



5 Curfew to be lifted in Australia as global deaths near a million



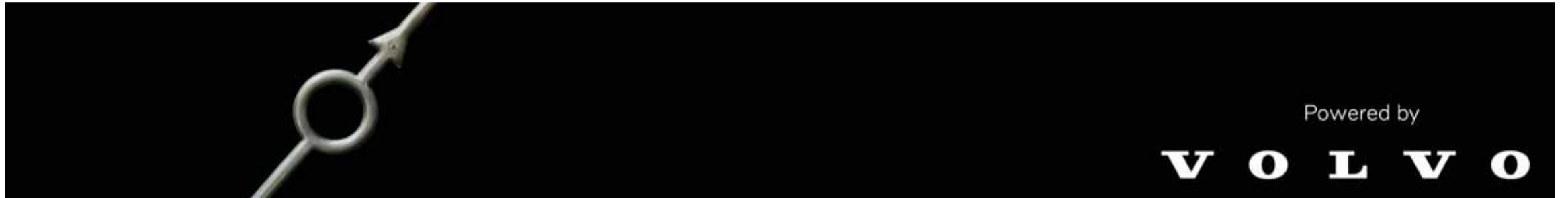
8 OPEC turns 60 at 'critical moment' for virus-hit oil



13 Iraqi youth with development disorders suffer in lockdown



16 Leicester hit Man City for five, Tottenham pay harsh penalty



Plenty on agenda as Assembly term ends

836,000 renew residencies online • MP queries bid to buy Rolls-Royce stake

By B Izzak

KUWAIT: The National Assembly will convene its last two regular sessions tomorrow and Wednesday, and then hold the final session of the four-year legislative term on Thursday, Speaker Marzouq Al-Ghanem said yesterday. Ghanem said the Assembly will debate tomorrow a number of draft laws and issues including the demographic structure based on a draft law approved last week by the Assembly's human resources development committee, which recommended reducing the number of expats in the country

over the next five years.

The Assembly is also scheduled to study a law regulating bankruptcy, in addition to a law on Kuwait Airways. It could also discuss the proposal of banks supporting small and medium projects if the financial committee completes it.

On Wednesday, the Assembly is scheduled to vote on a non-cooperation motion against HH the Prime Minister Sheikh Sabah Al-Khaled Al-Sabah filed last week by 10 MPs following a marathon grilling over allegations of failing to handle the coronavirus crisis. The Assembly might also discuss proposals to find a humanitarian solution for

tens of thousands of stateless people or bedoons.

The health ministry meanwhile asked all lawmakers who tested positive for COVID-19 not to attend meetings of the Assembly committees to avoid infecting others. Around 12 lawmakers have reportedly tested positive for the coronavirus, which forced the postponement of Assembly sessions two weeks ago.

MP Riyadh Al-Adasani asked Finance Minister Barrak Al-Sheetan if Kuwait Investment Authority, which manages Kuwait's investments overseas, is in talks to purchase a stake in Rolls-Royce Holding. If the Kuwait Investment Office in

London, part of KIA, is planning to purchase the stake, the lawmaker demanded a feasibility study on the issue. Sky News had earlier reported that Kuwait's state fund was in talks for a stake in the company after the maker of Trent engines said it was considering a rights issue of up to \$2.5 billion (\$3.2 billion).

The interior ministry said yesterday it has enabled some 836,000 expats to renew their residencies online during the coronavirus crisis. Some 460,000 expats in the private sector benefited from the facility, followed by 250,000 dependents and 100,000 domestic helpers.

Owners protest continued closure of shisha cafes

By Nawara Fattahova

KUWAIT: After facing the threat of imprisonment for nonpayment of rent and wages due to the long closure of their businesses, some shisha cafe owners gathered at the ministry of health yesterday to protest against the continued closure of their cafes. "We preferred to gather in smaller number so that the ministry wouldn't cause a problem for us. All those who gathered here today and hundreds of other cafe owners are facing bankruptcy and imprisonment after accumulating huge debts. We need a solution for our crisis," Eisa Al-Khamis, owner of a shisha cafe in Qurain, told Kuwait Times.

There are over 5,000 licenses for shisha cafes in Kuwait, employing over 225,000 employees. Most of them are still closed. A few reopened without serving shisha, but they are not even covering their expenses. "We were supposed to reopen in the fourth phase which started on August 18, but unfortunately, shisha cafes were not listed among the activities that restarted. The government issued a law to exempt businesses from paying rent during the pandemic, but this law only applies to state property and not businesses renting in private buildings. So this law does not apply to a majority of cafes, and I'm one of them," added Khamis.

The unpaid rents and salaries have accumulated and Khamis is not able to pay. "I received an eviction order from the landlord as I didn't pay the rent for the past seven months. My rent is KD 4,500, and I have 20 staff working at the cafe whose salaries total more than KD 3,000, but I have no income. All other businesses have opened. If I cannot pay soon, I will go to prison as the landlord is

Continued on Page 2



KUWAIT: Shisha cafe owners gather at the ministry of health yesterday to protest against the continued closure of their cafes. — Photo by Fouad Al-Shaikh

Azerbaijan, Armenia on war footing

YEREVAN: Baku and Yerevan put themselves on a war footing after heavy fighting erupted yesterday between Azerbaijan and Armenian separatists, claiming military and civilian casualties on both sides, including at least one child. The worst clashes since 2016 have raised the specter of a fresh war between arch enemies Azerbaijan and Armenia which have been locked for decades in a territorial dispute over the Armenia-backed breakaway region of Nagorny Karabakh.

A major confrontation between the ex-Soviet Caucasus neighbors would draw in big regional players Moscow and Ankara. Russia, France, Germany and the EU swiftly urged an "immediate ceasefire," while Pope Francis prayed for peace. The Armenian defense ministry spokesman, Artsrun Hovhannisyanyan, said intense fighting continued along the Karabakh frontline Sunday afternoon. Azerbaijan said it had captured seven of its Armenian-controlled villages, a claim Yerevan denied.

In a televised address to the nation earlier in the day, Azerbaijan President Ilham Aliyev vowed victory over Armenian forces. "Our cause is just and we will win," Aliyev said, repeating a famous quote from Soviet dictator Joseph Stalin's address at the outbreak of World War II in Russia. "Karabakh is Azerbaijan," he said.

Both Armenia and the breakaway region of Nagorny Karabakh declared martial law and military mobilization. "Get ready to defend our sacred homeland," Armenian Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan said on Facebook. Armenia said earlier Sunday that Azerbaijan attacked civilian settlements in Nagorny Karabakh including the main city Stepanakert.

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Yemen warring sides agree to swap prisoners

DUBAI: The warring sides in Yemen's long conflict have agreed to exchange 1,081 prisoners, the United Nations mediator said yesterday following talks in Switzerland. Yemen's government, which is supported by a Saudi-led military coalition, and Iran-backed Houthi rebels resolved to swap some 15,000 detainees as part of a peace deal brokered by the UN in Stockholm back in 2018.

The two sides have since undertaken sporadic prisoner exchanges, but the release of over 1,000 loyalists and insurgents - if it materializes - would

mark the first large-scale handover since the war erupted in 2014. "I am personally extremely pleased to be here to announce that you have reached a very important milestone," UN envoy Martin Griffiths said at the end of the talks at the Swiss village of Glion, overlooking Lake Geneva.

Griffiths hailed the decision to release the prisoners as the largest such operation during Yemen's conflict. He also congratulated the government and the Houthis for renewing their "commitment to the full implementation of the Stockholm agreement". The Houthi-run Al-Masirah TV channel quoted a rebel source as confirming a deal had been reached and that both parties "express their commitment to implement the agreement".

"What matters to us is implementing the deal, not only signing it," senior

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GLION, Switzerland: ICRC Director for the Near and Middle East Fabrizio Carboni and UN Special Envoy for Yemen Martin Griffiths sit with Houthi prisoner exchange committee members (left) and Yemeni government delegation members (right) at the end of a week-long meeting yesterday. — AFP

US Senate will 'easily' confirm Barrett: Trump

WASHINGTON: US President Donald Trump said yesterday the Senate will "easily" confirm his Supreme Court nominee Amy Coney Barrett before the election, despite furious Democratic opposition to his bid to steer the court rightward for years to come. Trump has nominated Barrett, a darling of conservatives for her religious views, to replace the late liberal justice Ruth Bader Ginsburg in a lifetime seat on the top court, potentially impacting some of the most partisan issues in America, from abortion to gun rights to healthcare.

His decision to push her nomination through just weeks before the tense and potentially disputed Nov 3 election, in which polls show he is the underdog, has galvanized Democrats, who are calling for the decision to be made by the winner of the vote. His election rival, Democrat Joe Biden, has led the charge. "The Senate should not act on this vacancy until after the American people select their next president and the next Congress," Biden said Saturday, just moments after Trump announced Barrett's nomination.

But Trump expressed confidence yesterday in an interview with "Fox & Friends". "I think we're going to have it done easily before the election," he said. "I think it would be nice to do. Get it out of the way," he continued, adding: "We have plenty of time."

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WASHINGTON: US President Donald Trump announces his US Supreme Court nominee, Judge Amy Coney Barrett, in the Rose Garden of the White House on Saturday. —AFP

Local

Deputy Amir receives heads of Kuwait's legislative, executive, legal authorities



KUWAIT: His Highness the Deputy Amir and Crown Prince Sheikh Nawaf Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah meets with National Assembly Speaker Marzouq Ali Al-Ghanem. — KUNA photos



His Highness the Deputy Amir and Crown Prince Sheikh Nawaf Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah meets with His Highness the Prime Minister Sheikh Sabah Al-Khaled Al-Hamad Al-Sabah.



His Highness the Deputy Amir and Crown Prince Sheikh Nawaf Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah meets with Chief Justice Yousef Al-Mutawaa.



His Highness the Deputy Amir and Crown Prince Sheikh Nawaf Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah meets with Deputy Prime Minister, Interior Minister and Cabinet Affairs Minister Anas Al-Saleh.



His Highness the Deputy Amir and Crown Prince Sheikh Nawaf Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah meets with Foreign Minister and Acting Defense Minister Sheikh Dr Ahmad Nasser Al-Mohammad Al-Sabah.

KUWAIT: His Highness the Deputy Amir and Crown Prince Sheikh Nawaf Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah received National Assembly Speaker Marzouq Ali Al-Ghanem at Seif Palace yesterday. His Highness the Deputy Amir also received His Highness the Prime Minister Sheikh Sabah Al-Khaled Al-Hamad Al-Sabah, as well as President of Kuwait's Supreme Judicial Council and the Cassation Court, and President of the Constitutional Court Justice Yousef Al-Mutawaa. Furthermore, His Highness Sheikh Nawaf received Deputy Prime Minister, Interior Minister and Minister of State of Cabinet Affairs Anas Khaled Al-Saleh, as well as Foreign Minister and Acting Defense Minister Sheikh Dr Ahmad Nasser Al-Mohammad Al-Sabah. — KUNA

Palestinians face bleak future 20 yrs after intifada

JENIN: Two decades on from the second intifada, Palestinians who grew up in the shadow of the uprising find themselves surrounded by physical and political barriers with little hope for the future. In Jenin refugee camp, in the north of the occupied West Bank, the walls are plastered with posters showing young Palestinian men wearing keffiyeh scarves around their necks and clutching AK-47 assault rifles. Whether killed by Israeli forces or jailed, their images have faded over the years.

"When I walk through the camp, I try to reconcile my memory with what I see today," said Nidal Naghnaghyeh Turkeman, 48, who spent 17 years in prison for his role in the uprising. Nidal fought in the ranks of the main Palestinian faction Fatah in the first intifada (1987 to 1993) which preceded a brief optimistic period when the Oslo peace

accords brought hope of a lasting solution to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict.

But by the turn of the century disillusionment had set in and the second intifada broke out after right-wing Israeli opposition leader Ariel Sharon visited the Al-Aqsa mosque compound in annexed east Jerusalem on Sept 28, 2000. The move was seen as a provocation by Palestinians and violent clashes between them and Israeli forces followed. The second intifada lasted five years, during which attacks were carried out in Israel, the Gaza Strip and the West Bank.

In response Israel reoccupied much of the West Bank and began building a separation barrier between the two communities that in places cuts deep into occupied territory. Jenin refugee camp was caught up in the violence and in 2002 was besieged by Israeli forces for more than a month. Turkeman, who lost two brothers in the fighting, was jailed for his role in an attack shortly after the siege which killed six Israeli civilians.

While reminders of the uprising can be seen on the streets of Jenin, such as a former fighter selling grapes in a wheelchair, daily life has changed significantly over the past two decades. Israel built the West Bank

security barrier - which Palestinians call an apartheid wall separating them from Jerusalem - saying it was necessary to prevent attacks. In Gaza, the Islamist group Hamas took power and the impoverished and densely-populated coastal enclave has been under a crippling Israeli blockade since 2007.

In Dec 2017, US President Donald Trump recognised Jerusalem as Israel's capital, going against international consensus that the city's status can only be defined as part of a peace accord. Turkeman's twin daughters, Yara and Sara, were born just weeks before the siege and saw little of their father growing up. "At the start we rejected him. We couldn't find a place for him in our hearts," said Sara, an 18-year-old studying IT at university.

Despite having no memories of the second intifada, the twins say their father is still viewed as a hero by young Palestinians in Jenin. "Today, we are still in the intifada, there are attacks every day, people wounded and nothing has been solved," said Sara, her sister nodding her head in agreement. "There is no future here, the only two options are emigration or fighting." — AFP



JERUSALEM: In this file photo taken on Dec 8, 2000, a Palestinian youth holds a stone in his bloodstained hand after carrying a dead fellow protester outside the Al-Aqsa mosque compound. — AFP

Yemen warring sides agree to...

Continued from Page 1

rebel commander Mohamed Ali Al-Houthi had tweeted on Saturday. Yemen's Foreign Minister Mohammad Al-Hadhrani welcomed the deal as a "humanitarian" breakthrough, but also said in a tweet that "the government demands the agreement is implemented without stalling".

Dr Elisabeth Kendall, a researcher at the University of Oxford's Pembroke College, said the deal was an "important trust-building measure" amid efforts to end the Yemen conflict, but one that would create more animosity if it faltered. "This step has to be viewed positively, given how polarized the warring sides now are and how intractable the conflict has become," she told AFP. "But there are several reasons to be wary... We have been here several times before. Prisoner swaps are agreed, then they come to nothing and those impacted end up even more frustrated and angry."

Sources on both sides had told AFP Saturday that a deal had been reached for the prisoner exchange,

indicating it was to be implemented within two weeks. The agreement includes the release of "681 rebels and 400 government forces (and allies), among them 15 Saudis and four Sudanese", a member of the government delegation told AFP.

The talks began on Sept 18, and had been aimed at securing the release of 1,420 prisoners, including the brother of Yemeni President Abdrabbo Mansour Hadi. Griffiths did not provide details on which prisoners would be exchanged under the agreement reached in Gilon. But the government official told AFP that the release of General Nasser Mansour Hadi from the hands of the rebels "has been postponed".

The International Committee of the Red Cross is to oversee the return of detainees to their families. Fabrizio Carboni, head of the ICRC's Middle East and Near East operations, described the agreement as "a very positive step". "This release will alleviate the suffering of many detainees and many families who have been waiting for so long to be reunited," he said at the Gilon ceremony. "We are convinced that this release... will contribute to renew solid, valid peace talks." Tens of thousands of people, mostly civilians, have died in the Yemen conflict, which has sparked what the United Nations calls the world's worst humanitarian crisis. — AFP

possible solutions including taking health precautions such as using disposable hoses, so customers will not reuse the same hose. We also proposed that customers bring their shisha with them, but the ministry refused," he told Kuwait Times.

"Many cafes have shut down indefinitely and handed over the premises to the landlord. Their staff are working illegally in cafes that surreptitiously serve shisha. But we are still respecting the law. Some cafes launched their business two or three months before the pandemic, and were shut down. The majority of these cafes depend on serving shisha - serving food and beverages merely complements the main activity, which is shisha," Delemi pointed out.

"Landlords are demanding rent even though they know we have no income. I have to pay KD 14,000 in monthly rent for my cafes, which is now accumulating. Staff salaries and rent for staff accommodation are accumulating too. The company's file at the ministry of social affairs is blocked, the license of the cafe can't be renewed, the residencies of the employees can't be renewed, and the fines due to the expiry of the license are also accumulating," he complained.

"We are facing bankruptcy and imprisonment as we are not able to pay these huge amounts that are accumulating till today. The government should help us, as they were all the time encouraging Kuwaitis to start small enterprises," concluded Delemi.

US Senate will 'easily' confirm...

Continued from Page 1

Barring a huge surprise, Republican senators, who have 53 out of 100 votes in the upper house of Congress, are expected to confirm Barrett. Senate majority leader Mitch McConnell, a Republican, has already announced that a vote will be held "this year".

If confirmed, Barrett will fill the seat of Ginsburg, likely steering the court to the right for years, expanding the current conservative wing's sometimes shaky 5-4 advantage to a solid 6-3. Trump has previously filled two of the nine seats on the high court. With the liberals' influence waning, the court will likely see a replay of some of the biggest judicial disputes in the nation, not least abortion rights and the already battered Obamacare health care plan.

More immediately - and even more explosively - a

Azerbaijan, Armenia on...

Continued from Page 1

Azerbaijan accused Armenian forces of violating a ceasefire, saying it had launched a counter-offensive to "ensure the safety of the population", using tanks, artillery missiles, combat aviation and drones. "There are reports of dead and wounded among civilians and military servicemen," Azerbaijan's foreign ministry said. "Extensive damage has been inflicted on many homes and civilian infrastructure." Karabakh's rights ombudsman Artak Beglaryan pointed to "civilian casualties", while Armenia said a woman and child were killed.

Ethnic Armenian separatists seized the Nagorny Karabakh region from Baku in a 1990s war that claimed 30,000 lives. Talks to resolve one of the worst conflicts to emerge from the 1991 collapse of the Soviet Union have been largely stalled since a 1994 ceasefire agreement. France, Russia and the United States have mediated peace efforts as the "Minsk Group" but the last big push for a peace deal collapsed in 2010.

Azerbaijan's ally Turkey blamed Yerevan for the flare-up and promised Baku its "full support". "We strongly condemn the attack by Armenia against Azerbaijan," Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan's spokesman Ibrahim Kalin said on Twitter. Russia's Lavrov spoke with his Turkish counterpart Mevlut Cavusoglu, Moscow said, stressing "the need to halt fire as soon as possible". The two discussed "Armenia's aggression", a Turkish diplomatic source said.

quick confirmation of Barrett would tilt the court just as fears are growing that the body may have to arbitrate a post-election dispute in which either Trump or his Democratic opponent Joe Biden refuses to accept the result.

Trump, who is well behind in the polls, has repeatedly said he may have to challenge results, alleging -without evidence - that Democrats want a "rigged" election. He said this week that the contest is likely to end up in the Supreme Court. Senate Judiciary Committee hearings to consider Barrett's nomination are scheduled to begin Oct 12.

Democrats are furious, given that Trump could lose the election, yet still leave a judicial imprint with potential to last decades. They are especially incensed, given that Barrett, 48, is replacing Ginsburg, one of the country's biggest feminist icons and a steady ally of the left. "Considering the fact that this Supreme Court nominee may serve on the court for 30 years, it is nothing short of outrageous that they want to approve her in fewer than 30 days," Senator Dick Durbin, the Democratic whip, told CNN on Saturday. — AFP

Pope Francis told crowds on Saint Peter's Square he was praying for peace and called for "concrete gestures of good will and fraternity" from the warring sides. Political observers said global powers should intensify talks to stop the conflict. "We are a step away from a large-scale war," Olesya Vartanyan of the International Crisis Group told AFP. "One of the main reasons for the current escalation is a lack of any proactive international mediation between the sides for weeks," she added.

"War is resuming. Time for Russia, France and US, individually and jointly, to stop it," tweeted Dmitry Trenin, director of the Carnegie Moscow Centre. Karabakh separatist leader, Arayik Harutyunyan, accused Ankara of sending mercenaries to Azerbaijan. "We have information that mercenaries from Turkey and other countries were airlifted to Azerbaijan," he said. "The Turkish army is already in Azerbaijan, under the guise of military drills," he claimed.

Yesterday morning, Azerbaijan started "active bombing" along Karabakh's frontline including civilian targets and in the main city Stepanakert, Karabakh's presidency said. The rebel defense ministry said its troops shot down four Azerbaijani helicopters and 15 drones, while Baku denied the claims. On Friday, Aliyev accused Armenia of undermining Karabakh peace talks.

In July, heavy clashes along the two countries' shared border - hundreds of kilometres from Karabakh - claimed the lives of at least 17 soldiers from both sides. Raising the stakes, Azerbaijan at the time threatened to strike Armenia's atomic power station if Yerevan attacked strategic facilities. During the worst recent clashes in April 2016, around 110 people were killed. — AFP

Owners protest continued closure...

Continued from Page 1

demanding full rent payment for this period," he said. More problems have followed. "As I couldn't pay the salaries of the staff, the bank blocked my account. Also, because I didn't pay the rent, the cafe license couldn't be renewed after it expired. As a result of the expired license, I cannot renew the residencies of the staff," Khamis explained.

"Some cafes exempted from paying rent still haven't reopened, because if they do, the landlord will demand rent. Some cafes that are not exempt from rent have reopened, but are not covering their expenses, as customers will not come to a shisha cafe that is not serving shisha. I didn't open as I cannot pay the salaries of the staff," Khamis said. He called on the government to find a solution - either to compensate them for their losses or let them reopen with conditions.

