

Friday Times

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JAMADA ALAWWAL 17, 1442 AH | FRIDAY, JANUARY 1, 2021

HAPPY
new year
2021

Happy New Year to all our readers! Kuwait Times will not publish its print edition on Sunday, January 3, 2021. Readers can stay informed with breaking news and information via KuwaitTimes.net and our digital media channels on Instagram, Twitter and Facebook: @KuwaitTimes



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Weary world ushers in locked-down New Year



KUWAIT: A group photo of Kuwait Times' staff. — Photo by Yasser Al-Zayyat

Kuwait Times' staff look forward to New Year

By Nawara Fattahova

With every ending year and in anticipation of the New Year, people make resolutions that they work on realizing during the coming year. But many resolutions made in previous years were not accomplished, especially with the pandemic, so people have shifted these resolutions to 2021. Also, as 2020 messed up our lives and plans, the 2021 resolutions hope for new beginnings.

Here are the resolutions of Kuwait Times' staff:

Nawara: To compensate for not travelling in 2020, I will travel every month. I also want to start saving money to buy a new car. I will work seriously to start fashion designing and have my own brand.

Chidi: There will be need to pray more and worry less. I want to be a blessing to others - promoting peace, love, equity and unity. Above all, I would like to be a good ambassador of Christ.

Mustafa: I want to support my daughter till she graduates. I want to arrange the marriage of my son and move to a new house.

Zakir: I want to make more money this year, even if I have to work 16 hours daily.

Hasan: Not get married this year.

Sahar: Take more care of my health and myself. I need a break to disappear for one month at least.

Abdullatif: Lose excess weight.

Sreenu: As I haven't traveled for three years, I want to travel this year. Also I will donate money to poor people in India.

Marylyn: I will travel not only to Egypt, but to other countries in Europe such as the Czech Republic, Germany, Austria and others.

Shakir: I want to travel more, exercise more, write more and learn new skills.

Suhail: I will build a new house in Bangladesh. I have already started construction and want to finish it in 2021.

Jamie: To be kinder and work every day towards achieving my goals.

Lenin: Planning to leave and go back home to India to settle there.

Yasser: I will buy a new camera.

Ahmad: I want to work to become a better person by taking things one step at a time.

Sajeev: Given the uncertain pandemic situation, it may not be wise to make a New Year resolution. Something unexpected can happen anytime and upset the appcart. Still, it is good to be positive and optimistic. So, I will give my old plan a serious thought - to write a book. The idea has been in the back of my mind for some time. Why not? 2021 may be a good year to start working on my book and even complete it.

Sabastian: I find it hard to keep new year's resolutions so I have decided not to make any this year. The only possible

one would be to travel to India if the circumstances allow me to travel in 2021.

Islam: I will improve myself in my field of IT by developing my website to increase my income, so I will be able to pay for my son's university fees. I want my son to finish his postgraduate studies. I also want to establish my own IT company.

Ismail: I will travel to my homeland Egypt this year. I will also practice more sports to control my weight. I want to support my son in his high school studies to let him join either engineering or medical college. I will also support my daughter to finish her intermediate studies and go to high school.

Rachel: I want to practice more sports with my children. I am now going for a walk once a week, but I want to go daily in 2021. I also want to save and invest.

Ben: Kuwait is my second home. Thank you Kuwait for the countless blessings and opportunities and for your readiness to embrace us! Thank you Kuwait Times! While prioritizing my family and job as a reporter, in 2021 I also want to earn extra income through online selling and meeting new people. I started a YouTube channel during the lockdown with content about Overseas Filipino Workers (OFWs). With this, I will continue to add more motivational stories and valuable content to inspire more people.

Rasha: I will get membership of a health club, as I want to lose weight.

Rajesh: I wish to travel this year without having to go through the hassle of quarantine.

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DESERT PICNICS WELCOME ALTERNATIVE TO WINTER CAMPS



By Nawara Fattahova

Picnicking has become popular these days, especially since camping was banned this year due to the coronavirus pandemic by a ministry decree. Also, travelling is difficult due to many restrictions, and now even impossible after the closure of the borders. Moreover, all entertainment spots are closed or have been demolished, so a picnic is the best outdoor activity.

