud involved former Malaysian prime minister Najib Razak and his cronies, and the cash plundered from state coffers bankrolled a global spending spree. It was used to buy every-



The headquarters of Goldman Sachs in New York City. —AFP

thing from artwork to real estate to a superyacht. The Hong Kong announcement comes two days after the Wall Street Journal reported that Goldman is preparing to admit wrongdoing in the 1MDB scandal and pay the US government \$2.8 billion.

The deal would end the criminal probe into the corruption case involving the Malaysian government's investment fund, the newspaper reported, citing people familiar with the matter. The Justice Department has said more than \$4.5 billion was stolen from 1MDB by high-level officials at the fund and their associates between 2009 and 2015. Two ex-Goldman bankers are accused of misappropriating billions, bribing officials and giving false statements in relation to bond issues they arranged for the fund.

The Malaysian government dropped the charges against Goldman in July after reaching a \$3.9 billion settlement with the financial giant. The firm, which posted profits of \$3.5 billion in the latest quarter, had set aside more than \$3.1 billion as of September 30 "for litigation and regulatory proceedings." —AFP

Business

Forgive or forget? Ohio auto workers weigh Trump record

Declining US auto industry now menaced by coronavirus

LORDSTOWN, US: Workers at the General Motors factory in Lordstown, Ohio listened when President Donald Trump said the region would soon be booming. But two years after that 2017 speech, the plant closed. GM's shuttering of the factory was a blow to the Mahoning Valley region of Ohio, a key battleground state in the November 3 presidential election, which has dealt with a declining manufacturing industry for decades and, like all parts of the United States, is now menaced by the coronavirus.

Trump, whom polls show running behind his Democratic challenger Joe Biden, made reviving manufacturing a centerpiece of his presidency. He told a crowd during a stop in the nearby Ohio city of Youngstown not to move away because "all" jobs that left the state were coming back—an unlikely prospect given how automation has supplanted manual labor in much of manufacturing.

"When (Trump) said it, I felt like he was talking to me," said Tommy Wolikow, who worked at the Lordstown factory for nine years. But the story of Lordstown didn't end with GM's pullout: the facility was purchased by a local company to build electric vehicles, one of a number of such new ventures blooming in the conservative region that local boosters hope will one day become known as "Voltage Valley." In hotly contested Ohio and neighboring battleground states Michigan and Pennsylvania, Trump and Biden are vying for the support of voters like Wolikow, who says the president did his best with the economy and isn't to blame for the plant's closure, even if he thinks Trump failed in dealing with the pandemic. "I'm torn with Trump—it's a mixed bag of emotions," said Wolikow, who now works for GM in Michigan and declined to say who he would vote for on November 3.

Closures nothing new

On the campaign trail in 2016, Trump vowed to revive the bat-

tered Rust Belt towns of the American Midwest and push the Detroit automakers to bring production back to the country from Mexico—words that helped him take Ohio by a significant margin. But Trump's promises haven't quite been realized.

In February, before the coronavirus hit the United States, there were 25,246 manufacturing jobs in the region, about 3,750 fewer than in January 2017 when Trump took office, according to Federal Reserve data. By August, the number was down to 22,551 jobs. GM's Lordstown factory existed for more than five decades, but after years of layoffs, the plant shut for good in 2019 as the company shifted investment towards electric cars and away from smaller vehicles made in Ohio like the Chevrolet Cruze.

The closure was finalized following a bruising United Auto Workers (UAW) strike. Dave Green, who led the Lordstown UAW local and brawled with Trump on social media, believes the Ohio plant's demise is at least partly due to the president's push to ease fuel economy standards, which gave GM "extra incentive to shut that plant down."

Green, now working for the automaker in Indiana, accuses the president of sowing division, adding that Trump is "not right in the head." He plans to vote for Biden. Other former employees intend to stick with the president. "I like a business guy and I like a guy who is strong-willed," said Brian Milo, who worked at Lordstown for a decade. "America was somewhat founded by people who were rebels... Trump, he's somewhat of a rebel."

Milo sees Biden as an ineffective career politician and is willing to forgive Trump for not meeting his manufacturing goal. "I think it was something that he promised that maybe he didn't have the ability to deliver," said Milo, who got a certification in facilities maintenance and now works at a hospital where his salary is almost equal to what he got at GM.