Salah Al-Delemi, owner of three cafes in Hawally, is also facing bankruptcy. "On March 2, 2020, we closed the cafes due to the decision of the ministry of health, and were patiently hoping to reopen along with other businesses. We have proposed all

Local

GCC ministers congratulate Amir on US award, praise efforts to heal rift

US honoring shows world recognition of Amir's status

KUWAIT: Saudi Minister of State for Foreign Affairs Adel Al-Jubeir stated that US President Donald Trump's granting His Highness the Amir of Kuwait Sheikh Sabah Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah the US Legion of Merit, Degree Chief Commander, shows His Highness' high status on the global stage. Granting His Highness the Amir this rarely-awarded legion reflects the US and the international commu-



Saudi Minister of State for Foreign Affairs Adel Al-Jubeir



Qatar's Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Foreign Affairs Sheikh Mohammad bin Abdulrahman Al Thani



Bahrain's Foreign Minister Dr Abdullatif Al-Zayani



Culmination of Amir's march

nity's great respect and appreciation of His Highness Sheikh Sabah, Jubeir told Kuwait's official state TV Saturday evening. He also described His Highness the Amir as a great, visionary, and far-sighted leader. Jubeir lauded His Highness the Amir's wise leadership of Kuwait and his cooperation with other leaders of the Gulf Cooperation Council. He noted that the Saudi leadership is keen on contacting and consulting with His Highness the Amir. He wished him speedy recovery and Kuwait more progress, security and welfare.

On September 18, President Trump granted His Highness the Amir of Kuwait the prestigious US

Legion of Merit, Degree Chief Commander in recognition of His Highness the Amir's tireless efforts and significant leadership diplomatic efforts in the region and the world. According to the White House, "the Legion of Merit, Degree Chief Commander, is a rarely-awarded, prestigious decoration that can only be bestowed by the president, typically to chiefs of state or heads of government of other countries. The honor was last awarded in 1991."

Full of achievements

In the meantime, Qatar's Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Foreign Affairs Sheikh Mohammad bin Abdulrahman Al Thani congratulated His Highness the Amir on his recent honoring, describing it as well-deserved. "This well-merited decoration comes in culmination of His Highness the Amir's

march which is full of achievements and after being named by the UN as a humanitarian leader," the Qatari foreign minister told Kuwait TV Saturday evening. He congratulated all Kuwaiti, Qatari and Arabian Gulf peoples on the US honoring of His Highness the Amir.

The Qatari top diplomat expressed Qatar's appreciation of His Highness the Amir's strenuous efforts to heal the Gulf rift. He also hailed Kuwait's diplomacy under the leadership of His Highness Sheikh Sabah Al-Ahmad and its active role during its membership at the UN Security Council in 2018-2019 to defend Arab causes and maintain international peace and security. Sheikh Mohammad bin Abdulrahman recalled the generous humanitarian initiatives by His Highness the Amir to aid people in distress across the globe and Kuwait's support to Palestinian people and war-torn Iraq and Yemen.

Global recognition

Meanwhile, Bahrain's Foreign Minister Dr Abdullatif Al-Zayani has congratulated His Highness the Amir on the recent honoring. This is an international honoring and a recognition of His Highness the Amir's political and diplomatic efforts, Zayani told Kuwait TV Saturday evening. He noted the US honoring reflected the depth of Kuwaiti-US strategic and friendship relations.

Zayani congratulated His Highness the Amir on his recent successful surgery and wished him speedy recovery. He spoke highly about His Highness the Amir's efforts to iron out differences among GCC member states. He added that the whole world recognizes His Highness the Amir of Kuwait's humanitarian role and support to poor countries worldwide which earned him the UN honoring and naming him a humanitarian leader. — KUNA

Award recognition of Amir's efforts: Sultan Al-Bohra

KUWAIT: The Representative of Sultan Al-Bohra in the State of Kuwait Sheikh Yahya Badri offered congratulations and blessings to His Highness the Amir Sheikh Sabah Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah, on the occasion of him being awarded the US Legion of Merit, Degree Chief Commander by United States President Donald Trump. "This Legion of Merit to His Highness is a recognition of his status, great effort, the great role he is leading, as well as his charitable efforts in the region and the world and supporting people in need," Badri said. He concluded by praying for good health and well-being to His Highness the Amir, and for his safe return to Kuwait in the near future, further wishing good health and well-being to His Highness the Deputy Amir and Crown Prince Sheikh Nawaf Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah.



Sheikh Yahya

Foreign Minister meets US Ambassador

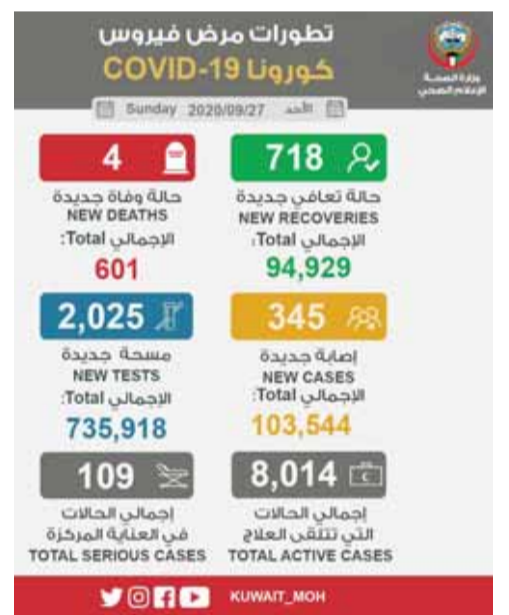
KUWAIT: Kuwait's Foreign Minister and Acting Defense Minister Sheikh Dr Ahmad Nasser Mohammad Al-Sabah received US Ambassador Alina Romanowski in his office yesterday. Assistant Foreign Minister for the Minister's office Saleh Al-Loughani and Assistant Foreign Minister for the Americas Hamad Al-Mashaan attended the meeting.



KUWAIT: Foreign Minister Sheikh Dr Ahmad Nasser Mohammad Al-Sabah meets with US Ambassador Alina Romanowski. — KUNA

Kuwait registers four deaths, 345 new COVID cases

KUWAIT: Kuwait's Ministry of Health said yesterday 345 people tested positive for the novel coronavirus while four patients died in the past 24 hours. Ministry spokesman Dr Abdullah Al-Sanad said that the total registered cases reached 103,544 while deaths topped 601. Furthermore, he explained that the distribution of cases in health zones was as follows: 112 in Hawally, 83 in Ahmadi, 64 in the Capital, 49 in Jahra and 37 in Farwaniya. The health ministry had announced earlier that 718 people recovered from the coronavirus in the past 24 hours to raise total recoveries to 94,929. Dr Sanad said 109 patients were in the intensive care units while the number of patients receiving treatment was 8,014. Meanwhile, Dr Sanad said health care workers conducted



2,025 swab tests in the past 24 hours to raise total tests since the outbreak of the disease to 735,918. He renewed calls on the public to abide by preventive rules like physical distancing and avoiding gatherings. — KUNA

News in brief

New French envoy arrives

KUWAIT: New French Ambassador to Kuwait Anne Claire Legendre arrived on Saturday evening, said local Arabic daily Al-Rai, noting that the new ambassador posted a tweet announcing her arrival as well as eagerness to work with both members of the French community in Kuwait and Kuwaiti friends.

Embassy closed

KUWAIT: The Sri Lankan Embassy in Kuwait announced closing until Oct 11 after three staff members and 44 workers staying at the embassy tested positive for COVID-19. The embassy said on its Twitter account that people with urgent matters are required to contact it via email during the closure at slemb.kuwait@mfa.gov.lk.

Rolls-Royce stake

KUWAIT: The Kuwait Investment Authority may be in talks with Rolls-Royce Holding to buy a stake in the British aircraft engine maker, reported Sky News over the weekend. London-based Kuwait Investment Office (KIO), which is part of the KIA is negotiating over a deal as part of a potential £2.5 billion cash call.

Municipality hotline

KUWAIT: Kuwait Municipality announced a WhatsApp number (24727732) and a hotline (139) to receive complaints and suggestions from the public around the clock.

In-class exams

KUWAIT: Around 3,000 grade 10, 11 and 12 students took their re-exams in person yesterday inside public schools, the education ministry announced. They include public school and home school students who failed to take their midterms (first semester exams).

Stay safe. Stay home. Stay informed.

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Jobs for 10,482 citizens in 86 days

KUWAIT: The Civil Services Commission (CSC) has succeeded in nominating 10,482 citizens to work in various government bodies within 86 days - from June 30 till Sept 24, 2020 - CSC Director Ahmad Al-Jassar told Al-Rai Arabic daily. Jassar described the nominations as an achievement for both CSC and government bodies.

"Nominees included 6,465 holders of university degrees, 2,283 with diplomas, 1,136 with high school certificates, 353 with intermediate school certificates or lower, 175 with intermediate school certificates or higher, 68 with master's degrees and two with PhDs," Jassar explained.

Jassar considered nominating over 10,000 citizens in less than three months as an achievement for CSC in view of the extraordinary circumstances Kuwait is going through. He stressed that CSC is always keen on nominating those registered in its employment system through government bodies' integrated systems and according to those bodies' needs.

Meanwhile, Al-Qabas daily reported yesterday quoting education ministry sources that the CSC sent a request to ministry officials asking for details of 1,961 expatriate teachers in public schools, who could be replaced with Kuwaiti teachers after the end of the 2020/2021 in July next year. There are no guarantees that the teachers, who teach Islamic studies, history, geography, psychology and philosophy, could lose their jobs, "but the CSC requires their information to study the possibility of replacing them with Kuwaiti teachers as part of the public sector jobs' Kuwaitization process," the report reads.



The Civil Service Commission

Taking risk for a job in Kuwait: Expat workers narrate process of return

Selfie uploaded to ministry app every four hours during quarantine

By Ben Garcia

KUWAIT: Ray Alvin Lopez is a nurse at a private hospital in Kuwait. He is considered as a frontliner in the fight against COVID-19. He took his annual vacation in the first week of March, but in mid-March, the government imposed a total lockdown, preventing commercial flights from entering Kuwait to stop the spread of the coronavirus. So Ray Alvin was stuck in the Philippines for six months. Things got worse when the government imposed an entry ban on passengers arriving directly from 34 countries, including the Philippines, forcing him to transit in a 'third country' on his way back to Kuwait.

"It was a hard thing to do. But I took the risk because the company told me that they will shoulder all the expenses. I was afraid, because if I tested positive in the third country, it meant extended quarantine. I would be stuck in Dubai for an additional two weeks, so I was praying really hard. Thank God, I was negative from day one. The swabbing started in Manila - a day before the flight, the travel agency requires passengers to take a swab test. That was the first negative test I underwent. Then on arrival to Dubai, I tested negative again, and a day before leaving Dubai, I again tested negative," Ray Alvin told Kuwait Times.

'Everything arranged'

Ray Alvin said the travel agency arranged everything, including hotel accommodation and tickets to Dubai and Kuwait. "It's an expensive process. The visa for my temporary stay in Dubai was at their

expense too. It's a special arrangement by my company with the travel agency. They arranged everything for me and all I did was to make sure I wasn't positive from day one till arrival," he said.

Ray Alvin said the returnees were advised by the hotel staff to not leave the room to make sure of testing negative when they travel to Kuwait. "It was just a piece of advice, as the hotel will allow you to go out after a negative swab test. I went out to enjoy Dubai, but with extra precautions," he said. "The hotel where I stayed asked for a 500-dirham deposit in case I was carrying the disease. They said they will refund the amount if I test negative. Food costs were shouldered by me - only breakfast was free - so I spent money during the 15 days in Dubai."

Ray Alvin arrived in Kuwait on Sept 1. Ten percent of passengers on the flight were subjected to random checks and he was not one of them. "On arrival to Kuwait, we were asked to register on the ministry app; you are required to take a selfie every four hours for the next seven days. If you fail to take a selfie, the ministry will call you because you are not allowed to leave your house for the next 14 days. The mobile phone should be switched on at all times and must have an Internet connection so they can check on you," he concluded.

The Directorate General of Civil Aviation had announced a set of rules that should be followed at Kuwait International Airport upon resumption of commercial flights back in August 1. Arriving passengers must register to the 'Shlonik' app before boarding, and obtain an accredited PCR certificate showing negative COVID-19 test results valid for

96 hours from the test's date (excluding children under the age of six). Passengers will have their temperatures checked before boarding the plane and upon arrival, while a random PCR test will be conducted for 10 percent of passengers on each flight. All arriving passengers must home quarantine for 14 days upon arrival.



Ray Alvin Lopez

Emergency leave

Jomar Perciano works as a chef and his wife Alvie works in a fashion company. "We took emergency leave in March for six days, but our emergency vacation lasted for six months. We went home because my uncle - who is very close to our family - died. Thanks to the six months, we were able to be with our two kids. They were very happy, but we need the job, so we took the risk (of returning via a third country)," Jomar said. They paid for their travel back to Kuwait from their own pockets, and arrived here after 14 days in quarantine in Dubai in the first week of September. The Philippines is ranked 17th in coronavirus cases in the world. As of yesterday, coronavirus cases in the country reached 304,226 and deaths totaled 5,344, with 252,510 recoveries.

Guardman arrested with drugs

KUWAIT: A Kuwait National Guard officer was arrested with three liters of a liquid drug known as 'rape poison' and meth, said security sources. The sources explained that the suspect had been importing the liquid claiming it was a glass cleaning material, adding that he told detectives that he usually sold one milliliter of the liquid for KD 1. Detectives also arrested an associate who had been helping him in distributing the drug.

Well-informed sources told Al-Rai that the liquid drug known as 'gama drug' is very dangerous and known as 'rape poison', as users cannot remember anything that happens when under its effect. "That is why it is known as rape poison," the sources added, noting that it was banned in the US in 1991 before

many other countries worldwide banned it. The sources added that the drugs control department was notified so that the drug could be listed on the banned drugs lists. Case papers indicate that Mubarak Al-Kabeer criminal investigators had been tipped off concerning an Egyptian man selling and abusing drugs, who was later arrested with meth and a transparent liquid. The suspect confessed to purchasing the drug from an officer in the National Guard, who was also arrested. A case was filed.

Two dead in crash

Two Kuwaiti citizens were killed and a third was seriously injured when a vehicle turned over near Mansouriya along King Fahd highway, said security sources. A case was filed for investigations to reveal the circumstances behind the accident.

Stray dogs attack sheep

A Kuwaiti owner of a ranch in Wafra reported that his ranch was repeatedly raided by stray dogs that killed 11 and injured seven of his precious white goats. "This cost me over KD 3,000," the citizen complained, noting that feral dogs had recently increased in Wafra and were also attacking people. Other citizens confirmed the story, noting that stray dogs had also attacked several other ranches before they were chased off into an abandoned ranch.

Worshipper insults security

Two security officers stationed at the Grand Mosque filed a complaint against a worshipper, accusing him of insulting them when they urged him to follow preventive measures set to prevent the spread of COVID-19 during Friday prayers. The officers said the man ignored their advice and when they repeated it, he cursed and insulted them. A case was filed and further investigations are in progress.

Drunk fake cop caught

A drunkard was arrested for drinking and impersonating as a police detective, said security sources, noting that the suspect stopped a Syrian taxi driver and asked him for his ID. To his bad luck, passersby

witnessed the incident and called the police, who rushed to the scene and arrested the suspect.

Kidnap and robbery

An Indian man reported that around 10 people in three different vehicles kidnapped him from Jleeb and took him to Fintas, where they robbed the KD 110 he had, assaulted him and then dumped him. A case was filed and further investigations are in progress to identify and arrest the suspects.

Three accidents

Under the effect of drugs, a Kuwaiti man drove his vehicle on the wrong side of the road, causing three crashes, said security sources, noting that the suspect was trying to escape a police patrol when he collided into two vehicles and then collided with a police patrol car. He also attempted to run over a policeman before he was arrested with drugs.

Case papers indicate that police operations received a report about a vehicle suspiciously parked outside a restaurant in Sabah Al-Nasser. On seeing the police approaching, the suspect drove off on the wrong side of Sixth Ring Road at tremendous speed, colliding into two vehicles, and when trapped by a police patrol car, he deliberately hit it and tried to run over a policeman who stepped out to arrest him. The suspect was finally controlled when warning shots were fired in the air. He was taken to the proper authorities to face charges.

By-election suspects summoned

The public prosecution has started summoning around 200 parliamentary election nominees who had taken part in by-elections that were monitored by the Ministry of Interior, Al-Rai reported. Legal sources said the public prosecution had formed special work teams and lists to summon the nominees and is expected to complete investigations within 10 days. The nominees are facing charges of violating the law banning by-elections as well as violating Ministry of Health decisions banning gatherings as part of precautionary measures taken to prevent the spread of COVID-19.

ICSK-Junior hosts virtual investiture ceremony

KUWAIT: The Investiture Ceremony is a proud moment for a school, and if with changing times it is on a virtual platform, it is much more innovative. It signifies the belief and poise that the school consigns in the newly invested office bearers. Despite the widespread of the COVID-19 pandemic, the indomitable spirit of young talented leaders of ICSK-Junior was commemorated by means of a Virtual Investiture Ceremony on September 21, 2020.

The honorable Chief Guest Arul Dharma Raj Thomas - Principal Integrated Indian School, graced the occasion with his presence. A garland of motivational words were delivered by the esteemed guest. In his address, the chief guest congratulated the newly appointed Student Council. Further, he laid emphasis on team spirit and the role of a leader by quoting an

incident from the life of Dr APJ Abdul Kalam. The dignitaries for this grand occasion were the principals, vice principals, deputy vice principals of the various branches of ICSK in Kuwait, management, parents, teachers and students.

In this unique virtual dais, the deserving young senate members were formally bestowed with the responsibility of leading their school with commitment, confidence and competence. It was a very proud moment for the senate elect as the badges were invested upon them by their worthy parents.

Sherly Dennis Principal-ICSK-Junior, administered the oath of office, where the newly invested senate pledged to bestow their duties to the best of their abilities. She congratulated the newly appointed Student Council and their preparedness to take up responsibilities entrusted onto them. She also advised them to carry forth their responsibilities with sincerity and dedication.

In her address, the principal graciously thanked the chief guest and all the invited guests for their benign presence, to bless the occasion. Special words of appreciation were extended to the parent community, teachers and staff who have always been a helping hand and strong support to the school fraternity.



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In a time of disarray, UN's virtual meeting adds surreal notes

Free movement at risk in heart of Europe as Swiss vote



NEW DELHI: Relatives and graveyard workers cover the coffin of a COVID-19 Coronavirus victim during a burial at a graveyard in New Delhi. —AFP

Global COVID deaths near a million

Number of infections passes 32 million worldwide

MELBOURNE: An overnight curfew in Australia's second-largest city will be lifted this week, officials said yesterday, even as the global coronavirus toll inched towards one million dead. Despite the number of infections worldwide passing 32 million—with the US state of New York reporting a fresh spike—more than 10,000 anti-lockdown protesters demonstrated in central London ahead of the re-imposition of restrictions there.

In more positive news, residents of the Chinese city of Wuhan—where the virus emerged last year—reported a hesitant return to normalcy, while the French Open got underway at Roland Garros in Paris. In Australia, Victoria Premier Daniel Andrews said Melbourne residents would be free from Monday to leave their homes for work, exercise, shop for essentials, or provide care after active cases in the state fell below 400 for the first time

since June 30.

The relaxation of the curfew, imposed August 2, comes after 16 new infections and two deaths were reported yesterday. People will still be confined to within five kilometers (about three miles) of their homes, and fines for breaching other restrictions will be increased to almost Aus\$5,000 (\$3,515). Andrews said several other restrictions, including on religious services and childcare centres, will also be lifted.

Anti-lockdown protests

It was a different story in the UK, now battling to contain a mounting second wave, as thousands marched in London on Saturday against coronavirus restrictions. At least 10 people were arrested as police moved in with batons to disperse more than 10,000 protesters gathered in Trafalgar Square. This week Prime Minister

Boris Johnson's government imposed a ban on gatherings of more than six people and ordered pubs and restaurants to close at 10 pm in a bid to slow the spread of the virus, which has claimed 42,000 lives in the country so far—making it the worst-affected nation in Europe.

In New York state—once the epicentre of the US outbreak—new infections rose for the first time since June to above 1,000 a day, local officials said. In India, meanwhile, infections closed in on six million yesterday as Prime Minister Narendra Modi called on people to keep wearing face masks in public. "They are potent tools to save the life of every citizen," he said. Health ministry figures showed that the total number of cases had risen to 5,992,532. India is expected to take over the United States—which has reported more than seven million cases so far—as the worst-hit country in the next few weeks.

Back to normal?

In Paris, a limited number of spectators will watch live tennis for the first time in months as the French Open starts—four months later than scheduled. It will be an eerily unfamiliar tournament as a resurgence of the virus means only 1,000 spectators will be allowed into the grounds each day. For residents of Wuhan, where the coronavirus first emerged late last year, life is already back to normal.

There have been 50,340 confirmed cases and 3,869 deaths in Wuhan, according to the official figures—the majority of mainland China's toll—but no new infections since May. Families are once again packing amusement parks, and shopping streets were full over the weekend—although residents remained cautious. "The people have experienced tragedy and deeply know that a happy life is not easy to come by," said a woman named Wang. —AFP

'Disorder, debacle, rebellion': Backers turn on Britain PM

LONDON: Boris Johnson, called dejected and dogmatic even by his partisans, is enduring a torrid time in his tumultuous premiership, and worse may lie ahead. The coronavirus pandemic is testing all world leaders. But Britain has suffered more than any other country in Europe, and now the prime minister faces a revolt by Conservative colleagues who accuse him of governing by diktat. If the Covid-19 crisis has dictated the need for emergency policies on the hoof, the government has had plenty of time to prepare for life outside the European Union.