A desert picnic with tents may look the same as a camp, but it should be temporary. But many people are turning picnic spots into permanent camps, which is a violation of the law. This has led to raids by the Municipality, which has

removed dozens of violating tents from various areas, both in the desert and residential areas too.

Municipal inspectors recognize the difference between picnic and camping equipment. "As a picnic is temporary for a few hours, it won't have a full set of furniture, fixed tents and so on. The inspectors are experienced and can figure out if it is a camp or a picnic. Also, after picnicking, the tent and all other things should be removed and cannot be left in place for another day," Mohammed from the hotline of the Municipality told Kuwait Times.

Inspectors go on daily random inspections, in addition to responding to specific reports. "We receive around five or six reports daily about illegal camping. Most reports are



Local

Friday, January 1, 2021



KUWAIT: Picnic tents and equipment set up on the beach. — Photos by Yasser Al-Zayyat

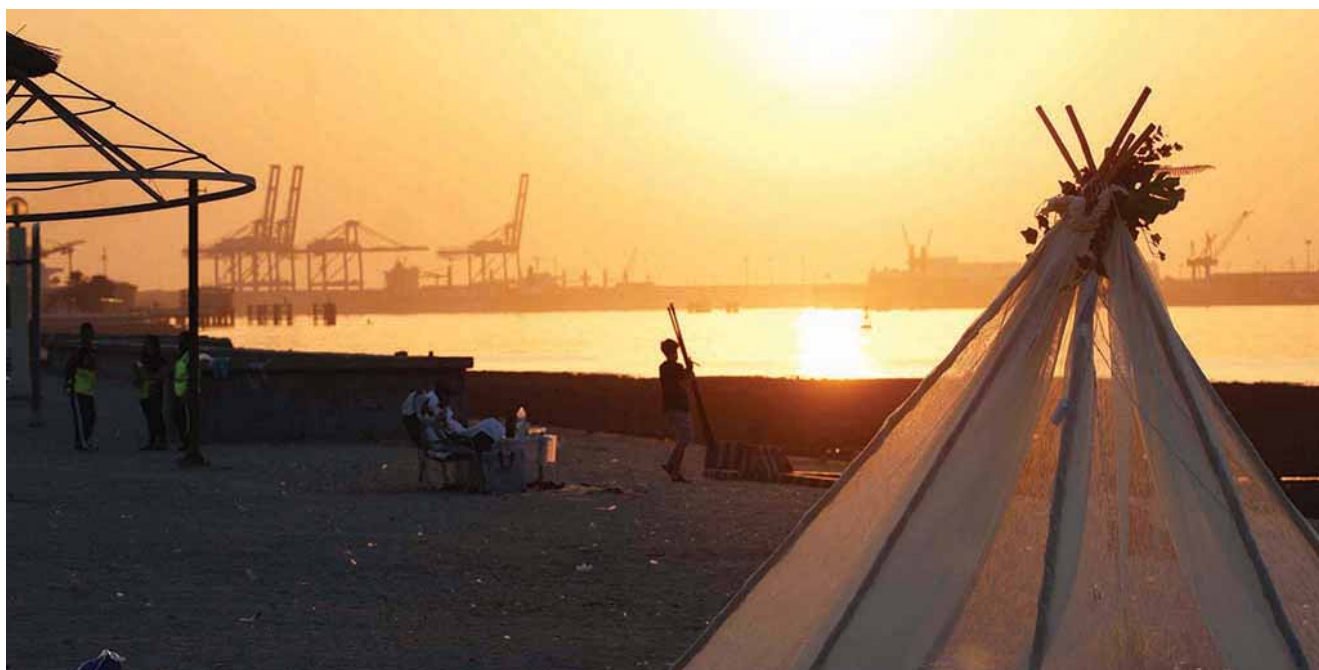


from Subiya, Julaia and Sulaibiya. There are also reports from other camping areas. We also receive two or three reports daily about tents pitched in residential areas," he said.

Setting up a tent in front of a house, even if it is inside the house's perimeter or garden, is forbidden by the ministry decree. "There are no specifications for the size of the tent - all tents are banned if they are visible from the outside. Inspectors will stick a warning letter on the tent and will give the violator a grace period depending on the size of the tent, which may vary between three days and a week. If the violation isn't removed, the Municipality's demolition teams will remove it and the violator will pay a fine," explained Mohammed.