German consumer confidence dips on lockdown fears

FRANKFURT: The mood among German consumers has darkened as fears rise of further restrictions to curb the spread of the coronavirus pandemic, a closely watched survey said yesterday.

The GfK institute's forward-looking assessment of consumer confidence heading into November fell to -3.1 points from a revised figure of -1.7 in October, well below expectations of -2.0 according to analysts surveyed by FactSet. Rising infection numbers and the toughening of restrictions are leading to a "fear of further lockdown increases if the rate gets out of control in the coming winter months," GfK's Rolf Buerkl said. The recovery of the mood since lockdowns in the spring, which was "strong" according to Buerkl, "has therefore come to a standstill".

The German economy had enjoyed a rebound after being weighed down in the spring, when businesses and factories were shuttered. The survey hit a historic low of -23.1 in May, before reaching -0.2 in August, a high point since pandemic-related restrictions were introduced in the country.

But the GfK survey, based on around 2000 interviews, found that German shoppers now thought their income prospects were bleaker, with expectations of the economy sinking after five months of rising sentiment. The survey also said that more than half — 51 percent-of respondents had "major concerns" over the economic impact of the virus on them personally. — AFP

No timetable yet for 737 MAX's return to service in China

BEIJING: China, the first country to ground Boeing Co's 737 MAX following two fatal crashes, has not set a timetable for the plane's return to service, the head of its aviation regulator said yesterday.

The Civil Aviation Administration of China (CAAC) has set three principles for the jet to return to service in China, Feng Zhenglin, director at the agency, told reporters in a press conference. Design changes need to be certified, pilots need to receive proper training and effective improvements need to be made to address the specific findings of investigations into the crashes, Feng said.

"Based on these three principles, we have not set a timetable for Boeing 737 MAX's return to service here. As long as these conditions are met, we're happy to see the MAX return to service in China," said Feng. "But if these conditions cannot be met, we still have to carry out strict airworthiness certification in order to ensure safety."

The 737 MAX, which has been grounded around the world since March 2019, is expected receive regulatory approval from the European Union Aviation Safety Agency (EASA) to resume flying in November and enter service by the end of the year. The US Federal Aviation Authority (FAA) has not publicly disclosed a timeline for the MAX's return of service, but sources familiar with



WASHINGTON, DC: In this file photo taken on January 24, 2017, US President Donald Trump speaks with General Motors CEO Mary Barra during a meeting with automobile industry leaders in the Roosevelt Room of the White House in Washington, DC. — AFP

The old GM factory has been acquired by Lordstown Motors, an electric truck startup that wants to build a full-size pickup called Endurance at the facility, and is raising \$675 million, the company's chief executive Steve Burns said.

"That takes us to the promised land," Burns said. The company has already hired about 200 people and expects to have 800 workers when the plant begins commercial production in September 2021. GM also plans to enter into a joint venture with LG Chem to invest \$2.3 billion in building a new battery cell assembly plant in Lordstown that will ultimately have 1,100 workers. — AFP



In this file photo taken on March 12, 2019, workers are pictured next to a Boeing 737 MAX 9 airplane on the tarmac at the Boeing Renton Factory in Renton, Washington. —AFP

the matter have told Reuters it is expected to lift its grounding order around mid-November, although the date could slip.

American Airlines has said it plans to return the jet to service at the year-end, subject to FAA approval. Feng said the CAAC had maintained communications with the FAA, EASA, and Boeing over the MAX and that he had held two meetings with Boeing's president on its return to service. — Reuters

Sports

Friday, October 23, 2020

Lowe homers twice as Rays win and level World Series

Snell shuts down Dodgers as Rays even Series

ARLINGTON: Brandon Lowe hit two home runs and the Tampa Bay Rays showed their resiliency in a 6-4 win over the Los Angeles Dodgers that knotted the World Series to one game apiece on Wednesday. Joey Wendle drove in three runs for the Rays, who will try to maintain momentum in game three of Major League Baseball's championship showcase today. Blake Snell was outstanding on the mound, holding the Dodgers without a hit over more than four innings before giving up a walk and a home run in the fifth.

But homers for Chris Taylor, Will Smith and Corey Seager weren't enough for the Dodgers, who were coming off a dominant 8-3 victory in game one on Tuesday at the neutral site of Globe Life Field in Arlington, Texas. "I don't think anyone in our clubhouse thought this series was over," Lowe said. "We had to show up and take care of business, and we came out there and played our game."