But there too, an air of mutiny hangs over parliament after Johnson picked a Brexit fight with Brussels that puts Britain on the wrong side of international law. The gloomy atmosphere is a sea change from last year, when Johnson displayed his barnstorming campaign skills to first win the Conservative leadership and then a general election. "Conservative MPs didn't elect Boris Johnson as their leader because they thought he'd make a great prime minister," Tim Bale, professor of politics at Queen Mary University of London, told AFP.

"They elected him as their leader because they were desperate to win an election," he said. "There's probably always a hope that someone will grow into the job. There's some alarm that hasn't happened." The main opposition Labour Party is resurgent in opinion polls under new leader Keir Starmer, taking the lead for the first time since Johnson took over last July, according to an Opinion survey released on Sunday. But it is in the ranks of his own Conservative party that Johnson faces the biggest test.

Sunak lays down gauntlet

His finance minister, Rishi Sunak, is winning plaudits for a series of big-spending coronavirus economic packages. In the true-blue Daily

Telegraph, commentator Katy Balls wrote that Sunak is "being talked up as a prime minister in waiting", although she noted he may yet come a cropper when it comes to balancing the books as mass unemployment returns.

In announcing his latest package on Thursday, the chancellor of the exchequer said Britons must learn to "live without fear"—delighting Tory skeptics who want Johnson to prioritize the survival of businesses over more stringent lockdowns. The prime minister's 80-seat majority should provide a comfortable cushion, but 40-60 Tories are said to be plotting a revolt when the government's emergency coronavirus powers come up for renewal this week.

Johnson himself nearly died of Covid-19 in April. In raising doubts about his political acumen of late, some Conservatives have openly aired concerns about the long-term effects on his health. "Whatever the cause, he has become doctrinaire and resistant to debate," argued Daily Mail columnist Stephen Glover. For the Spectator, a news magazine that Johnson once edited, the premier is presiding over "disorder, debacle, rebellion, U-turn and confusion". "He's no longer fit to be prime minister and should step down as soon as he's got Brexit done," wrote Spectator contributor Toby Young, normally a fervent backer of Johnson.

'Out of his depth'

Getting Brexit done with an "oven-ready" EU divorce deal was the promise Johnson made to the electorate last December, five months after he succeeded Theresa May as prime minister. May is now lined up among the rebels opposed to the government's internal market bill, which is meant to protect trade within the UK after Brexit—at the cost of violating treaty promises made to the EU.

The government looks to have bought off some of the malcontents by amending the legislation ahead of a final Commons vote this week. But the bill would still give parliament the right to breach the EU Withdrawal Agreement, and the 27-nation bloc remains deeply unhappy. Both sides are hoping to strike a new trade agreement by a mid-October summit, but the prospect of a chaotic "no



Britain's Prime Minister Boris Johnson

deal" split looms in December when a post-Brexit transition period ends.

Prior to the crunch EU summit, Johnson will preside over the Conservatives' annual conference on October 3-6, normally an occasion where his Churchillian rhetoric is lapped up by the party faithful. But the conference is all-virtual this year, thanks to the pandemic, depriving him of the chance to rediscover his normal ebullience. Johnson's downbeat public demeanor could be linked to a slow recovery from Covid-19 and life with a newborn baby in 10 Downing Street, some commentators argue. "But it may have more to do with the fact that he's in a job in which he appears to be quite badly out of his depth," professor Bale said. —AFP

Lebanon reels as crises linger



TRIPOLI: Lebanese army soldiers, clad in masks due to the COVID-19 coronavirus pandemic, carry the flag-draped coffin of their fallen comrade who was killed in an overnight shooting, in Lebanon's northern city of Tripoli. —AFP

BEIRUT: Lebanon was left reeling yesterday without the slightest prospect of ending multiple crises, after its premier-designate stepped down following the failure of talks to form a government, despite international pressure. Mustapha Adib's resignation on Saturday ended efforts to hammer out a reformist government in the wake of a colossal August 4 explosion in Beirut that killed 190 people, injured thousands and ravaged large parts of the capital. Political parties had pledged in early September, during a visit to Lebanon by French President Emmanuel Macron, to form within two weeks a cabinet of independent ministers tasked with ending the country's economic malaise.

"As the efforts to form a government reached their final phase, it became apparent to me that this consensus... was no longer there," Adib said on Saturday. Under the Lebanese constitution, the president must now hold further talks to nominate another prime minister to form a government, but it is a process that risks dragging out and even failing. "I don't expect a government anytime soon," said Sami Atallah, who heads the Lebanese Centre for Policy Studies.

"There was a chance, there was a lot of pressure to form a government and it didn't happen," he said, adding there was a "bigger problem" of geopolitical tensions, especially between the United States and Iran. Adib's efforts were hampered by the claims of two Shiite formations, the Iran-backed Hezbollah movement, and its ally Amal, led by parliament speaker Nabih Berri, who demanded the finance portfolio. According to observers, the Shiite allies dug in their heels after recent US sanctions imposed on a minister of the Amal party and two companies affiliated with Hezbollah.

Adib's decision to step aside 26 days after his appointment has left the people of Lebanon feeling as though they are back to square one. "The page of Mustapha Adib has turned," the French-language L'Orient-Le Jour newspaper declared yesterday. It described the return to the drawing board as "a leap into the unknown, even a highway to hell". Earlier this week, Lebanese President Michel Aoun warned the country was headed to "hell" unless all political parties stepped up and facilitated the formation of a government. —AFP

International

New US threats to Iraq widen rifts, leave premier exposed

Washington threatens to close its embassy in Baghdad

BAGHDAD: Enraged by near-daily attacks on its interests in Iraq, Washington has threatened to close its embassy in Baghdad, in a blow to a premier seen as a bulwark against Iran. Iraq has long been caught in a tug-of-war between its allies Iran and the US, rendered rockier by Washington's "maximum pressure" policy against Tehran since 2018.

In a new escalation, US Secretary of State Mike Pompeo called Iraqi President Barham Saleh last week to deliver an ultimatum, Iraqi and foreign officials said. Unless Iraq's government puts an end to the rockets raining down on US military and diplomatic sites, Washington would shutter its embassy and recall its troops, the sources said. "The Americans aren't just angry. They're really, really, really angry," one Iraqi official said. Another said: "The honeymoon is over."

The US still has hundreds of diplomats in its mission at the high-security Green Zone in Baghdad and around 3,000 troops based in three bases across the country. Since 2019, dozens of rockets and improvised explosives have targeted these sites, with US and Iraqi officials blaming Tehran-backed factions including Kataeb Hezbollah. Washington has twice retaliated with strikes on Kataeb Hezbollah in Iraq and threatened earlier this year to bomb more than 120 further sites if the rocket attacks cost American lives, a top Iraqi official said.

The frustration failed to ease even after Mustafa Al-Kadhemi, seen as Western-leaning, took office as premier in May. Ahead of Kadhemi's visit to Washington in August, the US signaled it was "unsatisfied with his actions" against pro-Iran armed groups, an Iraqi official said. The US declined to comment on Pompeo's latest call, but a State Department official told AFP that "Iran-backed groups launching rockets at our embassy are a danger not only to us, but to the Government of Iraq".



A blow to a PM seen as bulwark against Iran

Even the Hashed Al-Shaabi slammed rocket attacks as "illegal military acts", denied involvement and formally sidelined a pair of commanders seen as too Tehran-leaning. But the hardliners, too, are organizing. A half-dozen previously unheard-of groups have claimed responsibility for rocket attacks on the US and even threatened the United Nations in recent months. Iraqi intelligence officials and political sources say Iran has been gathering the most headline among its Iraqi allies into these new formations.

PM in hot water?

These reconstituted groups see Kadhemi as Washington's man in Baghdad and are irked by his vows to rein them in. "They're sending a message

Growing rift

Fresh in the minds of Iraqi officials and armed groups is the US drone strike in January that killed top Iranian general Qasem Soleimani and Abu Mahdi Al-Muhandis, the deputy head of Iraq's state-sponsored Hashed Al-Shaabi. Since then, many pro-Iran paramilitary leaders have gone into hiding lest they be subject to American strikes or sanctions. The new US threats seem to have deepened the growing rift between factions loyal to Iran and those less willing to enter into a full confrontation with the US.

After months of silence, influential cleric and political leader Moqtada Sadr took to Twitter this week to call for "the creation of a security, military and parliamentary committee to investigate" the rocket attacks. Within minutes, Kadhemi and other top government figures endorsed the recommendation. "There's a consensus on condemning these attacks. Kataeb Hezbollah and other hardliners are isolated and left without political cover," an Iraqi official said.

Even the Hashed Al-Shaabi slammed rocket attacks as "illegal military acts", denied involvement and formally sidelined a pair of commanders seen as too Tehran-leaning. But the hardliners, too, are organizing. A half-dozen previously unheard-of groups have claimed responsibility for rocket attacks on the US and even threatened the United Nations in recent months. Iraqi intelligence officials and political sources say Iran has been gathering the most headline among its Iraqi allies into these new formations.



BAGHDAD: Employees display rifles for sale at a gun shop in the Iraqi capital Baghdad. —AFP

from Iran to the US: the recent political developments have changed nothing. We can still hit you hard, and no leader can implement your agenda in Iraq," said a source from Iraq's Shiite political network.

That has left the prime minister in a precarious position. A US withdrawal could hand his rivals an unintended propaganda win, a Western diplomat in Baghdad told AFP. "If Washington follows through and withdraws its people, these groups will be able to brag that they kicked the Americans out of Iraq at little cost," the official said. Iraq's parliament voted after Soleimani's killing to oust foreign troops posted in the coun-

try to help fight jihadist remnants, but Kadhemi has tried to slow-walk the decision.

He has also embarked on an anti-corruption drive, launched a strategic dialogue with Washington and sought to fast-track deals with US companies that would decrease Iraq's reliance on Iranian energy imports. His downfall, Western diplomats and analysts said, could be a nightmare for Iraq's stability. "If the US really closes its embassy, it will leave Kadhemi in a very weak and dangerous position, opening the door for militias to expand and maybe take extreme action against the state," said Ali Mamouri, an analyst and editor of the Iraq Pulse at Al-Monitor news website. —AFP

Libyans caught between fear and skepticism

TRIPOLI: Haytham, tall and well-built, turns away customers without masks from a shop entrance in Libya's capital, telling them to return with a covering or buy one on the spot. "We do our best, at the risk of being insulted by unhappy customers who don't understand this is all in their interests, not ours," the imposing security guard shrugged. His job at a large supermarket in the west of Tripoli, one of the country's COVID-19 hotspots, is something of a thankless task.

The policy is set by management, which does not skimp on precautions - free anti-bacterial gel, disinfectant-soaked mats and even a disinfection gate where incoming customers are sprayed with a cleanser. It is impossible to gauge the full extent of the epidemic in Libya, a country mired in chaos since 2011 when an uprising backed by the West toppled dictator Muammar Gaddafi.

But it is clear there has been a surge in cases in recent weeks, heaping further pressure on overburdened services. More than 30,000 coronavirus cases have been confirmed in Libya and over 470

deaths, among a population of less than seven million, according to official figures. With hospital bed space scarce, in one way "we are lucky that around 80 percent of positive cases are asymptomatic, because all they have to do is self-isolate until their recovery is complete," said Ibrahim El-Deghayes, a member of the National Centre for Disease Control (NCDC).

But the instruction to self-isolate brings its own problems. Without running water or electricity, it is impossible to convince many to stick to the rules, Deghayes said, lamenting the indifference of some Libyans towards the pandemic. "The prioritization of tests targets people at risk, like older people and those with chronic diseases," he said.

The NCDC's head of communications, Mohamad Al-Jazoui, organizes education campaigns in the capital, where its testing strategy also targets venues that are "most exposed, like grocery stores, cafes and bakeries". These initiatives are judged insufficient by many Tripoli residents, who have to wait several days for test results, heightening the risk of infecting relatives.

Wearing a mask in public - outside, as well as inside - is compulsory in Libya's capital and transgressors risk hefty fines. But shop owners still struggle to enforce measures. Mayssoun Trabelsi and her sisters live with their grandparents in the suburb of Tajoura, after fleeing heavy fighting in their home district of Ain Zara in the capital's



TRIPOLI: Libyan medical workers distribute informative notices to shopkeepers during an awareness campaign on COVID-19 at the Friday market in the capital Tripoli, on September 10, 2020. —AFP

southeast last December.

The fighting pitched troops loyal to a UN-recognized government against eastern strongman Khalifa Haftar, who in April 2019 launched an offensive against the capital, only to be repulsed earlier this year. Trabelsi, who works in a clothes shop, fears for her grandparents, who are "old and fragile". She describes herself as "terrorized" by the risk that she will infect them with coronavirus, due to close contact with customers who refuse to wear masks. Clients "take offence" if she reminds them of their hygiene obligations. —AFP



NEW YORK: A UN police officer stands at an empty entrance at the United Nations during the 75th General Assembly of the United Nations which will be mostly virtual due to the COVID-19 pandemic in New York. —AFP

ing not to recognize leaders' videos as official UN documents. It demanded that every leader send a diplomat to introduce their video in the cavernous General Assembly amphitheater, adding a dated, bureaucratic overlay to modern communications. The videos often show the world leaders speaking from majestic offices, verdant gardens or before barren walls, usually flanked by their national flags. —AFP

ately respond to a request for comment. In June, Russia also made a veiled reference to Floyd's death, which sparked protests across the United States and around the world, when it slammed US policy toward Iran as like "putting a knee" to the country's neck.

Washington says the sanctions aim to cut revenue for Syrian President Bashar al-Assad's government and push him back into UN-led talks to end the more than eight-year-long conflict. A crackdown by Assad on pro-democracy protesters in 2011 led to civil war, with Moscow backing Assad and Washington supporting the opposition. Millions of people have fled Syria and millions are internally displaced. —Reuters

In a time of disarray, UN's virtual meeting adds surreal notes

UNITED NATIONS: "Our common house is in disorder," said French President Emmanuel Macron, describing the troubled state of the United Nations General Assembly as it prepares for a second week of mostly virtual meetings and speeches starting Tuesday. For the first time the speeches of presidents and prime ministers are being delivered on videos, often recorded days in advance. It's rather like watching a movie in an empty theater, as New York Times journalist Rick Gladstone put it. The human dimension of the global conclave, along with its more or less secretive bilateral tete-a-tetes, has been missing this year as the coronavirus pandemic plays havoc with diplomatic niceties.

Without closed door diplomacy there is no diplomacy, an ambassador from a Security Council member country said, speaking on condition of anonymity. The virtual approach however has

US using sanctions to suffocate Syrians 'like George Floyd'

NEW YORK: Syria's foreign minister accused US President Donald Trump's administration on Saturday of attempting to suffocate Syrians with sanctions "just like George Floyd and others were cruelly suffocated in the United States." New US sanctions that took effect in June under the so-called Caesar Act have further crippled the war-

made it far easier for world leaders to bring their message to New York. The General Assembly will hear or has heard from more than 160 of the heads of state or government representing the UN's 193 member countries. These include some whose appearances before the world body are rare, such as President Vladimir Putin of Russia, China's Xi Jinping, and even Pope Francis, unseen at such events since 2015.

Diplomats expect little progress between US President Donald Trump's administration-no friend of the UN and a constant critic of China-and much of the rest of the world as it pleads for unity in confronting the crippling Covid-19 pandemic. In the middle and struggling to be heard is UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres, who seems more like the Capitan in the sinking "SS Multilateralism" as he shows up in the nearly deserted UN headquarters.

'Wake-up call'

"This pandemic is a wake-up call for even more catastrophic challenges that may arise, starting with the climate crisis," Guterres warned on Thursday. "If we meet these with the same disunity and disarray we have seen this year," he said, "I fear the worst." Russia has been cool to the virtual approach, even threaten-

ing not to recognize leaders' videos as official UN documents. It demanded that every leader send a diplomat to introduce their video in the cavernous General Assembly amphitheater, adding a dated, bureaucratic overlay to modern communications. The videos often show the world leaders speaking from majestic offices, verdant gardens or before barren walls, usually flanked by their national flags. —AFP

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Greece warms to EU asylum pact but refugee groups rage

ATHENS: Greece's government has cautiously welcomed a plan from Brussels to reform the EU's shaky asylum system, but charity groups working with refugees on the ground have blasted a continued "outrageous containment policy". The "New Pact on Migration and Asylum" was unveiled on Wednesday and calls for a tougher stance on returning migrants who do not have the right to stay in the EU, and ratcheting up border controls. Such moves are music to the ears of Prime Minister Kyriakos Mitsotakis' conservative government, which has been operating a harsh migration policy since taking power over a year ago.

The only flaw from Greece's perspective is the Commission giving up on quota-based redistribution of asylum seekers among EU countries—a plan first mooted during the migration crisis of 2015 but which foundered on opposition from several member states. Wednesday's pact "goes in the right direction, our main positions are included, but we're disappointed on redistribution, we'd have preferred a different model," Greek asylum service secretary Manos Logothetis told ERT public television. Mitsotakis himself has reiterated calls for a "balanced asylum policy" and highlighted "the need to share responsibilities in a fair way".

'Enough is enough'

Like Italy and Spain, Greece's position on the EU's southern edge makes it one of the major points of arrival in the bloc for migrants. Its geography has made it a relentless defender of the idea that asylum seekers—who arrive almost daily on the country's Aegean Sea islands from neighboring Turkey—should be shared out fairly.

The Greek government has long struggled to manage overcrowding in camps on the five islands most affected by the arrivals, especially since the Moria camp on Lesbos burned down on September 8 and 9. Half of the 24,000 migrants packed into Greek camps remain on Lesbos. Authorities rushed to set up a provisional site for those left without shelter by the blaze, but charity groups are already incensed at conditions there. "The Commission promised "no more Moria", while building a new containment camp in Lesbos, where conditions are dire," tweeted the Legal Centre Lesbos, which provides legal information and assistance to migrants on the island.

Other groups working with migrants on the ground pointed out the arduous lines people must stand in to receive one meal per day, the lack of mattresses and the impossibility of respecting coronavirus infection control measures like social distancing. "We have continuously exposed the human cost of this outrageous containment policy to leaders in European capitals, to commissioners in Brussels and to citizens through the media, but nothing seems to lead to a desperately needed radical policy change," Doctors Without Borders (MSF) president Christos Christou tweeted. "Enough is enough. No more lies," he added. —AFP

International

Swaggering Trump goes into first debate with Biden - eager to fight

Some Democrats beg Biden not to debate at all

WASHINGTON: Donald Trump always fancied himself streetwise, a real tough guy, and at the first presidential debate with Joe Biden next week he'll be wearing the verbal brass knuckles. Trump, 74, is not a leader comfortable with the soaring rhetoric of JFK or Ronald Reagan. He's not one for the nuanced elegance that fans loved and detractors saw as aloofness-in the speeches of Barack Obama.

This is a president who brought reality TV skills to the White House. He's an entertainer whose style is inspired by the gaudy chaos of professional wrestling. And he's a New Yorker who mimics the wise-guy argot of mafia movies and loves to hang out with boxers and MMA athletes. So don't expect subtlety at his first-of-three socially distanced clashes with Biden on Tuesday in Cleveland. Last Saturday, he gleefully compared the debate to an MMA cage fight, telling Jorge Masvidal, a real UFC champion, it's the "same kind of thing." "A little bit less physical-slightly," he added.

Trump was not entirely joking. Take it from Hillary Clinton, the last person he pummeled in the presidential debate ring. "He could have cared less about answering the questions or even giving accurate information," she recalled in The Atlantic about their 2016 encounters. "He came prepared to insult, to bully." Opinion polls scored the intellectual Clinton as winner of the three debates. But real momentum-and eventually the election-went to the hard-hitting newcomer from New York.

Now Trump is behind and hoping his debate prowess will help him catch Biden in time for November 3. His fans muse that he may deliver a knock-out blow. Certainly Trump is confident: he pushed, unsuccessfully, for a fourth debate. By contrast, some



Photo shows Democratic presidential candidate Joe Biden (left) and US President Donald Trump. Democrat Joe Biden's cautious US presidential campaign faces its most unpredictable challenge yet in tomorrow's debate against Donald Trump - a setting with potential for explosive exchanges and one the ex-vice president has struggled with before. —AFP

Democrats have begged Biden not to debate at all, fearing that no one can prepare for Trump's unstoppable exaggerations and lies. Trump is "unique," said Aaron Kall, director of debate at the University of Michigan and co-author of "Debating The Donald." "There is no playbook on how to debate him."

'Gloves off'

Fox News host Chris Wallace, the moderator of the first debate, outlined the main topics they'll cover, including the Covid-19 pandemic, the economy and racial tensions. Wallace is a skilled questioner. Trump, though, is equally handy at ignoring constraints. Continuing with his pugilistic metaphors, Trump says he's ready to "take the gloves off." For months he has been insulting Biden as everything from a closet

communist to practically brain dead. What more he can do is unclear. But he'll do something.