But a municipal inspector from Hawally governorate, who wished to remain anonymous, said tents in most residential areas are not being removed. "This ministry decree is not being executed in most residential areas. For instance in South Surra, all houses that have space in front of them are occupying these areas and are setting up tents and diwaniyas on them," he said.

"I have faced many problems when I took the initiative and wanted to apply the law by removing these violations. The order should come from the general director. It's true that we respond to reports submitted by the public, but in fact we haven't removed any tent. There are no campaigns to demolish these encroachments, so people are brazenly violating the law," the inspector rued.



Local



A walk through the streets of **Jleeb**

By Ben Garcia

Jleeb Al-Shuyoukh is an intriguing place, with a mix of modern and dilapidated buildings and unmaintained roads. It is largely populated by low-income expats, with Kuwaitis residing in the area's block 4. Jleeb is notorious for its underground businesses and makeshift markets. There have also been reported cases of illegal gambling, prostitution and bootlegging. Kuwait Times heard from three expat residents about their survival stories.

Alhaz, a Bangladeshi from Comilla, works as tea boy on a salary of only KD 65 per month at the ministries complex in Kuwait City, but adds to his income by selling fresh fish from Souq Mubarakiya. "Since I work near Mubarakiya, I tried buying pots and pans to clothes to anything I could sell to the Bangladeshi community in Jleeb. I realized I could only earn a small amount and it took time, so I tried selling fresh fish, and it was a success," he said.

"I buy small fish popular with Bangladeshis. I don't buy large fish - we like to fry it with tomato sauce," he said. Alhaz buys 5 to 10 kg daily depending on the price of fish. "If expensive, I only buy 5 kilos. If I earn KD 3-5 daily, I am happy," he said. On arriving home in Jleeb, he places the fish in a bucket with ice and waits under his dilapidated building. "I sit here almost daily for customers. I don't display the fish outside - it's very dangerous and attracts police. Before I used to sell at makeshift markets, but some of my colleagues were arrested, so now I wait for customers outside my building," Alhaz said.

"This is the only way to earn an additional income. Many people are selling vegetables and fruits, so I thought if I sell something different, I can earn better for my family in Bangladesh," he said. Alhaz has a wife and three-year-old daughter in Comilla. He came to Kuwait in 2016.

Another person Kuwait Times encountered in Jleeb while taking pictures was a Syrian woman named Muneera, who was begging for alms. "Please don't post any video of me on social media. I am afraid of the police, but this is the only way I can feed my children," Muneera, wearing a black abaya, pleaded. She claimed to have been married to a Yemeni man and has four children, adding her husband died of an illness a few months ago. "My husband died recently and I need to earn something for my kids to eat and live," she said.

Mamun, another Bangladeshi, sells packets of cooked chicken biryani near a makeshift market. He said he is 60 years old and is ready to go home, but needs to earn some more money for his family. "I sell cooked food because I want to earn some extra money before I go back to Dhaka. I am 60 already and am planning to leave Kuwait in March this year," he said. Mamun has been in Kuwait for the last 15 years.



KUWAIT: Scenes from Jleeb Al-Shuyoukh.

— Photos by Yasser Al-Zayyat

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Local

Prime Minister: KNG vital part of security, defense apparatus

KUWAIT: The Kuwait National Guard (KNG) is a vital part of the country's security and defense apparatus especially during the times of need, said His Highness the Prime Minister Sheikh Sabah Al-Khaled Al-Hamad Al-Sabah. Speaking during his visit to the KNG General Command yesterday, His Highness Sheikh Sabah Al-Khaled congratulated the new Deputy Chief of KNG General Sheikh Ahmad Al-Nawaf Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah on attaining his post. Sheikh Sabah Al-Khaled, who was received by Sheikh Ahmad Al-Nawaf and KNG Undersecretary Lt Gen Hashem Al-Refaei, affirmed that the position of KNG Deputy Chief was a position of crucial importance, which entails great responsibility, indicating that Sheikh Ahmad Al-Nawaf was competent and up to the challenge.

Sheikh Ahmad Al-Nawaf is succeeding the legacy of former top KNG officials including His Highness the Amir Sheikh Nawaf Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah and His Highness the Crown Prince Sheikh Mishal Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah, said Sheikh Sabah Al-Khaled who reiterated his confidence in the new KNG Deputy Chief. On his visit, His Highness Sheikh Sabah Al-Khaled said that it came as an extension of a previous visit by His Highness the Amir last month to the KNG, adding that it also came within guideline set by the leadership to the government in supporting of Kuwait's security and defense entities.