Lowe, a stalwart of the Rays offense as they built the best regular-season record in the American League, was 6-for-52 through the first three rounds of the playoffs, and was 0-for-4 at the plate in game one. He gave the Rays an early lead when he belted a fastball from Dodgers rookie starter Tony Gonsolin over the left centerfield wall for a solo homer with one out in the first inning. "Pure joy," Lowe said of the reaction in the dugout.

Gonsolin, making his third career post-season appearance, lasted just 1 1/3 innings, but he wasn't

the only one of the Dodgers' seven pitchers to be victimized by Lowe, who lined a two-run blast over the left field wall off the Dodgers' fourth pitcher of the night, Dustin May, in the fifth inning to give the Rays a 5-0 lead. That was after Tampa Bay third baseman Joey Wendle smacked a line drive double off May to drive in two runs in the fourth. Lowe became the first player to hit two opposite-field home runs in one World Series game, but he said he didn't go to the plate seeking to hit it out of the park. "I just go up there, try to hit the ball solid and see how hard the ball comes off the bat," he said.

Wendle said no one on the Rays team was surprised to see Lowe break out of his slump in a big way, but he thought it was a characteristic team effort that put Tampa Bay back in the win column. "Today was a better indicator of the kind of team that we are," Wendle said. "It was a complete team win, everybody contributing in different parts of the game." The Rays are seeking a first championship, having fallen in their only prior World Series appearance against Philadelphia in 2008. Back in the World Series for the third time in four years, the Dodgers are in pursuit of their first title since 1988.

Snell was rolling against the potentially explosive Dodgers offense, using a devastating slider to good effect until Taylor tagged him for a two-out homer in the bottom of the fifth inning that cut the deficit to 5-2. Taylor's blast also scored Enrique Hernandez who had walked, and Snell then walked

Mookie Betts and gave up a single to Corey Seager, prompting manager Kevin Cash to pull him in favor of reliever Nick Anderson - who struck out Justin Turner to end the inning. Snell had nine strikeouts in 4 2/3 innings, giving up two hits and two runs with four walks.

'We're here to play'

"We're good and we're here to play," Snell said. "It's not going to be an easy World Series, but we've got a really good team here. They're going to have to bring it every night just like we're going to have to." Joe Kelly took over on the mound for the Dodgers in the sixth, which Tampa Bay's Choi Ji-man led off with a single up the middle. Choi, the first non-pitcher from South Korea to play in a World Series, hoofed it around to third on a single from Margot and scored on a sacrifice fly by Wendle.

The Dodgers pulled a run back in the bottom of the sixth with Smith's solo homer off Anderson, and Seager led off the bottom of the eighth with a solo shot off Rays relief pitcher Pete Fairbanks that pulled the Dodgers within two. Turner followed with a double, but the Rays escaped the inning without further damage. After Rays reliever Aaron Loup retired the first two Dodgers batters in the ninth, Diego Castillo came in to face Taylor and struck him out on three called strikes. "We did a pretty good job of fighting to the end," Taylor said. "We just weren't able to come up with that big hit we needed." —AFP



ARLINGTON: The Tampa Bay Rays celebrate their 6-4 victory against the Los Angeles Dodgers in Game Two of the 2020 MLB World Series at Globe Life Field on October 21, 2020. —AFP

About 10,000 fans allowed at Chinese football final

SUZHOU: About 10,000 supporters could be allowed at each leg of the Chinese Super League final next month, a top football official said, as spectators return to China's stadiums despite the lingering coronavirus threat. Football across the world is grappling with how to readmit crowds while preventing infections, with the English Premier League among the high-profile competitions still taking place behind closed doors.

The coronavirus emerged in China late last year but the country has successfully curtailed the number of local infections, allowing football fans to begin returning to matches in limited numbers. The postponed CSL began in July without spectators but there were about 3,000 fans on Saturday for a 2-2 draw between title contenders Beijing Guoan and Shandong Luneng in Suzhou. The title will be decided over two legs, on November 8 and 12, in Suzhou, near Shanghai.