At one of the debates with Clinton, Trump pulled an unheard of stunt by inviting several women who had accused her husband, former president Bill Clinton, of sexual impropriety. In another unsettling trick, he wandered from his designated spot to loom menacingly behind Clinton. "No matter where I walked, he followed me closely, staring at me, making faces," Clinton wrote in her book "What Happened." "It was incredibly uncomfortable. He was literally breathing down my neck. My skin crawled." Against Biden, Trump is likely to push hard on accusations that the former vice president's son Hunter was involved in corrupt business deals in Ukraine and China. —AFP

Free movement at risk in heart of Europe as Swiss vote

GENEVA: The Swiss were voting yesterday on limiting immigration from the European Union, which, while not expected to pass, has sparked fears a shock "yes" could devastate relations with the bloc. The initiative, backed by the populist right-wing Swiss People's Party (SVP) - Switzerland's largest party - has lost public support in recent polls. The latest survey showed 65 percent of those questioned opposed the call to tear up an agreement permitting the free movement of people between Switzerland and the surrounding European Union. It seems unlikely the initiative will garner the double majority needed to pass, winning both the popular vote and most of the 26 cantons.

But the SVP has eked out surprise victories in the past in its war against tightening relations with the EU, fuelling concern that Switzerland's relationship with its biggest trading partner could be in jeopardy. Most people vote in advance in the popular polls and referenda held in the country every few months as part of the direct democratic system, and ballot boxes open for just a few hours. Polls open at different times in different cantons, but will all close by midday (1000



GENEVA: A picture shows an electoral poster by right-wing Swiss People's Party (SVP) showing a cartoon worker wearing a belt studded with EU stars, crushing the red and white map of Switzerland. — AFP

GMT), with initial results expected by early afternoon.

High voter participation?

Voter participation is generally low in Switzerland's popular polls, and rarely inches above 50 percent, but a far higher voter participation than usual is expected this time, with some cantons anticipating as high as 60 percent. SVP's initiative calls for Switzerland to revise its constitution to ensure it can autonomously handle immigration policy. The party, which has built its brand by condemning immigration and EU influence, warns that the wealthy Alpine country is facing "uncontrolled and excessive immigration". While not an EU

member, Switzerland is bound to the bloc through an array of intricately connected bilateral agreements.

If the SVP initiative passes, authorities would have one year to negotiate an end to the 1999 agreement on the free movement of persons between Switzerland and the bloc. The proposal goes even further than a similar measure, also backed by the SVP, that narrowly passed in February 2014, demanding that Bern impose quotas on the number of work permits issued to EU citizens. That vote threw Swiss-EU relations into disarray, with Brussels warning any curbs on immigration by EU citizens would put a whole range of bilateral agreements at risk. — AFP

Belarus leader must step down: Macron

PARIS: French President Emmanuel Macron said yesterday that Belarus's leader Alexander Lukashenko must step down, after the EU refused to recognize him as the legitimate president of the ex-Soviet country. "It's clear he has to go," Macron told French weekly the Journal du Dimanche ahead of a trip to EU states Lithuania and Latvia, which border Belarus. "It is a crisis of power, an authoritarian power that cannot accept the logic of democracy and which is hanging on by force. It is clear that Lukashenko has to go."

Tens of thousands of people have taken to the streets in Belarus since August 9 elections which opposition leader Svetlana Tikhanovskaya says she won, despite Lukashenko's insistence he took a landslide victory. The embattled leader has launched a brutal crackdown against the protesters-drawing condemnation from the West, but support from Moscow. This week he triggered new demonstrations and fresh Western criticism when he held a secret inauguration for himself.

Macron yesterday said he had been "impressed by the courage of the protesters". "They know the risks they are taking by demonstrating every weekend, and yet, they are pushing forward with the move-



MINSK: Law enforcement officers detain a woman during an opposition rally to protest against the presidential inauguration in Minsk. — AFP

ment to make democracy come alive in this country that has been deprived of it for so long," he said. "Women in particular, who march every Saturday, command our respect," he added. More than 90 people-most of them women-were arrested on Saturday at opposition rallies, according to one NGO.

Russia's role

Fresh protests were sparked by the surprise announcement on Wednesday that Lukashenko had been sworn in for a sixth term in office. The European Union said the strongman's inauguration lacked "democratic legitimacy" and refused to recognize him as president. The bloc has

said it is reviewing relations with Belarus, with the issue to be debated at an EU summit on Thursday and Friday in Brussels.

EU ministers decided in principle last month to impose sanctions against the regime-but Cyprus has been blocking approval until the group agrees similar measures against Turkey over gas exploration in the eastern Mediterranean. Meanwhile, Baltic EU states Lithuania, Latvia and Estonia have expanded their own sanctions against Belarus. Macron sets off today for his first visit to Lithuania and Latvia, which are hoping for French support in the face of the Belarus crisis and rising tensions with Russia. — AFP

Address by Japan PM at the 75th Session of UN General Assembly

It is an honor for me to deliver my first statement after assuming office on 16 September as Prime Minister of Japan, at the United Nations which is celebrating its 75th anniversary. The novel coronavirus disease has pulled us into an unprecedented crisis, which in turn has brought the international community back to cooperation from its tendencies towards division and isolation. For the last 75 years, multilateralism has become stronger and made progress in the face of multiple challenges. I call on all of you to unite in solidarity so we can turn the current crisis into an opportunity to reinforce our cooperation.

In our fight against the virus, Japan has been doing its utmost for the health and safety of the people of Japan and around the world, harnessing the wisdom of public and private sectors alike. Now we are at the stage of revitalizing socio-economic activities while maintaining measures for preventing the spread of infections. Let me share my thoughts with you based on Japan's experiences.

The spread of the coronavirus is a human security crisis, posing a threat to the lives, livelihoods and dignity of people across the globe. The guiding principle for us to overcome this crisis must be "leave no one behind." The concept of human security, which focuses on individuals, has been debated for many years at this very forum of the United Nations General Assembly.

As we face the current crisis, and guided by the principle of human security, I think it is essential to set the goal of "leaving no one's health behind" as we work towards achieving universal health coverage. I expect this to be our shared goal. On that basis, Japan will proactively lead international efforts with a focus on the following three perspectives in collaboration with other countries.

First, we need to safeguard lives from the novel coronavirus diseases. Japan fully supports the development of therapeutics, vaccines and diagnostics, and works towards ensuring fair and equitable access for all, including those in developing countries. Japan also works with international organizations so that relevant international frameworks will be able to deliver results. We are also proposing a framework of "patent pooling". Public-private partnership is essential particularly in the health sector, and Japan is going to promote it steadfastly.

Second, we must prepare ourselves for future health crises. Japan is committed to expanding its efforts in developing countries to build hospitals as well as to assist strengthening health and medical systems through providing equipment and supporting human resource development. Working with the ASEAN, Japan is supporting the establishment of an ASEAN Centre for public health emergencies and emerging diseases. Japan has also been supporting the Africa Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. As a matter of fact, in Africa, we are witnessing the concrete result of our longstanding cooperation through the TICAD process for human resource development as well as for provision and maintenance of facilities in the health sector. Japan has provided support for the establishment of the Noguchi Memorial Institute for Medical Research in Ghana and assisted in the training of its medical laboratory technologists. The Institute serves as the hub of the country's response to the coronavirus and processes up to about 80% of PCR tests carried out in the country.

Third, we will take measures to ensure health security in an even broader context. We will continue to work with other countries to improve the conditions of water, sanitation and hygiene, nutrition and other environmental factors. In response to the current crisis, Japan has provided foreign aid of over 170 billion Japanese Yen or 1.54 billion USD to medical and health sectors.

Along with these initiatives, it is critically important to take steps towards revitalizing the economies hit hard by the crisis. To bolster economic activities in developing countries, Japan is implementing the COVID-19 Crisis Response Emergency Support Loan of up to 500 billion Japanese Yen or 4.5 billion USD over the course of two years. Reviving the economy rests on the safe movement of people. We will make our utmost efforts to ensure universal distribution of vaccines and therapeutics.

Free trade should not stop even with the restrictions caused by the crisis. We continue to promote WTO reform and economic partnership agreements with other countries. Times of difficulty are in fact times of innovation. Japan, for its part, will work on digitalization as a matter of urgency. Now we must look to the human security concept of the new era in responding to various challenges, accelerating efforts to achieve SDGs and to tackle global issues. To this end, I propose that we tap into the wisdom from around the world to deepen our discussions.

'Build back better'

Looking forward, we need to "build



Prime Minister of Japan Yoshihide Suga

back better" from the COVID-19 pandemic and create a flexible yet resilient society where the SDGs have been achieved and a virtuous cycle of environment and growth is generated. The ongoing crisis is heavily impacting the education of children and the youth who shape the future. It is also affecting women among others. In order to create a better and more inclusive society, there are three points that I consider to be of paramount importance.

The first is the significance of the United Nations and multilateralism. The UN should be a forum where all stakeholders engage constructively to respond to crises and work together with transparency. While I greatly respect the activities and efforts of the UN thus far, I would also like to emphasize that the Organization is in need of neutral and fair governance more than ever. The WHO is key in our collective response to infectious diseases.

Through its review and reform, I believe the WHO will be able to make even better use of necessary expertise at the right time, in the right manner. With this conviction, Japan stands ready to cooperate in the review and reform process. Likewise, UN reform, including the reform of the Security Council to reflect the realities of the 21st century, is an urgent task as the UN marks its 75th anniversary.

Peace building

Second, I am convinced that the current crisis must not jeopardize international peace and security. UN engagement in peacekeeping operations and peace building remains vital. Based on the policy of "Proactive Contribution to Peace", Japan will continue to contribute to sustaining peace, drawing on its experiences, including through our role in the Peace Building Commission, and engaging in strengthening institutions and building capacities. We also remain committed to the capacity building of peacekeeping personnel in collaboration with African and Asian countries.

Third, we must not allow challenges against the rule of law in times of increasing uncertainties. The rule of law as we ourselves set forth in the SDGs is the foundation of order, both domestic and international, and the very spirit which the UN is built on. In March next year, using virtual platforms, we will host the 14th United Nations Congress on Crime Prevention and Criminal Justice in Kyoto with the aim of advancing the rule of law. Japan continues to promote a Free and Open Indo-Pacific, the foundation of regional peace and prosperity rooted in the global rule of law.

The issue of abductions by North Korea is a matter of serious concern for the international community. I myself have worked on this issue for many years. This year, two parents of the victims passed away. It is heartbreaking to imagine the pain of the family members who passed, after working so hard to rescue their dearest children and yet not achieving a reunion in the end. As the families of the victims continue to age, there is no time to lose before we resolve the abductions issue. Japan's position remains unchanged.

Japan seeks to normalize its relationship with North Korea, in accordance with the Japan-DPRK Pyongyang Declaration, through comprehensively resolving the outstanding issues of concern such as the abductions, nuclear and missile issues, as well as settlement of the unfortunate past. As the new Prime Minister of Japan, I am ready to meet with Chairman Kim Jong-un without any conditions.

Establishing a constructive relationship between Japan and North Korea will not only serve the interests of both sides but will also greatly contribute to regional peace and stability. I will miss no opportunity to take actions with all my dedication. This year marks the 75th anniversary since the first use of nuclear weapons. Hiroshima and Nagasaki must never be repeated. With this resolve, Japan will spare no effort in realizing a world free of nuclear weapons while firmly upholding the Three Non-Nuclear Principles.

This year also marks the 50th anniversary of the entry into force of the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons (NPT), which serves as the cornerstone of the international regime for nuclear disarmament and non-proliferation. I wish to emphasize once again the importance of maintaining and strengthening the Treaty. We, as the international community, need to stand united to work on arms control and disarmament of conventional weapons, or "Disarmament that Saves Lives."

Business

MONDAY, SEPTEMBER 28, 2020

OPEC turns 60 at a 'critical moment'

Coronavirus crushes crude demand and prices

LONDON: OPEC faces a critical moment in its 60-year history with the coronavirus crushing crude demand and prices, discord among its members, and threats from a world seeking cleaner fuels.

Founded on September 14, 1960, by Iraq, Iran, Kuwait, Saudi Arabia and Venezuela who sought to control crude oil output, OPEC currently comprises 13 members including nations from Africa and Latin America. The 60th anniversary "comes at a critical moment in its history", UniCredit analyst Edoardo Campanella said in reference to the Organization of the Petroleum Exporting Countries.

"Its ability to steer the oil market in its favor has never been put in question to the extent it is now," he noted.

Relevant role

The Vienna-based institution convenes for regular meetings to assess the state of supply and demand in the marketplace, and its pronouncements can still spark major price swings. That ability has dimmed in recent years however, prompting it to join forces with ten non-OPEC producers including Russia to curb their collective output.

OPEC+ essentially wanted to counter surging energy supplies from shale rock in the United States and help clear a stubborn supply glut on world markets. Today, OPEC pumps about one third of global oil-but OPEC+ accounts for almost 50 percent, giving it greater clout.

Carlo Alberto de Casa, trader at Activtrades, insisted that the cartel retains a "relevant" function in the market, dismissing talk the organization was a "has-been". "They are slightly less influential com-

pared to the past, also due to production of non-OPEC countries and new extraction techniques. But I still see a role for OPEC," he told AFP.

This despite the larger OPEC+ in March failing to agree on a new strategy-with Russia refusing cartel kingpin Saudi Arabia's request to cut their collective output and combat a virus-fuelled slump in crude demand. In response, top global



Discord among members risks cartel unity

exporter Saudi slashed its prices and raised output to preserve market share in the face of Russian opposition.

The Saudi-Russian price war, in tandem with the worsening Covid-19 pandemic, sent oil prices off a cliff-and even caused New York's light sweet crude contract to briefly turn negative in April-meaning producers paid buyers to take the oil off their hands. After the unprecedented market crash, OPEC+ in May slashed up to a fifth of its output-a move that triggered a sharp rebound in crude prices to current levels around \$40 per barrel.

Added to the supply backdrop, the United



ALGIERS: In this file photo, participants gather in the lobby ahead of an informal meeting between members of the Organization of Petroleum Exporting Countries (OPEC), in the Algerian capital Algiers. — AFP

States, now the world's biggest oil producer, curbed the pace of costly shale extraction. Rystad Energy analyst Paola Rodriguez-Masiu, while noting that OPEC has lost market share in recent years, said the cartel still has an important role to play because it

possesses the largest amount of accessible crude. This meant that extracting its oil resulted in fewer carbon emissions, she said. "I would argue that OPEC would become more and more important" in the future, she concluded. — AFP

DIY a bright spot for consumer spending

PARIS: Many retailers have been caught off-guard by coronavirus restrictions and shifting consumer habits, but DIY stores are enjoying a boom as people spend money on their homes and gardens. A recent report by consulting group McKinsey found that faced with a prolonged period of financial uncertainty due to the pandemic, consumers "intend to continue shifting their spending largely to essentials... and cutting back on most discretionary categories".

Data has shown consumers worldwide are cutting back on clothing and shoes, but spending more to improve their homes.

In Britain, the sector has helped consumer spending overall to rebound to a level higher than before the pandemic hit. "Spending for home improvements continued to rise in August as sales volumes within household goods stores increased by 9.9 percent when compared with February," Britain's Office for National Statistics said this month. This shouldn't come as too much of a surprise, as people are spending more time at home, and even when not under lockdown, many people are working from home or have fewer public activities to participate in.

A recent survey carried out in 20 countries by consulting firm Accenture found that over two-thirds of respondents expect most of their social activities will take place at their home or that of a friend. The unease and concern that many people now feel in public spaces may push a lasting shift towards people spending more time at home, with Accenture even calling it a "decade of the home".

Certainly many Germans have used coronavirus downtime to "repair, refurbish and decorate their homes", the country's BfB trade association for home improvement, building and gardening said in a recent report. Sales in the sector rose by 15.6 percent year-on-year to nearly 12 billion euros (\$14 billion) over the first half of 2020, boosted by the fact that many DIY stores and garden centers were allowed to stay open during virus lockdowns. Paint and painting accessories proved most popular, according to the trade body, with sales climbing by 37.6 percent.

Garden furniture was another favorite, it said, seeing a 21-percent sales jump. DIY retailers have been reporting surging sales. A major DIY chain in the United States, Lowe's, saw comparable sales rise by 34.2 percent in its second quarter that ended on July 31 — a period when restrictions were still in place in some states. — AFP



European airlines cutting fares to woo back passengers

PARIS: With the coronavirus crisis putting a chill on travel, European airlines are reducing fares to attract passengers and fill the planes that are still flying. Travel restrictions adopted by many countries to stem the spread of the disease have clobbered airlines, bringing air traffic to a near halt in the spring. And while traffic picked up during the summer, it is now falling off again.

According to Eurocontrol, which coordinates air traffic in Europe, traffic has been slowing over the past couple of weeks, and is now 54 percent below its comparable level last year.

A European airline trade association has put August traffic even lower, at just 30 percent of 2019 levels. Eurocontrol is now more pessimistic about a recovery for the sector.

In the spring it had expected traffic to be 30 percent below 2019 levels in October, but it now sees a 57-percent drop. While the pandemic has left airlines starved for cash, they have begun to cut fare prices.

According to ForwardKeys, a company which



analyses the tourism market, airlines trimmed fares from Britain, France, Germany and the Netherlands to destinations in southern Europe by 15 percent in August compared with the same period last year. In a study released Thursday it found that prices on some routes were down by more than one third.

'Entice travellers'

"You have to entice travellers to return to flying and price is a factor," said Reginald Otten, deputy managing director for France at budget airline easyJet. He said the airline had managed to reopen some routes during the summer and the planes it flew were nearly full. "But we are nevertheless around 30 percent of capacity, which is a very, very low figure, and the summer is the most important,

most popular (time) for people to travel," he told AFP. Lower prices also stimulate traffic, according to Eddie Wilson, head of Ryanair DAC, one of the two firms which operate flights under the Ryanair brand. Ryanair, which has used a low-cost model to become one of Europe's biggest airlines, this week launched a brief buy-one-get-one-free promotion.

"At some stage you can't sit there and look out of the window and hope that things will be alright and wait for the politicians to do something," he said. Beyond cutting prices, airlines can and are focusing on their most profitable routes. But the reimposition of travel restrictions and tighter quarantine and testing measures could quickly undo their planning and efforts.

European airlines earlier this month urged national capitals to coordinate measures to limit the spread of the virus, saying the current patchwork of restrictions is hobbling a return to regular travel around the EU. Airlines are responding to the drop in demand for travel "with the tools they have in hand: reducing capacity and promotional offers, but they have no control over the evolution of the pandemic and policies on restricting travel," said Oliver Ponti, vice president of ForwardKeys.

"The effect of low prices will thus be limited, especially as consumers remain worried about their plans being disrupted and rapid reimbursement of their tickets in case of cancellation," he added. — AFP

China's addiction on coal erodes climate goals

BEIJING: China's surprise pledge to slash its carbon footprint to zero by 2060 was met with cautious applause, but fresh spending on coal to rev up a virus-hit economy threatens to nullify its audacious bid to lead the world into a low carbon future. The fossil fuel has powered China's economic surge over the last thirty years, and the nation burns about half the coal used globally each year.

Between 2000 and 2018, its annual carbon emissions nearly tripled, and it now accounts for nearly a third of the world's total greenhouse gases linked to global warming. Despite pledges to wean the economy off coal with the world's most ambitious investment in renewables, China's coal consumption climbed back in June this year to near the peak levels seen in 2013.

That was in part due to a pivot back to coal after geopolitical uncertainty in the Saudi peninsula, China's main oil supplier. But the coronavirus, which saw the Chinese economy contract for the first time in 30 years, also opened the taps from government lenders to build new coal plants to revive flatlining provincial economies.

There is a "tension at the heart of China's energy planning" Li Shuo, senior climate and energy officer at Greenpeace China, said. It "pits Beijing's strategic interests against the immediate goals of cash-strapped provincial governments, makes it difficult to walk the talk" on cleaner future.

This week Xi Jinping unveiled China's bold pitch for leadership on global warming at the United Nations, vowing his nation will reach peak emissions before 2030 and go carbon neutral thirty years later. It is the first time China has announced any plans to become carbon neutral, but so far there have been no details on how the country would



Between 2000 and 2018, China's annual carbon emissions nearly tripled, and it now accounts for nearly a third of the world's total greenhouse gases linked to global warming.

rebalance away from fossil fuels. In the first half of 2020 China approved 23 gigawatts-worth of new coal power projects, more than the previous two years combined, according to Global Energy Monitor (GEM), a San Francisco-based environmental NGO. "A new fleet of coal plants is in direct contradiction with China's pledge to peak emissions before 2030," said Lauri Myllyvirta, China analyst at Centre for Research on Energy and Clean Air.

Facing both ways

The world's second largest economy is also positioning itself as the global leader in renewables. It is already the top global producer and consumer of wind turbines, solar panels and electric vehicles, and Chinese factories make two-thirds of all solar cells installed used worldwide.

"China's energy policy is like a two-headed

beast, with each head trying to run in the opposite direction," said Greenpeace's Li. But the new coal surge is running renewables out of the market because China's energy distribution system uses Soviet-style quotas, where power suppliers are allocated a monthly supply limit.

The grid quotas pushed local governments to increase the allocation for coal-based power over recent years, and it leave less room on the grid for renewable energy use, even if investment in them is stepped up. "Local governments prefer to buy more coal-generated power to protect mining jobs," Li said. Wind and solar farms have been forced to idle and dozens of new renewable projects have been cancelled since late last year as small private operators struggle to make money. Experts say China's coal addiction will not be easy to end. — AFP

Business

Momentum drains from West African common currency plans

Hopes for 'Eco' fade amid coronavirus crisis and dispute with France

ABIDJAN, Ivory Coast: Hopes raised by West African leaders of finally launching this year their "Eco" common currency, in the pipeline for three decades, have faded as the coronavirus crisis and squabbling over severing the remaining monetary ties to former colonial ruler France snarl progress.