The KNG played an important role in addressing the most prominent challenge facing Kuwait this year, which was the spread of the coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic and their



KUWAIT: His Highness the Prime Minister Sheikh Sabah Al-Khaled Al-Hamad Al-Sabah poses for a group picture with Kuwait National Guard officials during his visit to the KNG General Command. —KUNA

efforts in constructing field hospitals and quarantine facilities will not be forgotten, noted Sheikh Sabah Al-Khaled. He stressed that the KNG's support of the Interior, Defense, and Health Ministries was of utmost importance to defeat the current pandemic. His Highness the Prime Minister extended his thanks to the KNG under the leadership of Chief His Highness Sheikh Salem Al-Ali Al-Sabah and also commended the role played by former Chief and current Crown Prince Sheikh Mishal Al-Sabah in developing the national guards apparatus.

Meanwhile, Sheikh Ahmad Al-Nawaf said that the Kuwait National Guard was eager to

develop its apparatus, cooperate with state bodies and defend the country when it is required. He affirmed that he was honored to continue the legacy and achievements of the former Deputy Chief of KNG and current Crown Prince His Highness Sheikh Mishal Al-Ahmad. Sheikh Ahmad Al-Nawaf said that he would do his best to perform his duties, pointing out that the KNG was eager to carry out the leadership's instructions in regards to fending of the threat of the pandemic. The KNG is willing to extend cooperation to other state entities including the Interior and Defense Ministries, the Kuwait Fire Force (KFF) as well as others, he indicated. The

KNG Deputy Chief added that this solid cooperation would be beneficial to Kuwait's security especially during times of crisis and emergency.

In the meantime, Sheikh Ahmad Al-Nawaf congratulated His Highness the Prime Minister Sheikh Sabah Al-Khaled on earning the trust of His Highness the Amir Sheikh Nawaf Al-Ahmad and His Highness the Crown Prince Sheikh Mishal Al-Ahmad, expressing hopes for success to His Highness the Prime Minister. Sheikh Sabah Al-Khaled's visit to the KNG is an honor and it reflects the government's keenness on the security and stability of Kuwait, the official affirmed. —KUNA

Premier thankful for firefighters' life-saving efforts

KUWAIT: His Highness the Prime Minister Sheikh Sabah Al-Khaled Al-Hamad Al-Sabah highlighted yesterday the efforts of Kuwaiti firefighters to save lives during the coronavirus pandemic, saying their sacrifices have been nothing short of admirable. As he visited the Kuwait Fire Force (KFF) headquarters, where he was received by Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of State for Cabinet Affairs Anas Al-Saleh, His Highness the Prime Minister said these efforts have garnered firefighters the respect and admiration of His Highness the Amir. "We shoulder the responsibility to live up to the expectations of His Highness the Amir," he said, adding that KFF staff had set a precedent during the pandemic through their efforts to provide urgent aid nationwide, lauding their "preparedness" to deal with similar emergencies. Citing newly enacted legislation, His Highness the Prime Minister said that such laws are instrumental in pushing life-saving efforts in times of trouble, wishing the nation continued growth and prosperity.

Meanwhile, Saleh said that the KFF mission during the pandemic was "highly commended, appreciated, and made the political leadership proud," as they embodied the high patriotic spirit and high efficiency in performing their on the ground duties to the fullest. In a speech delivered during His Highness the Prime Min-



KUWAIT: His Highness the Prime Minister Sheikh Sabah Al-Khaled Al-Hamad Al-Sabah poses for a group picture with Kuwait Fire Force officials during his visit to the KFF headquarters. —KUNA

ister's visit, Saleh expresses his happiness and pride to such visit, which comes as a continuation of previous visits to senior leadership, namely His Highness the Amir of Kuwait. In his speech, Saleh highlighted the achievements of Kuwait Fire Force during the COVID-19 pandemic, as KFF distributed batches of medicine supplies to those who need it most, including constructing and securing quarantine areas, securing and sterilizing various entities. KFF crews also applied and monitored fire systems applications

to all firefighting services and licenses, which reached more than 80 percent, the minister noted. He stressed the firefighters' keenness to develop the human resource element by activating virtual reality to ensure upgrades due payments and graduate batches of officers and non-commissioned officers to join and assist their colleagues. He affirmed that the force would continue to double efforts in cooperation and support for all military and civilian state bodies, keeping Kuwait's interest in mind. —KUNA