"Going to the final, I would say... 10,000-ish (fans)," Chinese Football Association secretary-general Liu Yi told AFP. "It'd be that kind of ceiling because it's a big game for sure," he added. That figure is likely to be lowered if there is a sudden spike in virus cases. The Suzhou stadium holds nearly four times that number but attendance will be limited to allow social distancing. —AFP

Ko tries to recapture winning form at new LPGA event

WASHINGTON: New Zealand's Lydia Ko, a two-time major champion who hasn't won in two and a half years, is happy just to be playing at this week's LPGA Drive On Championship. The event, which starts Thursday at Reynolds Lake Oconee in Greensboro, Georgia, was created to help ease the gap on players who would usually be playing in Asia at this time of year, the Covid-19 pandemic having shut down those opportunities for 2020.

"We would have all loved to have been in Asia," Ko said Wednesday. "I've not been in the US in October before. Obviously right now the best option for all of us was to stay within the US. I think it's nice that we still get another playing opportunity. It's going to be good golf - 2020 has been a pretty tough year for a lot of people all around the world, and I think for us to have another playing opportunity is something that we're very grateful and thankful for." That's true for world number 39 Ko.

"The first little while where I wasn't competing at the level when I was playing at my best, I think I compared myself a lot to then," she said. "I just got to try my 100% when I'm out there, grind my butt out there and just do the best that I can and the results happen. A lot of those things are out of my control, so hopefully I'll be able to keep playing consistently well and put myself more in contention and in those positions." Ko has been doing that lately. She shared second at the Marathon Classic in the LPGA's second return event from the pandemic shutdown and was sixth in last month's ANA inspiration major. "I'm doing pretty good," Ko said. "I feel like after quarantine, the time I spent practicing and recovering

and training, it was good to see the results kind of show some of that time. Hopefully I'll be able to keep working hard to have more of those moments." The 23-year-old former world number one likes the layout but knows lifting a 16th career LPGA trophy will be a difficult task. "It's definitely not easy to win," Ko said. "I've just got to, in my off weeks, try my best, keep working on the areas I feel like need to be worked on and at a tournament just being focused and hopefully have a good week." —AFP

Badminton World Championships fall to pandemic

KUALA LUMPUR: The 2020 World Junior Badminton Championships, due to be held in New Zealand, has been cancelled because of the coronavirus pandemic. The event, originally scheduled for May was rescheduled to October before being shifted again to January 2021. Thomas Lund, the Badminton World Federation (BWF) secretary-general, said travel and entry restrictions, quarantine rules and complexities related to the Covid-19 pandemic made staging the event "impossible". "The ongoing Covid-19 restrictions and uncertainty left BWF, Badminton New Zealand and tournament organizers no choice but to cancel the event," the BWF said in a statement. With a host for the next edition in 2021 already in place, further postponement was not an option, the BWF said. But BWF have accepted a proposal for New Zealand to stage the 2024 edition as a replacement for the edition lost. Badminton New Zealand chief executive Joe Hitchcock said the cancellation was "tremendously" disappointing, but agreed that it was the right decision to make. —AFP

Sports

Why Japan's Paralympics mean more than medals

The race for acceptance!

TOKYO: Long-jumper Sayaka Murakami is hoping not just for a medal at the postponed Tokyo Paralympics, but also for lasting acceptance in a Japanese society where disabled people can feel pressured to stay out of the public eye. Like many Japanese para-athletes, Murakami believes the Games are a unique chance to fight discrimination and change the way her country treats people with disabilities. "It's a window of opportunity," the 37-year-old told AFP as she trained at a facility in Chiba, south-east of Tokyo. "I hope that the Paralympics will be a chance for people to realise that people (with disabilities) live among them" and are part of society, she added.

The decision to delay the Paralympics, now set to open in August 2021 following on from the rescheduled Olympics, was devastating at first, said Murakami, who lost her right leg in a train accident when she was 25 and competes with a prosthetic blade. "I'd worked so hard, and was planning to retire after the 2020 Paralympics... I felt so down and I couldn't get back to being positive," she said. But gradually she said she felt her motivation returning, and she decided to resume training with the goal of qualifying for the postponed Games.

"If I can win a ticket, I will do my best to jump for a medal," she said. Ahead of the Games, Tokyo has worked to improve access for disabled people and promoted para-sports, but disability activists and experts warn there is a long way to go. Even Japanese citizens

feel their society has room for improvement: 84 percent of respondents in a 2017 government survey said they believed there is discrimination or prejudice against people with disabilities.