Chiefs of the 15-nation Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) regional bloc said last year the Eco would be set up in 2020 but the short time frame was not enough for the sheer logistics involved. Ahead of the euro's launch, its founding nations took 15 years to grind through preliminaries like setting up a central bank, deciding on an exchange rate regime, minting coins and printing banknotes and updating IT systems and bureaucracy.

The impact of the coronavirus pandemic has now definitively skewered the African bloc's ambitious timetable. This was exacerbated by an imminent reform supposed to switch eight ECOWAS members who use the CFA Franc, which ties their economies to former colonial ruler France, to the Eco.

The push by CFA Franc countries to move ahead alone has riled English-speaking neighbors like regional powerhouse Nigeria, even as the reform doing away with the franc has blown through a July deadline. Niger's President Mahamadou Issoufou,

whose country also uses the CFA franc, urged fellow leaders at a September summit to "come up with a new roadmap, sticking to a gradual approach for launching the common currency". For Yao Prao, economics professor at the University of Bouake in Ivory Coast, Issoufou's appeal heralds "not a burial, but a delay" for the Eco.

Prao said Ivorian President Alassane Ouattara had spoken of a possible five-year delay. "It's a question of political will. Five years would be enough to get there," he judged-frictions between ECOWAS member countries notwithstanding.

Adieu to France?

For now Nigeria, which by itself accounts for 60 percent of the bloc's GDP and 180 of its 300 million inhabitants, wants CFA franc countries organized in the existing West African Monetary Union (WAMU) to completely break currency ties with France, exceeding the reform plan already announced. Under a bill approved by the French cabinet in May, once the Eco arrives the Bank of France would no longer hold CFA countries' reserves, and Paris would withdraw from institutions like the Central Bank of the West African States (CBWAS) and WAMU's banking commission. But the new Eco envisaged would remain

pegged to the euro, while France would stand ready with a euro-denominated credit line in case the CBWAS ran into a currency crunch. WAMU countries signed up to those conditions-having had a front-row view of the currency woes of their neighbors who do not use the CFA-want to avoid such risks to the Eco.

'Can't take 1,000 years'

More fundamentally, if a new attempt at the Eco is to succeed, "we have to have a debate on the convergence criteria like inflation, debt and public deficits," economist Prao said. Divergence across countries on such economic factors has dogged the euro since its introduction, and attempts to bring them into line in part caused the drawn-out crisis following the 2008 financial crash.

While Prao said it would be positive for West African nations to have a common currency, he also struck a note of caution. "Let's not try and imitate Europe: we can't have its introduction leading to austerity policies that harm growth and employment," he said.

For now, any hope of ECOWAS members falling into line with convergence goals has been stymied by the coronavirus crisis. Ivorian economist and former minister Daniel Anikpo predicted that the



Chiefs of the 15-nation Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) regional bloc said last year the Eco would be set up in 2020 but the short time frame was not enough for the sheer logistics involved.

Eco "won't see the light of day... the political will isn't there". "When I was a minister in 2000, we were already talking about getting it done in five years," said Anikpo, who long fought for an independent common currency. "We can't wait around for a thousand years for all the incompatibilities between the countries to be fixed." — AFP

Ex-Audi boss to stand trial for 'dieselgate'

FRANKFURT: Former Audi boss Rupert Stadler on Wednesday becomes the first to stand trial in Germany over the "dieselgate" emissions scandal, five years after parent company VW admitted responsibility. Stadler, 57, faces charges of "fraud, falsifying certifications and false advertising" according to an indictment to be read out before the Munich district court.

He is in the dock alongside former Audi and Porsche manager Wolfgang Hatz and two Audi engineers.

Not a single senior executive has been convicted in Germany so far in connection with the scandal that erupted in September 2015 when the Volkswagen group acknowledged it had installed cheating software in 11 million diesel engines. The so-called defeat devices made the cars appear to pollute less in lab tests than they did on the road. Media interest in the opening hearing is expected to be high, prompting court officials to move proceedings to a justice building in a Munich suburb. Because of coronavirus restrictions however, seating inside the hearing room will be limited, a court spokesman told AFP.

'No wrongdoing'

Stadler had been Audi's chief executive for 11 years when he was arrested in June 2018. He spent four months in pretrial detention owing to concerns he could try to influence witnesses. A career Audi man, he joined the luxury car maker in 1990 and was named CEO in 2007. Prosecutors say Stadler knew about the emissions scam by the end of September 2015 "at the latest" but nevertheless allowed thousands more vehicles fitted with defeat devices to be sold.

His three fellow defendants stand accused of having developed diesel engines equipped with the manipulating software, which were installed in cars sold as far back as 2009.

The charges against the men cover a total of 434,420 Volkswagen, Audi and Porsche vehicles sold in Europe and the United States. Stadler has consistently denied the accusations.

Co-accused Hatz, whose past roles at the VW group include research and development chief at its Porsche unit, also rejects any wrongdoing. His lawyer said Hatz would respond to the charges "in detail". The large, complex trial is expected to run until the end of December 2022. The indictment alone, to be read out loud on Wednesday, is more than 90 pages long. The defendants face up to 10 years in prison if convicted.

Stadler is not the only top executive bracing for his day in court. A regional tribunal in Brunswick, near VW's Wolfsburg headquarters, ruled earlier this month that Martin Winterkorn, former chief executive of the VW group, must stand trial on charges of fraud and stock market manipulation.

The group's current CEO Herbert Diess and supervisory board chair Hans Dieter Poetsch had faced similar accusations of failing to inform shareholders in a timely manner of the pollution scam.

But those proceedings were dropped after VW agreed to a settlement that cost it nine



Former Audi boss Rupert Stadler. — Reuters

US restricts tech sales to Chinese giant SMIC

WASHINGTON: Washington has ordered US companies to seek permission before selling their technologies to Chinese semiconductor giant SMIC, its latest salvo in the battle for technological dominance over Beijing, the Wall Street Journal reported Saturday.

The Department of Commerce "has told US computer-chip companies that they must obtain licenses before exporting certain technology to China's largest manufacturer of semiconductors,"

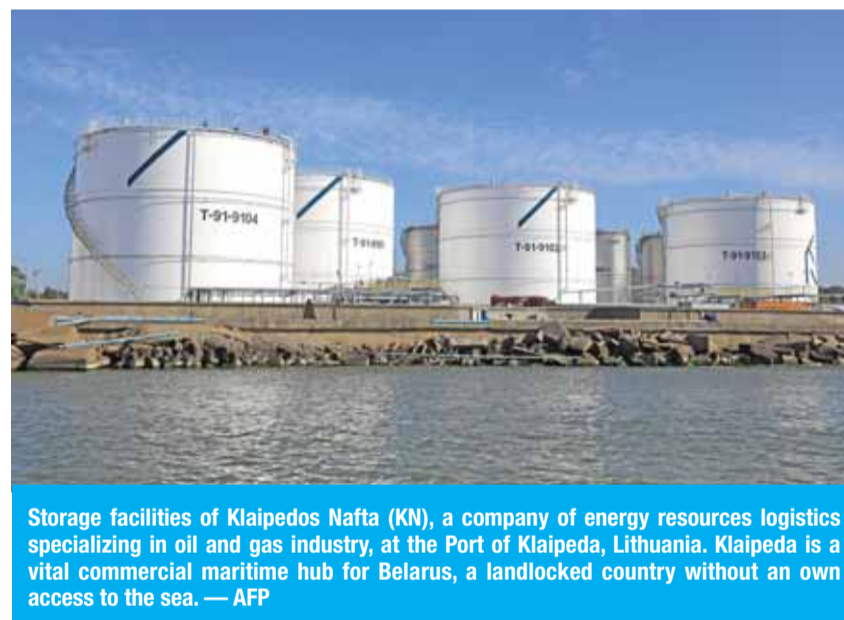
according to the business daily. The new rules were announced in a letter to the industry Friday, which says that "exports to Semiconductor Manufacturing International Corp. or its subsidiaries risk being used for Chinese military activities," the report continued.

The newspaper said the administration of US President Donald Trump has "grown more concerned about Beijing's practice of leaning on private companies to advance its military aims." The Commerce Department would not comment on the matter specifically, but a spokesperson with its Bureau of Industry and Security said they are "constantly monitoring and assessing any potential threats to US national security and foreign policy interests" and "will take appropriate action as warranted."

The report comes as the White House says it will not back down from a plan to ban new US down-

loads of TikTok, the popular Chinese-owned video-sharing app, over what it says are national security concerns, setting up a court showdown ahead of a Sunday deadline.

For years China and the United States have been scrapping for tech dominance. SMIC is key to Beijing's ambition to someday achieve semiconductor self-reliance. Analysts say China's dependence on foreign-including US-made-chips hinders that national goal. The issue was brought into stark relief earlier this year by the US campaign to hobble Chinese telecom giant Huawei, which Washington fears could allow China's security state to tap into global telecoms networks. The US Commerce Department in May announced plans to cut off Huawei's access to global semiconductor supplies, which the company said would threaten its "survival." — AFP



Storage facilities of Klaipėdos Nafta (KN), a company of energy resources logistics specializing in oil and gas industry, at the Port of Klaipėda, Lithuania. Klaipėda is a vital commercial maritime hub for Belarus, a landlocked country without an own access to the sea. — AFP

Lithuanian port caught in crossfire of Belarus crisis

KLAIPEDA, Lithuania: A vital maritime trade hub for landlocked Belarus, the Lithuanian port of Klaipėda now faces economic fallout from the Baltic state's hard line against President Alexander Lukashenko.

The embattled Belarusian leader has threatened to re-route import and export cargo through Russian ports after Lithuania and its neighbors Estonia and Latvia last month imposed sanctions against him.

Their move came as the strongman staged brutal crackdowns against protesters who demanded that he step down following a disputed August 9 presidential election. Klaipėda is the largest port in the Baltic states and handles more than 45 million tons of goods a year—more than quarter of it from and to Belarus via Lithuanian rail. "Belarusian cargo is very important for the port of Klaipėda," Algis Latakas, director general of the port, told AFP, standing near carriages and a ship loaded with Belarusian fertilizer.

Andrius Romanovskis, president of Lithuania's business confederation, said companies operating in Klaipėda were "very sensitive and are closely following" the latest news from Belarus. "For some companies, it would mean quite a strong negative economic effect," he said.

'It may be possible'

Lukashenko, facing the biggest challenge to his 26-year rule, threatened to cut off the route through neighboring Lithuania after Vilnius imposed sanctions for election fraud.

His tough talk has been backed up by Russia, his main ally that wants to

divert oil shipments from Lithuanian to Russian ports. Apart from oil products, Belarus also uses Klaipėda to export fertilizer from Belaruskali, the world's largest producer of potash.

Latakas said a boycott would be purely political and would make no sense economically. "We think that in the near term, politically it may be possible but it would prove rather complicated practically because it needs technologies and a concerted logistics chain. "Klaipėda is the closest location to Belarusian fertilizer factories, and since 2006 Belarusian cargo has mostly sailed to the rest of the world through Klaipėda," Latakas said. He said the port and Lithuania's railways have not seen any changes so far except that Lithuanian truckers have reported more thorough checks at the land border in recent days.

Before the presidential election, Belarus had been using oil imports through Klaipėda—including spot purchases from the United States and Saudi Arabia—to reduce its reliance on Russia. Since the vote and mass protests that ensued, the Belarusian government has changed tack as Lukashenko became heavily reliant on his single most important backer, Russian Energy Minister Alexander Novak visited Minsk to raise the issue earlier this month, sparking speculation about an imminent deal. "We need to create the economic conditions that will be beneficial to both sides," he said, voicing hope that a deal could be reached with Belarus by the end of the month. Russian officials have said any Belarusian cargo could transit instead through the Russian Baltic Sea ports of Ust-Luga and Kaliningrad. — AFP

Thailand tackles unemployment with million jobs expo

BANGKOK: Tens of thousands of Thais on Saturday flocked to a government-organised job expo with more than a million jobs up for grabs as it works to stem mounting unemployment in an economy battered by the coronavirus pandemic. Southeast Asia's second-largest economy could shrink by a record 8.5 percent this year, with its key tourism sector taking a beating, the government predicts, leaving young and old alike searching for work.

More than 570 booths, from public organizations, private firms and for roles overseas, were set up for job seekers at a "JOB EXPO THAILAND 2020" in Bangkok, which runs until today. "I got laid off," said 23-year-old Chanissara Prommas. "I used to work for Hong Kong Airlines, but the company couldn't deal with the cost, so they had to let go some of the staff."

Teera Magaumpai, 50, who lost his job after 30 years in the tourist sector, said the big crowd reflected huge unemployment and "elders have to fight with first jobbers".

Some of Thailand's biggest firms were among those offering jobs, including agribusiness Charoen Pokphand Foods, Telecoms firm True Corp and energy group PTT, which is

majority owned by the government. Although Thailand, which has suffered just 3,522 coronavirus infections, has lifted most restrictions and daily life and work is mostly back to normal, a ban on foreign tourists remains in place, cutting a swathe through a whole sector of career opportunities.

About 1.24 million jobs will be offered - with most in the private sector, and a little over 100,000 in roles overseas. Of that total, the government will help companies pay half in hiring 260,000 new graduates for a year. "People are the most important part of the country and for moving it forward," Prime Minister Prayuth Chan-ocha said as he opened the event.

The job offer is part of relief measures as the government has introduced a 1.9 trillion baht (\$60 billion) package to mitigate the impact of the outbreak. Supant Mongkolsuthree, chairman of the Federation of Thai Industries, estimated job losses at a record 2.5-3.0 million this year, with more than a million in the tourist sector. Thailand has a workforce of about 38 million. The government predicts just 6.7 million foreign visitors this year after last year's record 39.8 million visitors, whose spending made up about 11.4 percent of GDP. — Reuters



BANGKOK: More than 570 booths, from public organizations, private firms and for roles overseas, were set up for job seekers at a "JOB EXPO THAILAND 2020" in Bangkok, which runs until today. — Reuters

Business

Epic Games battles to get Fortnite back in App Store

Apple may be brought under pressure to put Fortnite back in the App Store

SAN FRANCISCO: Epic Games will strive anew today to convince a judge that its hit title Fortnite should be restored to Apple's App Store, despite sidestepping the tech titan's standard commission on transactions.

Apple does not allow users of its popular devices to download apps from anywhere but its App Store, and Epic is challenging its practice of taking a 30 percent cut of money spent on the apps by users. The clash comes as Apple puts priority on selling digital content and subscription services to the one billion-plus people around the world using devices powered by its iOS mobile operating software.

The commission dispute has also become a rallying cry for app makers who believe Apple's App Store policies are monopolistic. Major app developers including Epic and streaming music giant Spotify recently formed a coalition to press for new terms with the major online marketplaces operated by Apple and Google. Google runs a Play Store for apps tailored for devices powered by its Android software and also takes a commission, but people are free to get apps from other online venues. The new Coalition for App Fairness advocacy

group said it will seek legal and regulatory changes for the app stores which serve as gatekeepers for much of the mobile software distributed to smartphone users. The move comes amid rising criticism of the fees and terms imposed by the app stores, and legal challenges by both Epic and Spotify to Apple's commission for online subscriptions.

A hearing slated for today before a federal judge in California will focus on whether Apple should be compelled to put Fortnite back in the App Store while an overarching lawsuit plays out. Apple pulled Fortnite from its online mobile apps marketplace on August 13 after Epic released an update that dodges revenue sharing with the iPhone maker. The judge in

the case previously rejected an emergency injunction request by Epic, saying Fortnite's eviction by Apple was a "self-inflicted wound."

But Epic did not back down from its fight against Apple, accusing the tech giant of being "a monopolist." Due to the legal row, Fortnite fans using iPhones or other Apple devices no longer have access to the latest game updates, including the new season released at the end of August. —AFP



Hearing today before a federal judge in California



This illustration picture shows a person logging into Epic Games' Fortnite on their smartphone in Los Angeles. Epic Games will strive anew today to convince a judge that its hit title Fortnite should be restored to Apple's App Store, despite sidestepping the tech titan's standard commission on transactions. —AFP

ABK congratulates winners of salary transfer draw



KUWAIT: Al-Ahli Bank of Kuwait (ABK) announced the names of two winners for the month of September for the "Transfer your Salary and Find Reasons to Smile" monthly draw campaign, held on 17th September 2020, under the supervision of the Ministry of Commerce and Industry. The lucky winners who will each receive the equivalent of their monthly salaries are:

Jessymol Mathew Joseph and Sreeraj Thoovathara Achukutty

The next draw will be on 15th October 2020, with the last draw taking place on 10th December 2020. To be eligible to enter the draw, customers must have their salaries transferred to the bank at least one month prior to the draw date. The draw is open to both Kuwaiti and expatriate customers who hold Elite, Prestige or Al-Raed Salary Transfer Accounts.

In addition to the draw, the salary campaign offers ABK salary account customers a range of exceptional rewards. Kuwaiti salary account holders will receive cash gifts up to KD 1,000 provided they transfer a salary equivalent to/or higher than KD 500. Moreover, Kuwaiti customers are eligible for a 0 percent interest loan of up to KD 10,000 and expatriates up to KD 5,000. These loans are subject to ABK's terms and conditions, as well as the Central Bank of Kuwait's regulations and policies.

Timber-reliant US towns hit by virus downturn

BAYFIELD, Wisconsin: When a major US paper producer decided over the summer to shut two of its plants, citing the drop in demand for paper amid the coronavirus pandemic, it sent reverberations through a region that is highly reliant on its timber industry.

The sudden move by Verso Corporation affected thousands of jobs in Minnesota and its neighbor Wisconsin, where it also cut off revenue that was keeping many of the state's counties afloat. "Twenty-five percent of the pulpwood Wisconsin produced went to that one mill alone," said Henry Schienebeck, executive director of the Great Lakes Timber Professionals Association (GLTPA).

"We've seen some mill closures for the last 10 to 15 years, but we've never had one that took this much wood." Already stressed by rising digital trends, the US paper industry has been rocked by the pandemic, which plunged the country into a recession affecting advertising and jobs, while school and office closures saw the need for paper plummet. That "triple whammy" has slashed demand for paper by 35 percent from the same time last year, "a massive, catastrophic decline" affecting

KFH offers 9 'KFH Go' self-banking stations in Kuwait

KUWAIT: Kuwait Finance House "KFH" offers 9 self-banking stations "KFH Go" spanning different governorates in Kuwait. This comes as part of its efforts to meet the growing needs of customers according to the latest modern technologies and the highest quality standards, which confirms the bank's leadership position in digital transformation.

The Branches are: Avenues, Ishbiliyah coop, Jabriyah coop, Al-Mangaf coop, Shuwaikh KFH Auto Showroom, Sabah Al-Ahmad, Al-Salam coop, Abu Fatirah coop, and Dahiya Abdullah Al-Salem.

KFH GO services

KFH Go offers customers round the clock services covering over 80% of the services and transactions provided by traditional

branches, outside the official working hours of the branches.

KFH Go is unstaffed and contains XTMs offering the capability of communicating directly with the telephone service personnel in audio and video calls via XTM machines. Customers can access several services, including cash withdrawals without a card through the mobile phone using the "QR code", IDs or phone number. The smart branch conducts "Murabaha" financing transactions, requesting credit cards and prepaid cards, updating data and phone numbers, activating bank cards, opening deposits and accounts and a host of banking and financing services, therefore not having to visit the branch or deal directly with the staff. This means streamlined manner of accessing services quickly, safely and accurately.

Under the slogan "New Generation of Easy Banking Services" customers who wish to buy gold bullions (10 grams) can visit the nearest KFH Go branch and

Seidor acquires major stakes in Procons-4IT

DUBAI: In a significant boost to the MENA's SME sector, a leading global SAP VAR (value-added reseller) Seidor acquired majority shares in Procons-4IT, an accredited SAP Gold partner in the region. Seidor Procons, part of a multinational Spanish group of companies, is a foremost SAP Master VAR with platinum partnership through United VARs, providing a wide portfolio of products and SAP solutions.

Branded as Seidor Procons, the acquisition brings together the global expertise and technology of

Seidor with the localized leadership of Procons-4IT to help SMEs optimize their business operations with strong ERP SAP Business One solutions, machine learning, IoT, and other technologies that fulfill their digital transformation and make them prepared for unforeseen challenges.

"We are confident that this acquisition will provide an opportunity to serve Middle East SMEs uniquely," said Angel Fernandez, co-CEO of Seidor Procons "With Seidor's global leadership and Procons-4IT's localized comprehensive experience, we can offer our clients in the Middle East a broad range of SAP Business One solutions and technologies."

Seidor Procons products are at the core of digital transformation. It accelerates client's digital transfor-



Opening ceremony at one of the KFH Go branches

use the self-service option by inserting their card and choosing the buying Gold Bullion option, or by calling "Allo Baitak" to purchase and receive the gold bullion immediately.

For printing cheques immediately, a customer can visit the

nearest KFH Go smart branch and make a video call with a KFH employee to conduct this process. With the aim of completing the conditions for printing cheques and receiving the cheque book (10 papers) immediately.

Moreover, Seidor Procons' new positioning in the tech market is crucial and timely since the COVID-19 pandemic has forced companies to be more competent in remote working via cloud solutions. It helps clients avoid delays in project delivery, keep customers informed, and effectively manage funds as the situation changes. "This acquisition will move our business to a new level and will definitely place Seidor Procons as the SME Leader in MENA," said Wassim Hassanieh, co-CEO of Seidor Procons. "We are proud of our history, and this venture translates our vision to our future. Through this acquisition of talents, expertise, and knowledge, we plan to accelerate our clients' digital transformation journey to growth despite the current economic challenges."

mills across the country, said Derek Mahlborg, a senior economist with Fastmarkets RISI, which tracks the industry.