Local

Kuwait Amir exchanges New Year best wishes with world leaders

Sheikh Nawaf sends letters to UAE, Oman rulers

KUWAIT: His Highness the Amir Sheikh Nawaf Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah exchanged yesterday cables of congratulations and best wishes with leaders of Arab and friendly countries on the advent of 2021, wishing them a year of peace, security, stability and that they enjoy good health. In other news, His Highness the Amir Sheikh Nawaf Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah wrote letters to UAE President Khalifa bin Zayed bin Sultan Al Nahyan and Oman's Sultan Haitham bin Tariq Al-Said over bilateral relations, in addition to current happenings around the world. His Highness the Amir's envoy, Foreign Minister Sheikh Dr Ahmad Nasser Al-Mohammad Al-Sabah, delivered the letters to UAE Vice President Mohammed bin Rashid Al Maktoum and Omani Deputy Prime Minister for the Council of Ministers Fahad bin Mahmoud Al-Said, during respective visits to the two countries yesterday. The letters highlighted a "desire to push ties between the Arab Gulf neighbors even further," according to an official statement. —KUNA



UAE Vice President Mohammed bin Rashid receives a letter from His Highness the Amir Sheikh Nawaf Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah to UAE President Khalifa bin Zayed Al Nahyan.



Omani Deputy Prime Minister for the Council of Ministers Fahad bin Mahmoud Al-Said meets Kuwait's Foreign Minister Sheikh Dr Ahmad Nasser Al-Mohammad Al-Sabah.

Ministers inspect Kuwait's northern military sites



KUWAIT: Ministers Sheikh Hamad Jaber Al-Ali Al-Sabah and Sheikh Thamer Ali Al-Sabah in a group photo with Kuwait Army personnel during a tour at a military site north of Kuwait. —Defense Ministry photos



Defense Minister Sheikh Hamad Jaber Al-Ali Al-Sabah speaks to soldiers as Interior Minister Sheikh Thamer Ali Al-Sabah looks on.



Kuwaiti Army Chief of Staff Khaled Al-Sabah gives a detailed presentation to the ministers during the tours.

KUWAIT: Deputy Prime Minister and Defense Minister Sheikh Hamad Jaber Al-Ali Al-Sabah and Minister of Interior Sheikh Thamer Ali Al-Sabah on Wednesday made an inspecting tour to some military sites north of the country. During the tour, the two ministers were given a detailed presentation by the commanders on the sites they visited, and the nature of duties and missions achieved by the units, the Kuwaiti Army's moral guidance and public relations department said in a press statement. The chiefs of the military sites stressed readiness of their personnel, and the joint coordination and cooperation between the two ministries through carrying out several joint duties and missions, it

added. Minister of Defense affirmed the importance of coordination and collaboration between the army and police, in light of the current regional situation that requires the utmost readiness and vigilance, it noted. He also stressed the need of developing capabilities of the Kuwaiti Army's personnel through providing the latest equipment in this domain. "This matter pushes us to accelerate necessarily the nationalization of the Kuwaiti Army's staff," he said, adding that this will top his priorities. This move will be made through offering privileges and incentives to encourage Kuwaiti youth to join the army, he pointed out. —KUNA

News in brief

Man kills sponsor in Khaitan

KUWAIT: Police arrested a man who killed his sponsor in Khaitan, the Interior Ministry announced yesterday. Detectives had identified an Arab man as the prime suspect after launching investigations in the death of a Kuwaiti man whose body was found in a Khaitan house. The man reportedly committed the murder due to money-related disputes with his sponsor, according to investigations. The suspect admitted his crime when faced with evidence, and was sent to the proper authorities for further legal action, the Interior Ministry's Relations and Security Media Department said in a press statement.

Kuwait reports 286 new COVID cases, one death

KUWAIT: Kuwait's Ministry of Health reported yesterday 286 new COVID-19 cases and one death, raising the total confirmed infected cases to 150,584 and the death toll to 934. Meanwhile, the ministry earlier announced that 233 patients recovered during the same 24-hour period, increasing total recoveries to 146,517. According to the ministry's spokesman Dr Abdullah Al-Sanad, the number of people receiving medical care in intensive care departments reached 47 cases, bringing the total number of active cases to 3,133. He pointed out that 3,289 medical tests were conducted in the same period, raising the total number to 1,254,832 tests.