"Japan has not so far been used to accepting diversity," said Motoaki Fujita, a professor of sports sociology at Nihon Fukushi University and an expert on disabled sports. "In Japan, the way people are evaluated often depends on whether they are seen as being productive or producing economic value," he told AFP. There have been improvements since Tokyo won the bid to host the Games, he said, but those could be undone. "The results will be totally different if the Games are cancelled." In the run-up to the Games, there have been efforts to increase the visibility of disabled people—with broadcasters hiring reporters with disabilities, and events such as a fashion show featuring models with prosthetic limbs, some of them athletes.

'Prosthetic legs are cool'

Among those participating in the fashion show was Kaeda Maegawa, who competes in the 100m and long jump and sashayed down the runway in a lacy white skirt that showcased her metal prosthetic. She said she could understand that some people were reluctant to reveal their disability, and worry about being seen as a burden in Japan. "But personally I don't feel that I want to hide my prosthetic leg... I want to send a message



TOKYO: Japanese athlete Sayaka Murakami practices at Matsuyamashita Park in Inzai of Chiba. —AFP

that prosthetic legs are cool," the 22-year-old said.

She is hoping to score a medal at next year's Games, but also sees them as offering a bigger opportunity. "Since the Tokyo Paralympics was awarded, media coverage of para-athletes has increased, and because of that more and more people are becoming aware," she

said. "If you want to change something, knowledge is what's most important." Despite the hopes pinned on the Games, there are still plenty of unresolved questions about how the event will be staged, with complex discussions on coronavirus countermeasures currently under way. —AFP

Rosberg to rekindle rivalry with Hamilton in Extreme E series

LONDON: Ex-Formula One world champion Nico Rosberg is launching a team in the Extreme E series - meaning he will be locking horns again with Lewis Hamilton, organizers have announced. The Germany-born driver's Rosberg Xtreme Racing (RXR) will go head to head with Hamilton's X44 team in the new electric off-road racing competition, which aims to shed light on environmental issues. Competitors in Extreme E will race electric vehicles in five remote locations — arctic, desert, rainforest, glacier, and coastal — that are already damaged or at risk from climate change.

Extreme E is scheduled to begin in January 2021. Electric SUVs will race in Senegal, Saudi Arabia, Nepal, Greenland and Brazil, with each race being held across two days. To minimize environmental impact, they will not be open to spectators and the command centre for the championship series will be a ship, modified to minimize emissions. Rosberg, who retired from Formula One shortly after being crowned world champion in 2016, said Extreme E was the perfect competition to highlight his belief in sustainable technologies. Last year he founded the Greentech Festival, which showcases green technologies. He was also an early investor in the all-electric racing series Formula E. "The series represents an amazing opportunity to inspire action in the fight against climate change - the single biggest threat to our planet today," said Rosberg, 35. —AFP

Lose the battles, win the war? Mir targets world MotoGP crown

MADRID: Despite not having won a race since 2017, Spain's Joan Mir is edging closer to the MotoGP world title as the championship enters its 2020 end-game this weekend. The 23-year-old Mir has a wafer-thin advantage of just six points over France's Fabio Quartararo ahead of the Teruel Grand Prix on Sunday. However, the Suzuki rider has proved the master of consistency in this truncated season with three second places and two thirds from the 10 races held. In 2019, Mir raced 17 events, fail-

ing to make the podium and finished in 12th place in the standings. The previous season, he went winless in Moto2 leaving his last victorious season as his world championship campaign in Moto3 in 2017. Last weekend, Mir was third in the MotoGP of Aragon with Suzuki teammate Alex Rins winning the race. "It was really positive because we took important points for the championship," Mir told motogp.com after seeing Rins become the eighth different winner in 2020.

The two Suzukis were split by the Honda of Alex Marquez. Mir is the first Suzuki rider since Kenny Roberts Jr in 2000 to lead the world championship. "I will not change the way to approach the races, this is for sure. I will continue working race by race, trying to get as many points as possible, trying to get the victory every GP," he said ahead of this weekend's race at the same Motorland of Aragon circuit. "Then in the last race we will look at the championship and see where we are." —AFP

Social media must do more to fight online abuse

LONDON: Manchester City's Raheem Sterling said social media companies have the technology to tackle online abuse but questioned whether they have the will to do so. Sterling was responding to the results of a Professional Footballers' Association (PFA) report into messages sent on Twitter to 44 current and former players in England. The report said that during the six weeks of "Project Restart", data science company Signify Group analysed 825,515 tweets directed at the players, identifying over 3,000 explicitly abusive messages.