Dedicated to producing glossy paper for print publications, the mill in Duluth, Minnesota, halted operations in June, followed in July by the one in Wisconsin Rapids, which for decades was said to be the world's largest paper mill.

Verso's decision was based on an "accelerated decline" in demand for certain types of paper as a result of the pandemic's impact on print advertising, a company spokesman said in an emailed statement.

The company continues to look for potential buyers for the mills and holds out the possibility of reopening them if market conditions improve, he said.

Rise of digital media

The Verso mill closures affected upwards of 14,000 jobs, not only those of the 1,000 mill workers, but also people who cut and transported timber to the operations, according to Schienebeck. A representative for the United Steelworkers union, which includes paper mill workers, declined to comment.

Mike Nielsen, who runs an eight-person logging operation near Ely, Minnesota, said his production has slowed by about 40 percent since Verso's announcement in June. Independent loggers like him typically buy rights to timber two or three years in advance, meaning they are left with significant debts if a market suddenly dries up.

"Right now I possess a lot of timber - and a third of it doesn't have a home," said Nielsen, 40.

His loggers are now focusing on harvesting species other than the spruce and balsam that would typically have been headed for the paper mills. "We're harvesting as (much) as we can and trying to find a market, and otherwise we're trying to avoid spruce and balsam like it's COVID-19," he said.

The US paper industry has been battered over the past decade by the rise of digital media, said Mahlborg, the economist. Demand for most types of graphic paper have plummeted by 60 percent during that time, he said. Although the need for cardboard boxes has skyrocketed in more recent years due to the rise of online delivery, he said, converting mills from one type of production to another is extremely costly.

Together, the two Verso mills in Duluth and Wisconsin Rapids had the capacity to produce about 810,000 tons of paper per year, according to the company. Verso said that it looked into pivoting operations at the mills to make other paper products, but was unable to find viable alternatives that could be done in the near term.

Cutting county budgets

Wisconsin looks set to be particularly hard-hit by the financial effects of the paper sector's downturn, industry experts say. The state has the largest paper industry in the country, contributing nearly \$30 billion and more than 95,000 jobs in 2018, according to a report published last year by the Wisconsin Economic Development Corporation.

"What's important about the paper industry in



Demand for most types of paper has plummeted, hurting jobs and public funds in Wisconsin, the country's largest producer. —Reuters

Wisconsin is that you see the full supply chain in the state," said Missy Hughes, chief executive of the public-private agency. The current effects of the Verso mill idling are "scary", Hughes said, but she remained optimistic on the sector: "There is absolutely a strong place for the forest products industry in Wisconsin and will continue to be."

Yet, the situation means huge revenue losses for Wisconsin counties that have long based their budgets around timber sales - local jurisdictions that are already reeling from other pandemic-related financial concerns. Wisconsin is unique nationally in that its counties are the largest public landholder in the state, managing more than 2.4 million acres (970,000 hectares), said Rebekah Luedtke, executive director of the Wisconsin County Forests Association (WCFA). —Reuters

Classifieds

Monday, September 28, 2020

Kuwait Times
 Now you can browse
www.kuwaittimes.net
 e-mail: info@kuwaittimes.net

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Civil Aviation
 State of Kuwait - دولة الكويت



Tel: (+965) 161 Ext: 66819 - 66817
 Fax: (+965) 24348714
www.met.gov.kw

Expected Weather for the Next 24 Hours

BY DAY: Hot with light to moderate variable wind to north westerly wind with speed of 08 - 35 km/h.

BY NIGHT: Rather hot to fair with light to moderate freshening at times north westerly wind with speed of 15 - 45 km/h.

WEATHER WARNING			No Current Warnings		
STATION	MAX. EXP.	MIN. REC.	SFC. CHART 27/09/2020 0000 UTC		
KUWAIT CITY	44 °C	32 °C			
KUWAIT AIRPORT	46 °C	27 °C			
ABDALY	46 °C	29 °C			
BUBYAN	- °C	- °C			
JAHRA	46 °C	31 °C			
FAILAKA ISLAND	- °C	- °C			
SALMIYAH	39 °C	33 °C			
AHMADI	- °C	- °C			
NUWAISIB	43 °C	26 °C			
WAFRA	46 °C	29 °C			
SALMY	45 °C	29 °C			

4 DAYS FORECAST						
DAY	DATE	WEATHER	Temperatures		Wind Direction	Wind Speed
			MAX.	MIN.		
Monday	09/28	Hot	43 °C	26 °C	NW-VRB	10 - 35 km/h
Tuesday	09/29	Hot and Relatively humid with a chance for light fog forming at night	42 °C	24 °C	VRB-SE	08 - 30 km/h
Wednesday	09/30	Hot and Humid specially over coastal areas with a chance for fog forming at night	41 °C	23 °C	SE-VRB	08 - 35 km/h
Thursday	10/01	Hot and Humid specially over coastal areas with a chance for fog forming at night	41 °C	23 °C	VRB-SE	08 - 40 km/h

PRAYER TIMES	
Fajr	04:20
Sunrise	05:39
Zuhr	11:39
Asr	15:05
Sunset	17:39
Isha	18:56

RECORDED YESTERDAY AT KUWAIT AIRPORT	
MAX. Temp.	44 °C
MIN. Temp.	25 °C
MAX. RH	36 %
MIN. RH	10 %
MAX. Wind	S 21 km/h
TOTAL RAINFALL IN 24 HR.	0 mm

All times are local time unless otherwise stated. UP:0

CHANGE OF NAME

Passport no. L1407205, Name: Saifuddin Adnan Mohammed, Mother's Name: Seema Jaweed changed/corrected to Name: Mohammed Saifuddin Adnan, Mother's Name: Seema Ruksana. (C5803) 28-9-2020

I, Akbar Aklakh Hussain, having Indian Passport no: U0612209 issued at Kuwait wants to change my daughter name to Kulsoom Akbar Hussain (PP no. 0420856, issued at Kuwait). (C 5807) 25-9-2020

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

NOTICE
 September 14, 2020

Mr. Vinod Prabhakaran Nair, son of Mr. Prabhakaran Nair, resident of Vineeth Bhavan, Pathiruvilaveedu, Athrasserri, Chempazhanthi PO, Trivandrum 695587, Kerala and Ms. Aswathy Viswanathan Lathika, daughter of Mr. Viswanathan Kunjukrishnan, resident of Arapuravilakathu veedu, Kuzhikattukonam, Powdikanam PO, Trivandrum 695587, Kerala, both Indian nationals presently residing in Kuwait, have given notice of intended marriage between them under the Foreign Marriage Act, 1969. If anyone has any objection to the proposed marriage, he/she may file the same with the undersigned according to the procedure laid down under the Act/Rule within thirty days from the date of publication of this notice. Communications in this regard can be made by Email (cw2.kuwait@mea.gov.in) / letters / telephonic calls (00965 - 22550171, 00965 - 22533125.)

(Rameer Bharti)
 Second Secretary (Cons) and Marriage Officer.
 Embassy of India, Kuwait.
 Email: cw2.kuwait@mea.gov.in

Airlines

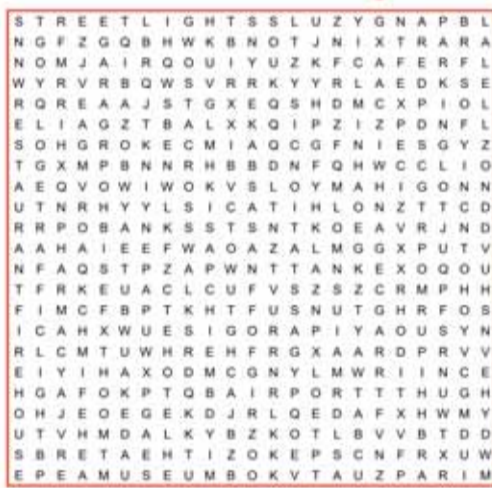
Kuwait Airways	171
Jazeera Airways	177
Turkish Airlines	1884918
FlyDubai	22414400
Qatar Airways	22423888
KLM	22425747
Royal Jordanian	22418064/5/6
British Airways	22425635
Air France	22430224
Emirates	22921555
Air India	22456700
Air India EXPRESS	22438185/4
Sri Lanka Airlines	22424444
Egypt Air	22421578
Swiss Air	22421516
Saudia	22426306

Word Search

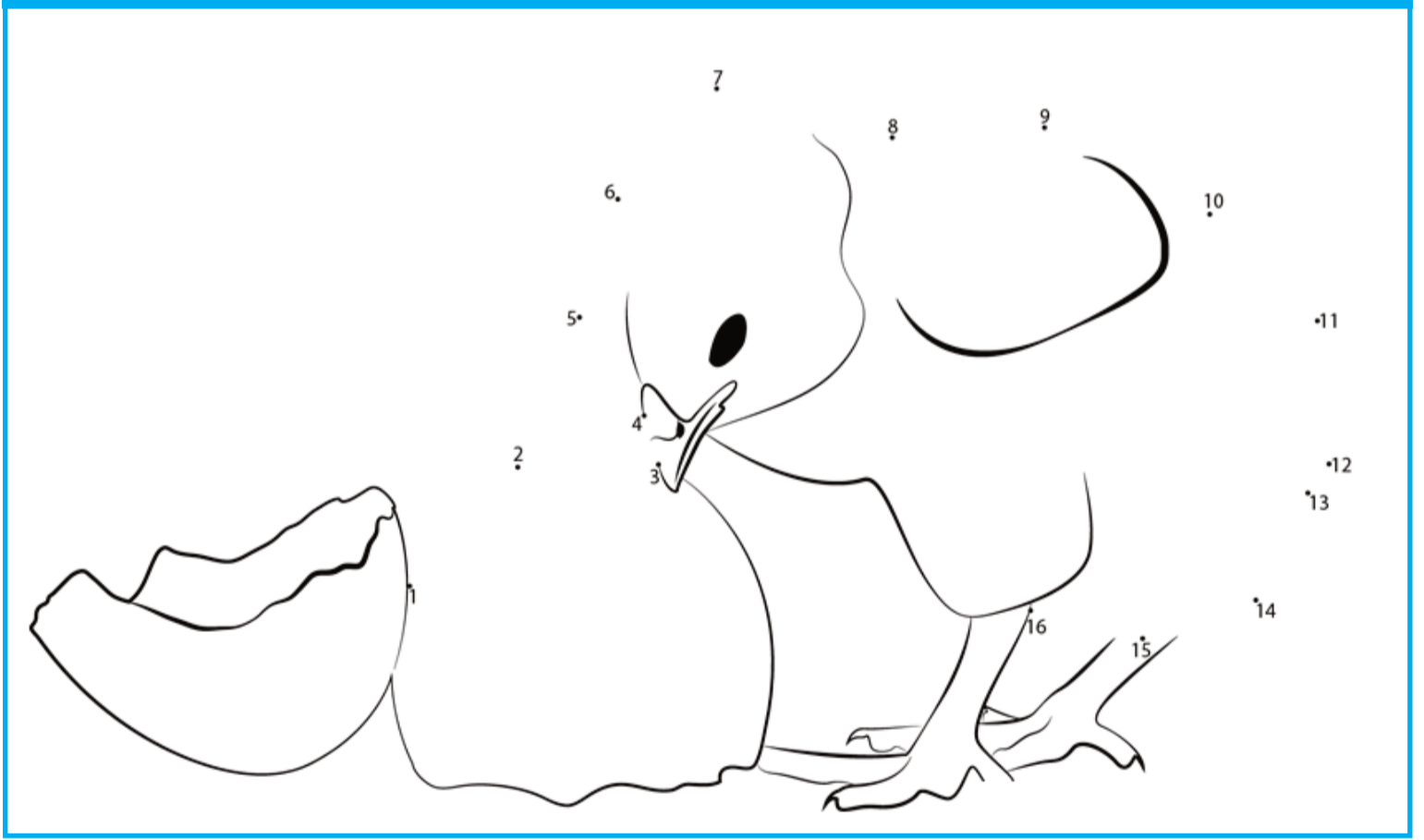
DIRECTIONS:
 Find and circle the vocabulary words in the grid. Look for them in all directions including backwards and diagonally.

- AIRPORT
- BAKERY
- BANK
- BIKE PATH
- BUS STOP
- CAFE
- CHURCH
- CINEMA
- CROSSWALK
- FACTORY
- FIREHOUSE
- GARAGE
- GAS STATION
- HOSPITAL
- HOTEL
- LIBRARY
- MUSEUM
- PARKING LOT
- PHARMACY
- PLAYGROUND
- POLICE STATION
- POST OFFICE
- RESTAURANT
- SCHOOL
- SIDEWALK
- STADIUM
- STREETLIGHT
- SUPERMARKET
- THEATER
- TRAFFIC LIGHT
- TRAIN STATION
- ZOO

In the City



Join the Dots



STAR TRACK

Aries (March 21-April 19)
 A lot of creative work may need to be finished by today, Aries. If you're professionally involved with writing, a deadline may loom. It could be difficult to get it done because family members and friends could constantly call and text, which keeps you from concentrating. The best course of action might be to go somewhere quiet, like a library, and do your work there. Think about it!

Cancer (June 21-July 22)
 You usually love to talk, Cancer, but right now you've probably reached your limit. You've attended a number of virtual gatherings and talked to a lot of people over the past week or so, and now you want to sit quietly at home. If friends or family members insist on your chatting with them, don't be afraid to say no. Everyone knows how busy you've been. Take some time to yourself and relax.

Libra (September 23-October 22)
 A small gathering of some kind could attract you and your family tonight, Libra. Perhaps you will arrange to meet some friends there, if possible. You may feel good just being out with those you love, but you're likely to be tired by the end of the event. Make sure you fortify yourself with nourishing food during the day. Take care of yourself so you can have some fun.

Capricorn (December 22-January 19)
 Generally, you're a very sociable person, Capricorn, and today you won't want to slow down. Invitations to parties, from intimate coffee klatches to big neighborhood bashes, continue to come in, but you weigh the pros and cons of attending carefully now. Saying no goes against your nature because you don't want to miss anything. But right now, you must pick the most important to you and leave the rest.

Taurus (April 20-May 20)
 What's happening in your community today that attracts crowds, Taurus? A parade? A festival of some kind? Some friends may want you to go with them, but you hesitate for many different reasons. Go if you want to but take necessary precautions. You could meet some interesting people. If you don't go, find another way to have fun. You deserve it.

Leo (July 23-August 22)
 Have you been indulging in too many goodies, Leo? You might feel under the weather because of all this abundance. You probably should take it easy. Think about reorganizing your priorities. Is a second piece of chocolate cake more important than your energy and health? Indulging can be important to your psyche, but don't forget about moderation - and don't forget that there are many other ways to indulge.

Scorpio (October 23-November 21)
 Too many phone calls may be on the agenda today, Scorpio. You might also have a few last-minute errands to run in your neighborhood. It won't be easy, probably because of unexpected delays, closures and traffic. Nonetheless, your sense of excitement and enthusiasm will help you tolerate conditions that would normally be very frustrating. Furthermore, you're having fun! Go to it.

Aquarius (January 20- February 18)
 You and other members of your household might suddenly decide to do one more thorough house cleaning, Aquarius. Usually this would be a good idea, but today it doesn't really need it, and you might work too hard and do too much. Do you really need to clean your closets now? Dust and vacuum, then spruce it up with some decorations, and that should be enough for now. Relax!

Gemini (May 21-June 20)
 You may be too free with your money right now, Gemini. You're usually careful with it, but the spirit of generosity and abundance is definitely upon you. You're more inclined to be generous with those you care about. After all is said and done, you could panic, but don't. You're good at making money. A little belt tightening later is entirely possible, and it won't hurt you. Follow your heart - within limitations.

Virgo (August 23-September 22)
 It has been said that you can never have too many friends, Virgo, but today you might wonder if perhaps you do. Your phone could be ringing off the hook. One person after another will be soliciting you for advice and your famous shoulder to cry on. Be patient. One day you may need that person to be there for you. Try to listen and keep your sense of humor about you.

Sagittarius (November 22-December 21)
 You may have lost your usual control of the purse strings and spent too much money lately, Sagittarius. Don't worry about it. It's all been for a good cause. It's nothing you can't handle, and certainly not enough to bankrupt you. The situation is only temporary anyway. The financial picture looks great for you in the months to come. Make the most of it!

Pisces (February 19-March 20)
 Too many people may be making demands on your time right now, Pisces. Some may have genuine concerns and need your assistance, but others have definite agendas that they really should deal with on their own. Use your intuition to tell the difference because you won't be able to help them all. A female friend might have the most urgent need. If you can only help one, help her.



This picture shows fragrance and tanning oil by French designer Gabrielle Chanel displayed during the exhibition.



This picture shows fragrances by French designer Gabrielle Chanel displayed during the exhibition 'Gabrielle Chanel, fashion manifesto' at the Galliera Palais fashion museum in Paris. — AFP photos



This picture shows creations by French designer Gabrielle Chanel.



This picture shows an ancient bottle of Chanel N°5 perfume.

Paris reopen its doors in 'Gabrielle Chanel, fashion manifesto' exhibition

The Palais Galliera, the City of Paris Fashion Museum, reopens its doors after extension work and presents the first retrospective in Paris of a unique and remarkable fashion designer: Gabrielle Chanel (1883-1971). At a time when Paul Poiret dominated the world of women's fashion, Gabrielle Chanel went to Deauville in 1912, then to Biarritz and Paris, and revolutionized the world of Haute Couture, adorning the bodies of her contemporaries with what amounted to a fashion manifesto.

The first part of the exhibition is chronological: it recounts her early beginnings with a few emblematic pieces, including the famous 1916 mariniere, the sailor blouse, in jersey. You are invited to trace the development of Chanel's chic style: from the little black dresses and sporty models of the Roaring Twenties to the sophisticated dresses of the 1930s. One room is devoted entirely to N°5, created in 1921 and quintessentially the spirit of "Coco Chanel".

Ten photo portraits of Gabrielle Chanel accompany the ten chapters of the exhibition and show the extent to which the couturiere herself was the embodiment of her brand. Then came the war and the fashion house was closed;

the only things still sold in Paris, at 31 rue Cambon, were perfume and accessories. Then the arrival of Christian Dior and the New Look - the corseted style that she so objected to: Gabrielle Chanel reacted by returning to couture in 1954 and, against the trend, reaffirmed her fashion manifesto.

The second part of the exhibition is themed and you are invited to decipher her dress codes: the braided tweed suit, two-tone pumps, the 2.55 quilted bag, black and beige naturally, but also red, white and gold... and, of course, the costume and the fine jewelry that were intrinsic to the Chanel look.

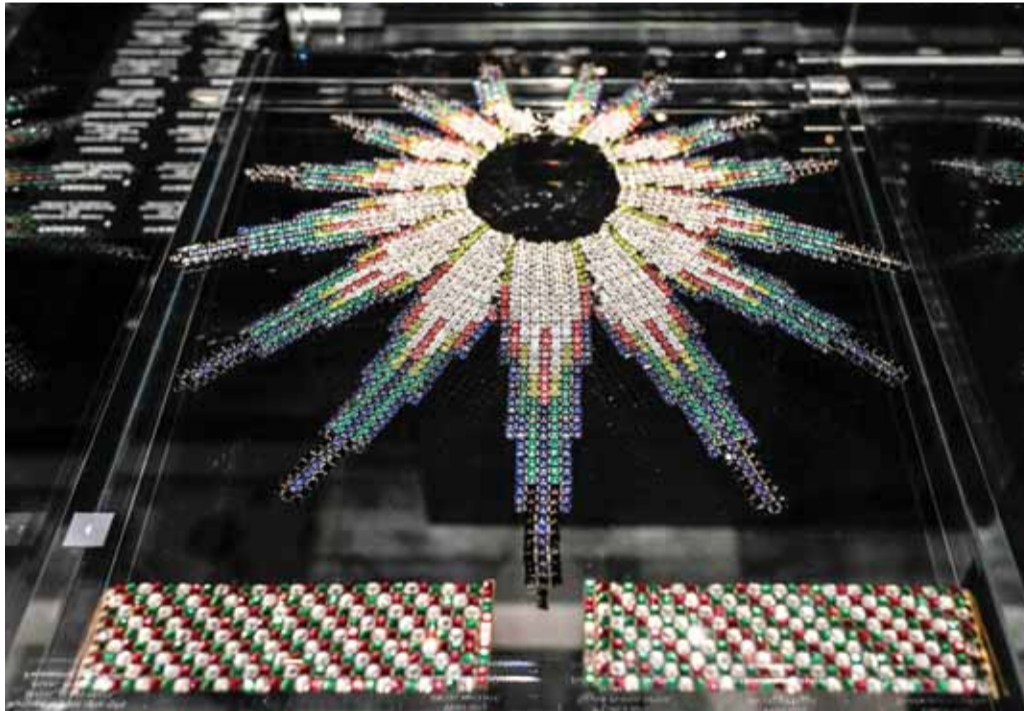
Gabrielle Chanel. Fashion Manifesto, covers an area of nearly 1500 m2 - including the newly opened basement galleries. With more than 350 pieces from the Palais Galliera collections and Patrimoine de CHANEL, from international museums, including The Victoria & Albert Museum in London, the De Young Museum in San Francisco, the Museo de la Moda in Santiago de Chile, the MoMu in Antwerp..., as well as from private collections, this exhibition is an invitation to discover a universe and a style that are truly timeless. — www.palaisgalliera



This picture shows style sketches by French designer Gabrielle Chanel.



This picture shows creations by French designer Gabrielle Chanel.



This picture shows jewels by French designer Gabrielle Chanel.



This picture shows a magazine with creations by French designer Gabrielle Chanel.



This picture shows handbags by French designer Gabrielle Chanel displayed during the exhibition "Gabrielle Chanel Manifeste de Mode".



This picture shows creations by French designer Gabrielle Chanel.





Children with special needs attend a class at a rehabilitation center in Iraq's northern city of Mosul on March 4, 2020. — AFP photos



A social worker helps children with special needs to practice a short eight-note tune to improve their motor skills at a rehabilitation center Mosul on March 4, 2020.



Iraqi youth with development disorders suffer in lockdown



Girls with special needs pose for a picture at the Fakhri Dabbagh Centre on the eastern side of Mosul on Feb 25, 2020.

When Mosul ended its COVID-19 lockdown last month, health specialists faced a disheartening reality: A deterioration among youth with developmental disorders and special needs in the northern Iraqi city. Mosul's few health centers treating these young people had been shut for around four months to stem the spread of the novel coronavirus, which has infected more than 300,000 Iraqis and killed over 8,000, according to official figures.

Hundreds of children diagnosed with various conditions, including autism spectrum disorder (ASD), were deprived of socialization classes, speech training and physical therapy - all described by doctors as essential. "The spread of the coronavirus and the lockdown really affected the situation for our young patients, as they were not able to come to hospitals or treatment centers," said Ilham Khattab, an autism specialist in Mosul. "Their cases got worse and they had relapses. It was disastrous."

Decades of war and poor investment have left hospitals across Iraq in bad shape, but the infrastructure in Mosul - recaptured from the Islamic State group in 2017 - is especially lacking. Even now, there is only one operational general hospital in a city once seen as a destination for the best medical care in the country.

The Fakhri Dabbagh Centre in Mosul's east is treating 170 children with symptoms of ASD and other special needs, offering help free of charge. Parents wait outside in the public facility's packed hallways as kids take rehabilitation courses in two small rooms.

Private clinics pricey

While nurses are happy to see their patients again, long-standing challenges remain. Nisrin Hamdi, a 63-year-old social worker, told AFP the center lacked equipment to provide speech and motor skills sessions, while staff need advanced

training. "Our capabilities are limited and we cannot absorb more patients. There's not even a transportation system to bring in patients" who have trouble accessing the center, she said.

Private clinics offer help too, but their fees are hefty for many Mosul families with no income. One such private facility, the Special Giving Institute, charges 120,000 dinars (\$100) for a month of rehabilitation programs. Its head, 35-year-old Dr Ahmad Sufi, said he had noticed a rise in cases of ASD across Nineveh province since IS overran its capital Mosul in 2014.

He said staying at home - whether to hide from IS rule or during a coronavirus lockdown - can exacerbate the disorder. "We had about 4,000 cases (requiring treatment) in Nineveh before IS. It reached around 6,000 under IS and now we are at 10,000 cases," Sufi told AFP.

In a small room, about a dozen children practice a short eight-note tune on keyboards to improve their motor skills. "If these children are not treated, their personal and psychological development will deteriorate," the clinic's head, Dr Mohammad Al-Qaisi, told AFP. Some studies show increased screen time for young toddlers is linked to a higher likelihood of ASD symptoms.

Umm Laith, whose four children are all being treated at the Fakhri Dabbagh Centre, told AFP that staying at home seemed to have set them back. "Because I was afraid for my children, I kept them watching television or playing with their mobile phones. This isolation led to them getting worse," she said.

Struggling with stigma

Doctors complain of broader issues too, including stigma. "One of the biggest challenges we have is that even after diagnosing a child with autism, their parents won't accept it," said Rahmat Al-Zuhair, a health worker in Mosul. "That affects how quickly we can begin treating



them." Several international organizations in the city are trying to plug the gap in aid and raise awareness. They include Save the Children, which has offered psychosocial support to 15,000 kids there since last year.

"The needs went up a lot with COVID-19 - when the lockdown happened, many families in Mosul called us asking when centers would reopen," said spokeswoman Amal Taif. She said the lack of doctors for children with special needs meant that symptoms of developmental disabilities could go unnoticed or be misdiagnosed. "There are mental health workers, but they don't necessarily have expertise in children, or (there are) pediatricians, but without a mental health focus."

And in Mosul, Taif pointed out, even basic provisions that can help children with special needs improve are often a long way away. Access to education is limited, parents often struggle to provide nutritious food for their children, and families often still live in homes still severely damaged by war, without electricity and running water. — AFP



Vehicles are pictured on a broken road, the only travel route between Yemen's cities of Taz and Aden, on Sept 23, 2020. — AFP photos



Yemen's terrifying road to Taz on brink of collapse

Lorries filled to the brim with goods labor up and down the dangerously winding and precipitous road of Hayjat al-Abed, the mountainous lifeline to Yemen's third largest city. Unlike all other routes linking southwest Taz to the rest of the war-torn country, the road - with its dizzying drop-offs into the valley below - is the only one that has not fallen into the hands of the Houthi rebels.

Some 500,000 inhabitants of the city, which is besieged by the Iran-backed Houthis, depend on the seven-kilometer stretch of crater-filled road for survival, as the long conflict between the insurgents and the government shows no signs of abating. Convoys of vehicles big and small move at a snail's pace as they squeeze past each other on the narrow road that has been severely damaged over the years by heavy rainfall.

"As you can see, it is full of potholes, and we face dangerous slopes," Marwan Al-Makhtary, a young truck driver, told AFP. "Sometimes trucks can no longer move forward, so they stop and roll back." Makhtary said nothing was being done to fix the road, and fears are mounting that the inexorable deterioration will ultimately bring the supply of goods to a halt.

Dozens of Taz residents on Tuesday urged the government to take action, forming a human chain along the road - some of them carrying

signs saying: "Save Taz's Lifeline". "We demand the legitimate government and local administration accelerate efforts to maintain and fix the road," said one of the protesters, Abdeljaber Numan. "This is the only road that connects Taz with the outside world, and the blocking of this artery would threaten the city."

'Humanitarian disaster'

Sultan Al-Dabbaly, who is responsible for road maintenance in the local administration, said the closure of the road would represent a "humanitarian disaster" in a country already in crisis and where the majority of the popula-

tion is dependent on aid. "It is considered a lifeline of the city of Taz, and it must be serviced as soon as possible because about five million people (in the province) would be affected," he told AFP.

Governance in Taz is complicated, with the internationally recognized government practically absent and the city split and under the control of rival groups - some linked to Yemen's Muslim Brotherhood-influenced Al-Islah party and others to Salafists, another Islamist movement. Meanwhile, the city's government-appointed governor Nabil Shamsan has little power, and any influence over the province is undermined by internal divisions.

Yemen has been ravaged by the five-year conflict between the Houthis and the government, which is supported by a Saudi-led military coalition. The United Nations has called it the world's worst humanitarian crisis with tens of thousands killed since 2015. — AFP



Sports

Photo of the day



Massi Piffa wakeboards on an abandoned boat at sunset in Sebastian, Florida, USA. —Photo taken from www.redbullcontentpool.com

Frosty Azarenka powers through in French Open

PARIS: Former world number one Victoria Azarenka complained about the playing conditions at the French Open amid light drizzle and low temperatures during her 6-1 6-2 first-round victory yesterday. The US Open runner-up, who entered court Suzanne Lenglen wearing a thick pink puffer jacket, and her opponent Danka Kovinic walked off the court after play was suspended with Belarusian Azarenka leading 2-1.

"No, it's eight degrees. I live in Florida. I'm used to hot weather," a furious Azarenka told the supervisor who asked her to wait on court until a decision was made on whether the match should continue. Speaking to her opponent from Montenegro, 10th seed Azarenka, who next faces either Venus Williams or Slovakia's Anna Karolina Schmiedlova, said: "Do you want to wait on court?" "No," Kovinic replied. "No, it's ridiculous, it's too cold. What's the point? Sitting here like ducks," said Azarenka, who wore a wind jacket on court and said she was worried about sliding on a court made heavier by the persistent drizzle. The players returned after a delay of about 50 minutes and Azarenka immediately broke her opponent's serve before wrapping up victory in front of nine spectators. Azarenka said the interruption should have been better managed.

"I think it's very tricky at the moment to have these conditions. So definitely not going to sit here and complain, but sometimes I think there are smarter ways to handle situations. The unfortunate part sometimes with the French Open is that there is no communications with players or players council," she added. The French Open is usually played in May-June but this year's tournament was pushed back to late September due to the COVID-19 pandemic. The weather in Paris is therefore colder than normal for the Grand Slam event with the claycourt conditions much heavier and slower than the players are accustomed to. —Reuters

Cubs clinch 3rd division title in 5 seasons

Padres top Giants as NL wild-card contenders gain hope

CHICAGO: Jose Abreu drilled a go-ahead, bases-clearing double in the fourth inning and James McCann and Yoan Moncada homered to lift the host Chicago White Sox past the Chicago Cubs 9-5 on Saturday to snap a six-game losing streak. Despite suffering their sixth loss in seven games, the Cubs clinched the National League Central when the St. Louis Cardinals lost earlier in the night. It's the Cubs' third division title in the past five seasons and first since 2017.

The White Sox still could join the Cubs as division champs. The White Sox remained one game behind the American League Central-leading Minnesota Twins entering Sunday's regular-season finale and are one game ahead of the third-place Cleveland Indians. Chicago owns the tiebreaker on Minnesota, but Cleveland holds the tiebreaker on Chicago. Moncada, Abreu, McCann and Nick Madrigal had two hits apiece for the White Sox, with Abreu and Moncada both driving in three runs. The White Sox out-hit the Cubs 10-5. Cubs third baseman Kris Bryant went 2-for-4 with four RBIs, smacking a third-inning grand slam that gave Chicago a 5-2 lead.

Brewers 3, Cardinals 0

Brandon Woodruff allowed just two hits in eight innings to lead Milwaukee past host St Louis to keep its playoff hopes alive. These teams split the first four games of their five-game NL Central showdown heading into Sunday's critical game. The loss prevented the Cardinals from clinching a berth in the National League postseason bracket. Woodruff (3-5) only allowed singles by Kolten Wong in the first inning and Yadier Molina in the second. He struck out 10 batters overall and retired 19 consecutive batters after Molina's hit. Josh Hader pitched the ninth to earn his 13th save. Losing pitcher Adam Wainwright (5-3) allowed three runs on eight hits in 6 2/3 innings.

Padres 6, Giants 2

San Diego dealt host San Francisco a damaging blow in their quest to make the National League playoffs when right-hander Zach Davies and five relievers combined on a seven-hitter. The loss dropped the Giants into a tie with the Milwaukee Brewers for the second NL wild-card playoff position, and kept the Philadelphia Phillies alive in a congestion that won't be settled until the dirt has settled on Sunday's final day of the regular season. The Padres, meanwhile, have clinched second place in the NL West and the No 4 NL playoff position, which guarantees home-field advantage in the first round of next week's playoffs. With his team's top two starting pitchers—Mike Clevinger and Dinelson Lamet—battling injuries, Davies gave the Padres a boost with three shutout innings. He gave up three hits, struck out three and did not issue a walk.

Dodgers 7, Angels 6

Joc Pederson hit a go-ahead two-run home run in the sixth inning just before a power-outage delay, and the host Dodgers returned to finish off a victory over the crosstown Angels. The game was paused for more than 20 minutes as Dodger Stadium temporarily was plunged into total darkness. Edwin Rios and Will

Smith hit home runs after the game resumed. In his bid to earn a starting role in the opening round of the playoffs, rookie right-hander Tony Gonsolin (2-2) gave up four runs on seven hits over six innings. Left-hander Adam Kolarek recorded the final two outs for his first save.

Pirates 8, Indians 0

Rookie Ke'Bryan Hayes went 5-for-5 with three doubles and Colin Moran homered and drove in four runs to lift Pittsburgh to a romp over host Cleveland, which was eliminated from the American League Central race and will settle for a wild-card berth. Bryan Reynolds belted a two-run homer and Jose Osuna also went deep as Pittsburgh banged out 13 hits en route to just its sixth road win of the season, tying Texas for the fewest road wins in the majors. Joe Musgrove (1-5) followed up a career-high 11 strikeouts by fanning 10 and scattering three hits over seven innings for the Pirates, who have won four of their last five games overall. The Indians mustered just five hits to see their six-game winning streak come to a halt.

Rays 4, Phillies 3

Top-seeded Tampa Bay used a three-run fifth inning to win another close one, beating Philadelphia in St Petersburg, Fla. Just before the start of the second meeting, the Seattle Mariners beat the Oakland A's 5-1 to give the Rays the No. 1 overall seed in the expanded eight-team American League playoffs-facing either Toronto or the New York Yankees. The win improved the Rays' MLB-best record in one-run games to 14-5 — 6-2 in September—and marked their 20th comeback victory.

Yankees 10, Marlins 4

DJ LeMahieu had four hits and drove in three runs to inch closer to securing the American League batting title as New York overcame a three-run deficit to beat visiting Miami. LeMahieu had a two-run double in the sixth and an RBI single in the seventh. The second baseman's fourth four-hit game of the season raised his batting average to .359, giving him a 31-point lead in the batting race on Chicago's Tim Anderson (.328), who went 0-for-5 in a 9-5 loss to the Cubs later Saturday. The last Yankee to win a batting title was Bernie Williams in 1998. Luke Voit capped New York's seven-run sixth with a three-run home run. It was his major league-leading 22nd homer. Tyler Wade and Aaron Hicks hit two-run homers for the Yankees, who had lost five of their previous six games and were homerless in five straight games for the first time since 2014.

Twins 7, Reds 3

Luis Arraez went 4-for-4 with three doubles and three RBIs as Minnesota secured home field advantage for the Wild Card Series with a victory over Cincinnati in Minneapolis. Max Kepler had two doubles and scored three times, Eddie Rosario also doubled and drove in two runs for Minnesota, which improved to a major league best 24-6 at home while bashing eight doubles, one off the team's single-game record. The Twins can clinch their second consecutive American League Central title with a victory in Sunday's finale or

launched a furious late onslaught in the 12th round as he chased a knockout. But Charlo, leading comfortably on points, had too much savvy to let victory slip and closed out a third defense of his WBC belt.

Nationals 4, Mets 3 (Game 1)

Josh Harrison's sixth-inning RBI snapped a tie as host Washington eliminated New York from playoff contention by coming back to earn a win in the opener of a doubleheader. The defending World Series champion Nationals kept alive their hopes of not finishing alone in last place in the NL East. The Mets, who needed to sweep the remainder of the four-game series and get plenty of help to earn a wild-card berth, missed the playoffs for the fourth straight season. The rally made a winner of Max Scherzer (5-4), who bested Jacob deGrom in a battle of Cy Young Award winners. Scherzer, who won the AL Cy Young in 2013 and the NL Cy Young in 2016 and 2017, allowed three runs on six hits and two walks while striking out seven over six innings.

Nationals 5, Mets 3 (Game 2)

Trea Turner's one-out solo homer sparked a five-run third inning for Washington, which completed a doubleheader sweep of visiting New York as Anibal Sanchez (4-5) earned the win by tossing 5 1/3 solid innings. The sweep means the defending World Series champion Nationals can still technically escape the NL East basement with a win in Sunday's season finale. The Mets are one game ahead but if the two teams finish the season tied, Washington would earn fourth place by virtue of its 6-4 series win over New York. Josh Harrison contributed to the pivotal rally, when the Nationals sent 10 batters to the plate in the third inning against Rick Porcello (1-7).

Red Sox 8, Braves 2

Christian Vazquez belted a grand slam in an eight-run second inning and Tanner Houck struck out a career-high 10 in six innings to lead Boston to a blowout win over host Atlanta. Vazquez went 3-for-5 with his second career slam while Bobby Dalbec smacked a two-run homer for Boston. Houck (3-0) gave up one run, three hits and three walks as he has won all three of his major league starts. He has given up two runs (one earned) and six hits while striking out 21 in 17 innings. Dansby Swanson went 2-for-4 with a homer for the Braves, who had just six hits. Atlanta is the No 2 seed for the National League playoffs.

Mariners 5, A's 1 (Game 1 / 8 innings)

JP Crawford singled home the go-ahead run to ignite a four-run, eighth inning as Seattle defeated Oakland in the opening game of a doubleheader. Crawford's single snapped a 1-1 tie, and was followed by Ty France's RBI single and a two-run homer from Kyle Seager. Mariners reliever Kendall Graveman (1-3) worked the final two innings to get the win against his former team. Khris Davis had a sacrifice fly in the fourth for Oakland. Liam Hendriks (3-1) took the loss for the A's, who finished with six hits.

Mariners 12, Athletics 3 (Game 2)

Dee Strange-Gordon's two-run single was the key hit in an eight-run third inning as "host" Seattle com-

Charlo twins both make world title wins

LOS ANGELES: Charlo twins Jermell and Jermall put on a show Saturday with impressive world title wins in the boxing ring at the Mohegan Sun Arena in Uncasville, Connecticut. Jermell Charlo knocked out Jeison Rosario with a brutal blow to the body in the eighth round of their super welterweight unification bout. In his first fight since he won the WBC belt with a knockout of Tony Harrison in December, Charlo added Rosario's WBA and IBF belts to his collection.

Charlo stopped Rosario 21 seconds into the eighth round with a left jab that sent the Dominican sprawling onto his back. Rosario lay shuddering on the canvas, finally trying to rise but unable to beat the count from referee Harvey Dock. Charlo, who improved to 34-1 with 18 knockouts, had knocked Rosario down twice—in the first and sixth rounds—on the way to victory. Charlo was credited with a knockout in round one, when in a wild push forward he backed Rosario up, the Dominican's foot appearing to slip as Charlo landed a hook to his head.

Rosario, who fell to 20-2 with one drawn and 14 wins inside the distance, got Charlo's attention with his punching power. He backed Charlo into the ropes with a left hook early in the fifth and Dock warned Charlo in the middle of the round for pushing Rosario down by his head. The fifth ended with a tough exchange. Rosario landing a hard jab before Charlo backed him up with a right. Rosario came out on the attack in the sixth, but was warned by Dock in the middle of the round for low blows.

Charlo tagged him with a hard left hook that dropped him to one knee shortly before the round ended. He answered the count moments before the bell rang and he still looked wobbly on the way to his corner. "I definitely proved that I'm more than just a puncher, but I'm also a puncher," said Charlo, who left the ring at the spectator-less arena with all three belts draped around him calling out "Team Charlo!" Earlier in the evening, Jermall Charlo battered Sergiy Derevyanchenko on the way to a unanimous decision victory to retain his WBC middleweight crown.

The 30-year-old American champion overcame stubborn resistance from the Ukrainian challenger to extend his unbeaten record to 31 fights. But he was pushed all the way by Derevyanchenko, who fell to 13-3 with the defeat. Derevyanchenko, bleeding from cuts around both eyes,

launched a furious late onslaught in the 12th round as he chased a knockout. But Charlo, leading comfortably on points, had too much savvy to let victory slip and closed out a third defense of his WBC belt.

'I passed the test'

The three judges scored Charlo a convincing winner, handing the champion victory by margins of 116-112, 117-111 and 118-110. "I executed the game plan. It was the biggest test of my career and I passed test," he said. "I knew he was going to be tough, and I knew he was going to come to fight. I wanted to knock him out and make a statement. But getting through it and getting the decision was a statement in itself." It was another disappointing defeat for the stocky Derevyanchenko, who had lost two previous world title fights including a disputed decision against Gennadiy Golovkin in October last year.

In other early card action, John Riel Casimero of the Philippines made a successful first defence of his WBO bantamweight crown on Saturday, knocking out Ghana's Duke Micaiah in the third round. Unbeaten super bantamweight Luis Nery of Mexico earned a 12-round unanimous decision over previously unbeaten compatriot Aaron Alameda to claim the vacant WBC super bantamweight title. Nery saw

pleted a doubleheader sweep of Oakland at the Coliseum in Northern California. Kyle Seager, Evan White and Tim Lopes homered for the Mariners, who were considered the home team in the nightcap because a three-game series between the teams scheduled for Sept. 1-3 in Seattle was postponed because of a positive COVID-19 test in the A's organization. The first two games of that series were made up in a Sept 14 twin bill in Seattle. Mariners rookie right-hander Justin Dunn (4-1) went five innings and allowed three runs on six hits. A's right-hander Paul Blackburn (0-1), making his first major league appearance of the season, lasted just 2 1/3 innings. He allowed seven runs on five hits.

Rockies 10, Diamondbacks 3

Elias Diaz homered and finished with three hits, Ryan McMahon also went deep, and Colorado hammered host Arizona in Phoenix. German Marquez tossed seven solid innings, Raimel Tapia had three hits and Trevor Story two for Colorado. Marquez (4-6) allowed three runs on five hits and struck out seven with a walk. Jon Jay and Daulton Varsho had two hits apiece for Arizona. Diamondbacks starter Luke Weaver (1-9) left after allowing five runs—four earned—on seven hits and striking out six in five innings. —Reuters



LAS VEGAS: In this file photo Jermell Charlo (left) talks with his twin brother Jermall Charlo after beating Jorge Cota in a super welterweight fight at the Mandalay Bay Events Center in Las Vegas, Nevada. —AFP

his 11-fight knockout streak end, but improved to 31-0 with 24 knockouts while Alameda fell to 25-1 with 13 wins inside the distance. —AFP

Sports

LeBron powers Lakers past Nuggets into the NBA Finals

Lakers complete a 4-1 victory over Nuggets

MIAMI: The Los Angeles Lakers, fueled by a triple-double from superstar LeBron James, beat the Denver Nuggets 117-107 on Saturday to reach the NBA Finals. With the win in the league's quarantine bubble in Orlando, the Lakers completed a 4-1 victory over the Nuggets in the best-of-seven Western Conference finals. James scored 16 of his 38 points in the fourth quarter as the Lakers remained perfect in elimination games this post-season.