As much as 56% of all discriminatory abuse identified during the study was racist, with 43% of Premier League players in the group experiencing targeted and explicitly racist abuse. "I don't know how many times I need to say this, but football and the social media plat-

forms need to step up, show real leadership and take proper action in tackling online abuse," Sterling told British media. "The technology is there to make a difference, but I'm increasingly questioning if there is the will."

The study, also backed by anti-discrimination body Kick It Out, called for stakeholders to fund a centralized artificial intelligence-driven system to monitor abusive users across social media. It recommended prosecutions, stadium bans and suspensions for abusers. "The recommendations we have announced today can make a real impact, but it needs everyone to work together to achieve change," PFA head of equalities Simone Pound said. In response to the study, a Twitter representative told Sky Sports the platform strongly condemned racist behavior. "We want to reiterate that abusive and hateful conduct has no place on our service and we will continue to take swift action on the minority that try to undermine the conversation for the majority," the representative said. Facebook said it had recently partnered with Kick it Out on its Take A Stand campaign. —Reuters

Sports

Bayern begin title defense in style, thrash Atletico Madrid

Real Madrid stunned; Liverpool, Manchester City win

PARIS: Bayern Munich began their defense of the Champions League title in ominous fashion by crushing Atletico Madrid 4-0 on Wednesday, while Liverpool and Manchester City also won but Real Madrid suffered a shock defeat. Madrid, the record 13-time European champions, went down to a 3-2 home loss against Shakhtar Donetsk, showing how far Zinedine Zidane's side are just now from the standards being set by Bayern.

Two months after scoring the winner in the final against Paris Saint-Germain in Lisbon, Kingsley Coman put Bayern ahead against Atletico in Group A and later scored a stunning individual effort to wrap up the victory at an empty Allianz Arena. In between Leon Goretzka and Corentin Tolisso were also on target for the German champions, with the latter's strike a stunner from long-range. "The winning goal in last season's final is a good motivator, but it's in the past now and we have fresh goals this season," Coman told Sky Sports.

It was Bayern's 12th consecutive Champions League win while the result for Atletico equaled their worst defeat under Diego Simeone. Bayern next go to Russia to play Lokomotiv Moscow, who battled back to draw 2-2 at Red Bull Salzburg on Wednesday. Eder put Lokomotiv ahead in Austria, only for Dominik Szoboszlai to crash in a brilliant equalizer. A deflected Zlatko Junuzovic goal put the hosts in front, but Vitali Lisakovich headed in to earn the Russian side a point.

Disastrous night for Real

Real were 3-0 down at half-time against Shakhtar at the Alfredo di Stefano stadium and fell short with a second-half fightback to get their European campaign off to a disastrous start. A depleted Shakhtar were without 10 first-team players and nine members of staff due to coronavirus infections and had seven starters aged 21 or under. Strikes from Tete and Manor Solomon, either side of a Raphael Varane own-goal, gave the Ukrainian champions a three-goal half-time lead.

Luka Modric and Vinicius Junior pulled goals back and Fede Valverde thought he had grabbed an injury-time equaliser but his deflected shot was ruled out for an offside. Missing the injured Sergio Ramos, Real have now won just one of their last seven Champions League home games. This was also a second defeat in five days as they prepare to go to Barcelona for the Clasic on Saturday. "We lacked a bit of everything, but above all our confidence, which is the most important thing," said Zidane.

Lukaku double

Real are already up against it in Group B, even if rivals Inter Milan and Borussia Moenchengladbach cancelled each other out in a 2-2 draw at San Siro. Romelu Lukaku scored twice for Inter, opening the scoring early in the second half and then turning in a late equalizer. In between Ramy Bensebaini netted a penalty for Gladbach and Jonas Hofmann scored what he thought was a late winner.



AMSTERDAM: Liverpool's and Ajax's players jump for the ball during the UEFA Champions League Group D first-leg football match between Ajax Amsterdam and Liverpool FC at the Johan Cruyff Arena in Amsterdam on October 21, 2020. —AFP

Liverpool win without Van Dijk

Liverpool shook off the absence of Virgil van Dijk to edge Ajax 1-0 behind closed doors in Amsterdam in Group D. Van Dijk is set to miss the rest of the season with a knee injury but Jurgen Klopp's side kept a clean sheet and took all three points after Nicolas Tagliafico turned a wayward Sadio Mane shot into his own net on 35 minutes.