Denver, already the first team to twice come back from 1-3 series deficits in the same playoffs, couldn't work the magic again. James added 16 rebounds and 10 assists, and Anthony Davis scored 27 points for the Lakers, who are back in the championship series for the 32nd time — and the first time since they lifted the trophy for the 16th time in 2010.

Kobe Bryant was NBA Finals MVP that year, and it has been an emotional road to the finals this season for the Lakers after the death of Bryant in a helicopter crash in January. "Every time you put on the purple and gold you think about his legacy, you think about him and what he meant to this franchise for 20-plus years," James said of Bryant.

The Lakers will take on the winners of the Eastern Conference final series between the Boston Celtics and Miami Heat. The Heat lead that series 3-2 with game six coming up on Monday.

"We're going to enjoy it tonight, but we understand we've got bigger fish to fry," James said as the Western Conference title was celebrated on court. "We understand there's a bigger goal. Nikola Jokic and Jerami Grant scored 20 points apiece for the Nuggets and Jamal Murray added 19 points with eight assists despite being slowed by injury. A tight first quarter that featured nine lead changes ended

with the Lakers up 33-30, with reserve Alex Caruso pushing the Lakers' lead in the closing seconds with a layup off an assist by James.

With 14 points from James in the second quarter the Lakers began to separate themselves, leading by as many as 11 points and taking a 61-51 lead into halftime. It looked like the Lakers might run away with it when they built a 16-point lead early in the third quarter. But Denver kept chipping away. Murray drove for a basket and was fouled, converting the free throw to cut the Lakers' lead to two points. Murray's two free throws with 11 seconds left in the third made it 84-84 before Davis drained a three-pointer to put the Lakers up 87-84 heading into the final period.

'Amazing' LeBron

That's when James took over. Fouled on back-to-back baskets he made the free-throws to stretch the Lakers lead to 95-88 with 9:33 remaining. James scored nine straight points late in the period — a stretch capped by a three-pointer that put the Lakers up 115-103 with 1:57 left. "I don't know if I've ever witnessed a guy take over a game the way he did in the fourth quarter tonight in person," Lakers coach Frank Vogel said of James.

"It was remarkable," James is in the NBA Finals for the 10th time — and the first time with the Lakers. "I'm extremely proud to be a part of this franchise getting back to where it belongs, and that's playing for championships," James said. Davis is in the championship series for the first time in his first season in Los Angeles, after his move from New Orleans.

"Feels good," Davis said. "It's good to get something like this accomplished with this group of guys."



FLORIDA: LeBron James #23 of the Los Angeles Lakers drives the ball against Jerami Grant #9 of the Denver Nuggets during the second quarter in Game Five of the Western Conference Finals on September 26, 2020. —AFP

"We battled through a lot this year, starting with the beginning of the season. We know the job's not done. It's a great feeling, but we got four more to win for the ultimate goal." Nuggets star Jokic said he and his teammates would never forget their experience in the bubble, where the NBA resumed

play in July four months after halting play in the face of the coronavirus pandemic. "We had a really good group of guys," Jokic said. "There was a lot of fight in us. We had six elimination games. Today, they were better," he said. "They won the game. LeBron was amazing." —AFP

Perry's OT goal keeps Stars in NHL Stanley Cup finals

LOS ANGELES: Corey Perry scored at 9:23 of the second overtime Saturday and the Dallas Stars stayed alive in the NHL Stanley Cup final with a 3-2 victory over the Tampa Bay Lightning. The Lightning had a chance to seize the Cup in the NHL's quarantine bubble in Edmonton, Alberta, after an overtime win in game four on Friday. Instead the Stars narrowed the gap in the best-of-seven series to 3-2, with game six on Monday. "We talked about it all day, we get one we keep going," Perry said. "We start building here, and I think we're starting to do something special." Perry's second goal of the contest came after John Klingberg fired a shot from the blue line.

Lightning goalie Andrei Vasilevskiy left the puck waiting in the crease and Perry slotted it home, the officials reviewing to make sure the play was onside. Joe Pavelski scored at 13:15 of the third period to knot the score at 2-2. With his 61st NHL post-season

goal Pavelski passed Joe Mullen for most by a United States-born player. "We hang in there, we really do," Pavelski said. "We stick with it, stick with the plan. 'We're in a hole,' Pavelski acknowledged. "This gets us a step closer, but we've got a ways to go." Mikhail Sergachev had put the Lightning up 2-1 3:38 into the third period on a one-timer from the blue line.

Perry had given the Stars a 1-0 lead at 17:52 of the first period, scoring off a loose puck in the slot and Ondrej Palat tied it at 1-1 at 4:37 of the second, cutting across the crease and firing the puck past Stars goalie Anton Khudobin. Khudobin made 39 saves for Dallas, and Andrei Vasilevskiy made 30 for Tampa Bay. "Yesterday and tonight, we had so much fun," Stars center Tyler Seguin said. "It's such a great time to be playing hockey and these games have been so good, and we've been told we're the underdogs non-stop, which we are, so we're relishing that and we're having a good time."

Both teams are chasing a second Stanley Cup crown. The Lightning's run to the title series in the pandemic disrupted season was a vindication after they were swept in the Eastern Conference first round last season after earning the Presidents Trophy for best regular-season record. "It's obvi-



EDMONTON: Corey Perry #10 of the Dallas Stars scores the game-winning goal past Andrei Vasilevskiy #88 of the Tampa Bay Lightning during the second overtime period to give the Stars the 3-2 victory in Game Five of the 2020 NHL Stanley Cup Final. —AFP

ously not the outcome you want," Lightning defenseman Victor Hedman said. "But at the same time we knew it was going to be a hard series and, you know, we had some good looks in overtime and throughout the game. "It wasn't our night, and they scored. So at the end of the day, we look forward to next game." —AFP

Ramos penalty snatches a win for Real over Betis

MADRID: Sergio Ramos scored a late penalty as Real Madrid came from behind to scrape a 3-2 win against 10-man Real Betis, their first La Liga victory of the season. Betis were ahead at half-time after two goals in two minutes from Aissa Mandi and William Carvalho overturned Fede Valverde's opener for the reigning champions. But Betis defender Emerson, who is on loan from Barcelona, endured a nightmare start to the second half by scoring an own-goal and then being sent off for knocking over Luka Jovic after the striker had been sent clear.

VAR again intervened in Madrid's favour in the 82nd minute as Marc Bartra was adjudged to have cleared with his arm, leaving Ramos to chip in the winning penalty. Betis were fuming at referee Ricard de Burgos at full-time and while the red card seemed fair, they were unlucky to concede the penalty, with Bartra

seemingly nudged into the ball by Madrid's Borja Mayoral.

Madrid, though, breathed a sigh of relief, their opening win secured having kicked off the season with a goalless draw away at Real Sociedad last weekend. "I'm not getting into the referees," said Zidane. "We suffered of course but in the end we got the three points." Ramos converting from the spot felt familiar after his three penalties during Madrid's run to the title last term but this was an uncharacteristically sloppy defensive display from Zinedine Zidane's side.

It was the first time they had conceded twice in the first half of a league match since Zidane returned as coach 18 months ago and it would have cost them had their opponents been less generous. Defeat for Betis ends what had been a perfect start under new coach Manuel Pellegrini, after two wins out of two against Alaves and Real Valladolid. "From Madrid's first goal to the end of the first half we were much superior," said Mandi. "But we weren't able to get a clean sheet in the second half."

Victory for Madrid puts early pressure on Barcelona, who begin



SEVILLE: Real Madrid's Spanish defender Sergio Ramos (left) heads the ball next to Real Betis' Argentinean midfielder Guido Rodriguez, French forward Karim Benzema and Portuguese midfielder William Carvalho during the Spanish league football match Real Betis against Real Madrid CF on September 26, 2020. —AFP

with Lionel Messi back in the fold at home to Villarreal on Sunday. Atletico Madrid also play their first game on Sunday at home to Granada. Eden Hazard was still absent in Seville, not even included on the bench as Zidane continues to insist the Belgian regain

full fitness before returning to action. Jovic was given a rare start up front but the Serb missed a good chance before going off in the second half and it would not be a surprise if he departed before the end of the transfer window. —AFP

Roland Garros starts in shadow of COVID and 'ridiculous' cold

PARIS: Roland Garros got underway in the "ridiculous" cold of Paris yesterday — still in the grip of the coronavirus which organizers had hoped they would escape by unilaterally pushing back the clay court Grand Slam event by four months. Play started with the tournament's new retractable roof closed over Court Philippe Chatrier. Outside on the eerily quiet grounds of an event limited to just 1,000 fans it was a different story as temperatures dropped to a shivering 10 degrees (50F). Only 15 minutes of play was possible before heavy rain brought a suspension with former world number one and recent US Open run-

ner-up Victoria Azarenka complaining over the bitterly cold conditions.

"We are sitting like ducks," the two-time major winner raged after just three games of her opener against Danka Kovinic of Montenegro. "It's too cold, it's eight degrees, I live in Florida. This is getting a little ridiculous. I'm not waiting," she said before storming off to seek shelter deep inside Court Suzanne Lenglen. Opening day sees 2018 champion Simona Halep start her bid for a third major while 40-year-old Venus Williams kicks off her 23rd French Open. Andy Murray takes on fellow three-time Grand Slam champion Stan Wawrinka in the day's marquee tie in a rematch of their epic 2017 semi-final duel.

However, it will be an eerily unfamiliar tournament, even for defending champion Rafael Nadal, chasing a 13th Paris title, and 2016 winner and world number one Novak Djokovic, as well as Serena Williams, pursuing an elusive 24th major. A resurgence of Covid-19 cases has cut attendance to just 1,000 spectators a day. In

2019, more than 500,000 people watched the two-week tournament on site. Organizers had hoped to welcome 20,000 fans a day but in the space of just a few weeks, that figure was quickly downsized to 11,500, then 5,000 before the French government slashed it to a 1,000 maximum.

"Tens of millions of euros have gone up in smoke," said French Tennis Federation (FFT) marketing chief Stephane Morel as he mourned the loss of ticket income. Players, meanwhile, have been confined to two tournament hotels with tight restrictions on their movements. It's at the hotels where they undergo Covid-19 testing, a source of controversy and recrimination in the build-up. Last weekend, five players due to take part in men's qualifying were stood down. Two had tested positive while three others had been in contact with coach Petar Popovic who also tested positive. Popovic told L'Equipe it was a "scandal" and had "(Rafael) Nadal been in our shoes, he would have had the right to a second or third test". —AFP

News in brief

Rennes go top; Marseille held

PARIS: Rennes climbed back to the top of Ligue 1 with an impressive 3-0 win at Saint-Etienne on Saturday while Marseille needed a late equalizer to snatch a point at home to lowly Metz. Rennes, who finished third last season, took the lead through summer arrival Nayef Aguerd after 33 minutes. Second-half goals from Serhou Guirassy and substitute Adrien Hunou sealed the victory over a side that was previously unbeaten. Rennes are now two points clear of Lille who beat Nantes on Friday. Marseille looked to be heading for defeat when Ibrahima Niane put visitors Metz ahead after 72 minutes but the home side saved the game five minutes into added time when Morgan Sanson fired in just under the crossbar. —AFP

Kolkata Knight's big IPL win

DUBAI: England's Eoin Morgan heaped praise on young Indian opener Shubman Gill after the batting duo led Kolkata Knight Riders to a comprehensive win in the Indian Premier League on Saturday. Gill and Morgan put on an unbeaten fourth-wicket partnership of 92 as Kolkata chased down their target of 143 with two overs to spare and win by seven wickets against David Warner's Sunrisers Hyderabad. Gill top-scored with 70 off 62 deliveries and the left-handed Morgan hit the winning boundary in his 29-ball 42 as Kolkata recorded their first victory in two matches. "I didn't have to tell Gill a great deal to be honest, beautiful to watch," Morgan, England's limited-overs captain, said of his 21-year-old batting partner who was named man of the match. "Good bat swing, very languid style, magnificent to watch. He's good kid, very hungry to learn and I would love to bat with him once again." —AFP

Al Ahli cruise into quarters

DOHA: Al Ahli of Saudi Arabia defeated Shabab Al Ahli Dubai 4-3 on penalties to progress to the quarter-finals of the AFC Champions League on Saturday. After 120 minutes of frenetic action produced a 1-1 draw at the air-conditioned Al Janoub Stadium, it was twice runners-up Al Ahli who proved lucky in the shootout which saw Shabab Al Ahli's Ahmed Khalil and Abdullah al-Naqbi misfiring from the spot. Talismanic Syrian striker Omar al-Somah had scored the equalizer for the Saudi side from a penalty in the second half, but watched in agony as his shot hit the post in the tie-breaker. But that didn't matter as Naqbi of Shabab also missed, sparking celebrations in the Al Ahli camp bench. The Saudis were up and about from the outset and could have gone ahead early in the game but Somah's powerful header from a fine corner from German World Cupper Marko Marin slammed into the crossbar. —AFP

PGA Puntacona Championship

MIAMI: Adam Long fired an eight-under-par 64 to open up a two-shot lead at the PGA Tour Corales Puntacona Championship on Saturday. The 33-year-old American carded eight birdies and 10 pars in a flawless bogey-free round at the Corales Puntacona resort in the Dominican Republic. Long, who is chasing only his second career PGA Tour title after victory at the Desert Classic last year, had started the third round three off the lead. But Long began moving up the leaderboard after reeling off four birdies over the front nine to reach the turn at four under, 13 under overall. A brilliant second shot from the fairway on the par-four 10th left him with a three-footer for his fifth birdie of the day which he duly converted. Long then went on a run of three consecutive birdies on the 12th, 13th and 14th holes to move two shots clear of the pack on 17 under overall. —AFP

14 Cubs clinch 3rd division title in 5 seasons; Brewers stun Cardinals



15 LeBron powers Lakers past Nuggets into the NBA Finals



15 Ramos penalty snatches a win for Real over Betis



Leicester hit Man City 5-2

Tottenham pay harsh penalty



MANCHESTER: Manchester City's English midfielder Raheem Sterling (center) vies with Leicester City's French midfielder Nampalys Mendy (left) and Leicester City's Belgian midfielder Yuri Tielemans (right) during the English Premier League football match between Manchester City and Leicester City yesterday.— AFP

LONDON: Jamie Vardy's hat-trick dealt an early blow to Manchester City's hopes of wresting back the Premier League title as they conceded three penalties in a 5-2 defeat to Leicester, while Newcastle's late spot-kick to snatch a 1-1 draw at Tottenham sparked fresh debate over the handball rule. City were without a host of first-team regulars due to injury and coronavirus infections, but the deficiencies at the back that undid their title defense last season were again exposed by the pace and finishing prowess of Vardy as a Pep Guardiola team conceded five for the first time in his coaching career.

Leicester stormed to the top of the league, but had to come from behind to extend their perfect start to the season as Riyad Mahrez's stunning strike against his former club opened the scoring after just four minutes. City are reportedly close to signing Benfica centre-back Ruben Dias and the

need for defensive cover was obvious as Vardy tore apart the experimental pairing of Eric Garcia and Nathan Ake. It was the more experienced Kyle Walker who was at fault to start Leicester's revival as he brought down Vardy, who slammed home the resulting penalty. The former England international then brilliantly flicked home Timothy Castagne's cross and drew another penalty from Garcia's naive challenge. Vardy this time slotted low past Ederson and James Maddison killed off a jaded City with a sumptuous curling effort into the top corner. Ake pulled a goal back six minutes from time from Mahrez's corner, but after Vardy had made way, another idiotic City challenge, this time from Benjamin Mendy, allowed Your Tielemans to score Leicester's third penalty

'Nonsense' penalty saves Newcastle
Tottenham find themselves already five points

behind the Foxes and Everton at the top of the table after letting two points slip away from a dominant display against Newcastle. Lucas Moura's predatory finish on 25 minutes was all Spurs had to show from a first-half littered with chances as Karl Darlow made three fine saves from Harry Kane and Son Heung-min hit the woodwork twice.

Newcastle had not even registered a shot on target until they were awarded a penalty five minutes into added time when Andy Carroll's header brushed the arm of Eric Dier and referee Peter Bankes pointed to the spot after reviewing the incident on the pitchside monitor. Hugo Lloris got a hand to Callum Wilson's penalty but could not keep it out with even the Magpies boss Steve Bruce embarrassed to have escaped with a point. "It is a total nonsense," said Bruce of the penalty award. "We should be jumping through hoops, but I would

be devastated if that was us."

Leeds blunt the Blades

Leeds' fine start on their return to the Premier League after a 16-year absence continued as Patrick Bamford scored a dramatic late winner to win a Yorkshire derby against Sheffield United 1-0. After pushing Liverpool all the way in a 4-3 defeat on the opening weekend of the season, Marcelo Bielsa's men have won their next two with the much-maligned Bamford scoring in all three games so far. Bamford's header two minutes from time settled a hard-fought clash that was dominated by superb displays from Leeds keeper Illan Meslier and Blades stopper Aaron Ramsdale. The Blades remain without a point or a goal this season after impressing to finish ninth on their return to the top-flight last season. — AFP

Nine-man Monaco hang on to beat Strasbourg

PARIS: Monaco hung on desperately to beat Strasbourg 3-2 in Ligue 1 yesterday after having two players sent off as Lille moved into second place with a more straightforward 2-0 win over Nantes. Monaco coach Niko Kovac described his side as "heroic" as they resisted a comeback from battling Strasbourg despite the dismissals of Aurelien Tchouameni and Axel Disasi at the Stade Louis II.

Wissam Ben Yedder put Monaco ahead with a ninth-minute strike before Ruben Aguilar made it 2-0 late in first-half stoppage time. Mehdi Chahiri pulled Strasbourg back into contention just after the break before Ben Yedder struck again on 47 minutes. But the Monaco sendings-off put Strasbourg on the front foot.

Disasi was dismissed for bringing down Ludovic Ajorque, who scored from the penalty spot to make it 3-2, setting up a breathless last 20 minutes. "My players were heroic,"

Kovac said. "When we were down to nine and the young players came on they showed a lot of character." Monaco move to 10 points from five games, three points behind surprise leaders Rennes. Seeking to stay in touch with Rennes who beat Saint Etienne 3-0 away on Saturday, Lille went ahead through a Nicolas Pallois own goal before Turkish international Burak Yilmaz wrapped up the three points with an 87th minute spot kick.

Montpellier wasted the chance to go second when they were held 2-2 at Dijon. Patrick Vieira's Nice side showed they are struggling for form as they were held to a goalless draw at Bordeaux despite hitting the woodwork three times. The southern side have seven points from five games. Reigning champions Paris Saint-Germain, still struggling to get back on track after a stormy start to the season following their defeat in the Champions League final, visited Reims. — AFP

Bayern's 23-match winning streak ends

BERLIN: European champions Bayern Munich suffered a first defeat for 10 months when their 23-match winning run was ended by a shock 4-1 Bundesliga loss at Hoffenheim yesterday. Hoffenheim raced into a 2-0 lead with early goals by defender Ermin Bicakcic and striker Munas Dabbur. Although Joshua Kimmich gave Bayern a lifeline just before the break, Croatia international striker Andrej Kramaric netted a second-half goal and converted a late penalty to seal the win and move Hoffenheim to the top of the league.

It was the first time Bayern have lost under head coach Hansi Flick in any competition since going down 2-1 to Borussia Muenchengladbach on December 7, 2019. "Compliments to Hoffenheim, they cut out our space and gave us few chances," said Flick, who bristled at repeated questions about his team's tired display. "We just couldn't manage to take our chances or play with our usual intensity."

Hoffenheim coach Sebastian Hoernes is the nephew of Bayern's honorary president Uli Hoernes and left Munich's reserves in July to take over at Hoffenheim. "We put into practise everything we had worked on, we were dominant from the beginning, managed to always be dangerous and defend well, so I am not surprised by the result," said Hoffenheim coach Hoernes. Bayern looked tired, showing the effects of being taken to extra time in the UEFA Super Cup on Thursday before beating Sevilla 2-1 in Budapest. "We shouldn't forget that Bayern played 120 minutes four days ago, but we put in a great performance," added Hoernes.

The loss brings to an end Bayern's run of 23 consecutive wins, a record for a club in one of Europe's five main leagues, surpass-



SINSHEIM: Hoffenheim's Bosnian defender Ermin Bicakcic (left) and Bayern Munich's Dutch forward Joshua Zirkzee vie for the ball during the German first division Bundesliga football match yesterday.— AFP

ing Real Madrid's 22 straight between September and December 2014. With Robert Lewandowski rested ahead of Wednesday's German Super Cup showdown at home to Borussia Dortmund—the chance to win a fifth title in 2020 — his 19-year-old understudy Joshua Zirkzee struggled to spark Bayern's attack. "We go into every game to win, it didn't work today, now we focus on Dortmund," added Flick. "We will tick off this match and we focus on what we can do better on Wednesday."

Hoffenheim took full advantage of Munich's lethargy with Bicakcic giving them the lead on 16 minutes when he out-leapt Corentin Tolisso at a corner and headed past Manuel Neuer. The hosts doubled their lead when Bayern defender Benjamin Pavard tried to snuff out a counter-attack, but his pass rolled into the path of Israeli striker Dabbur, who held his nerve to chip the ball over Neuer on 24 minutes. — AFP