"It was not sunshine football but we wanted three points and we got it," said Klopp. The 2019 European champions will hope to build on this result when they host Midtjylland next week. The Danes were outclassed at home by Atalanta on Wednesday, losing 4-0 with Duvan Zapata, Alejandro "Papu" Gomez and Luis Muriel scoring in the first half and debutant Aleksei Miranchuk adding a late fourth. — AFP

'Thank you Brazil': Pele still laughing as he turns 80

SAO PAULO: Considered by many to be the greatest footballer of all time, Pele will celebrate his 80th birthday today, confined to his home in Brazil because of Covid-19 but meeting the milestone with his trademark laugh. "The King" has suffered from a series of health problems in recent years, but has not lost his charisma or sense of humor. "I'm fine, it's just I won't be able to play" on his birthday, he joked this week in a video conversation with the head of the Brazilian Football Confederation.

The only player in history to win three World Cups (1958, 1962 and 1970), Pele plans to celebrate his birthday quietly—as he does almost every year, he says, coronavirus pandemic or not. But several tributes are planned in Brazil, from an exhibit in his honor at the Sao Paulo Football Museum to a mural designed by renowned street artist Kobra in Santos, the city where Pele started his professional career as a 15-year-old prodigy in 1955.

Pele also recorded a song with Grammy-winning Mexican duo Rodrigo and Gabriela, billed as "a little birthday present for his fans and himself." "Thank you to Brazil and all Brazilians.

I was always very happy wearing this jersey. Thank you for all your warm wishes for my birthday," he wrote Wednesday on Instagram, posted with a photo of himself celebrating one of his 1,281 goals.

Whether captured in grainy black and white early in his career, or with his yellow and green number 10 Brazil jersey flitting across the screen in the era of color TV, many of those goals were spectacular displays of athletic prowess, setting the standard for the "jogo bonito," or "beautiful game," that would come to define Brazilian football. His legacy looms so large that FIFA named him the greatest footballer of the 20th century in 2000, alongside Argentina's Diego Maradona—who celebrates his 60th birthday on October 30.

Health scares

Born October 23, 1940, in the city of Tres Coracoes in southeastern Brazil, Edson Arantes do Nascimento—Pele's real name—has grown increasingly frail with age. His public appearances had become rare even before the pandemic confined him at home in Brazil, where Covid-19 has now claimed 155,000 lives, the second-highest death toll in the world after the United States. Pele has been in and out of hospital in recent years for various health issues. Last year he was rushed to the hospital for kidney problems after traveling to Paris for a promotional appearance with French star Kylian Mbappe. In 2014, he was placed in intensive care for dialysis after contracting a severe urinary infection. "The King" has only one kidney, after a broken rib during a match forced doctors to remove the other. — AFP

FIFA President 'not interested' in Super League

LONDON: FIFA President Gianni Infantino said yesterday he is not interested in a European Super League amid reports that some elite clubs were in talks to set up a breakaway competition with the backing of the global soccer body. In an interview published by German-language newspaper Aargauer Zeitung and other regional Swiss media, Infantino said FIFA was focused on the success of the revamped Club World Cup, which will feature 24 teams and be held for the first time in China in 2022.

"As FIFA president, I'm interested in the Club World Cup, not the Super league," said Infantino. "For me, it's not about Bayern Munich against Liverpool, but Bayern against Boca Juniors. "Liverpool have 180 million fans worldwide. Flamengo have 40 million fans and 39 million of them are in Brazil. Liverpool have maybe 5 million fans in England and 175 million fans around the world," he added.

"I want clubs from outside Europe to have global appeal in the future. That's my vision: to have 50 clubs and 50 national teams who can become world champions." Sky News reported on Tuesday that more than 12 teams from Europe's top five leagues - in England, France, Germany, Italy and Spain - were in negotiations to become the founding members of the new competition with a provisional start date in 2022. FIFA had previously declined to comment on its reported involvement in the plans. — Reuters



MUNICH: Atletico Madrid's Montenegrin defender Stefan Savic (left) and Bayern Munich's German forward Thomas Mueller vie for the ball during the UEFA Champions League Group A football match FC Bayern Munich v Atletico Madrid in Munich on October 21, 2020. — AFP

Bayern Munich begin title defense in style

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