Oil price up 3 cents

KUWAIT: The price of the Kuwaiti oil barrel rose three cents to stand at \$50.61 Wednesday, compared with \$50.58 on Tuesday, Kuwait Petroleum Corporation (KPC) said yesterday. In international markets, Brent crude oil went up 13 cents to reach \$51.22, while West Texas crude rose seven cents to reach \$48.07. —KUNA

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Clerics among 26 held after Pakistan temple destroyed

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Peacekeeping mission in Darfur ends, stoking fears

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SYDNEY: New Year fireworks erupt over Sydney's iconic Harbor Bridge and Opera House today. — AFP

World ushers in locked-down New Year

Billions of people eagerly bid farewell to virus-ridden 2020

SYDNEY: The world began ushering in the New Year yesterday, with pandemic controls muting celebrations for billions of people eager to bid farewell to a virus-ridden 2020. After a grinding year that has seen at least 1.7 million people die from COVID-19, fresh waves of infection have sparked renewed lockdowns and forced would-be revelers to extend their 2020 tradition of watching events from the sofa.

The eagerly awaited first seconds of 2021 fell on the Pacific nations of Kiribati and Samoa from 1000 GMT, with the uninhabited Howland and Baker Islands the last to tip over into the New Year, 26 hours later. New Zealand, which has won plaudits for its handling of the coronavirus, followed an hour later with large crowds gathered in Auckland to watch a fireworks display.

Although still isolated by international border closures, months of zero recorded cases in the

community has let life in New Zealand return to relative normality. In Australia's largest city, Sydney, fireworks lit up the glittering harbor with a dazzling display at 1300 GMT, but few spectators watched in person.

Plans to allow crowds were scrapped amid a cluster of around 150 new infections that have seen travel to and from Sydney severely restricted. "I think everybody is looking towards 2021 as a fresh beginning and a fresh start," Karen Roberts, among the lucky few who were allowed past checkpoints around the area, told AFP at a bar nestled under the Sydney Opera House.

In Tokyo, which will see in the new year at 1500 GMT, residents face the prospect a state of emergency being imposed after a daily record 1,300 new coronavirus infections were recorded in the last 24 hours. Italy - where

shocking images of makeshift morgues and exhausted medics awoke the world to the severity of the crisis - is on a nationwide lockdown until Jan 7 and a 10 pm curfew is in place.

From France to Latvia to Brazil, police and - in some cases - military personnel are being deployed to make sure night-time curfews or bans on large gatherings are enforced. In hard-hit London, 74-year-old American singer-songwriter Patti Smith will ring in the New Year with a tribute to National Health Service workers who have died from COVID-19, projected on the screen at Piccadilly Circus and streamed on YouTube.

Social gathering

Thousands were expected to attend a fireworks and a laser show in Dubai at the Burj Khalifa, the world's tallest tower, despite a slew

of new cases. All those attending the event - whether at a public place, hotel or restaurant - were required to wear masks and register with QR codes. In Beirut, a city still reeling from the Aug 4 port explosion, authorities were also cutting loose. A night curfew has been pushed back to 3 am. Bars, restaurants and night clubs have all reopened and were advertising large parties to mark the turn of the year.

On the banks of Lake Baikal in Siberia, where temperatures plummet to as low as -35 degrees Celsius, around a dozen Russians emerged invigorated after a new year's eve ice dip. The swimmers, known in Russia as "walruses", ran several kilometers through a snowy forest in swimsuits and festive costumes before plunging into the world's largest freshwater lake. "It's invigorating. It stings a little!" Andrei Bugai told AFP after climbing out of the water. —AFP

International

One year after US killed Iran general, Iraq tensions boil

Pro-Iran forces accuse PM of complicity in killing

BAGHDAD: One year after US forces assassinated Iran's most storied commander, tensions are boiling between Iraq's Washington-backed premier and pro-Tehran forces that accuse him of complicity in the Baghdad drone strike. US President Donald Trump sent shock waves through the region on January 3, 2020 with the targeted killing of Iran's revered General Qasem Soleimani and his Iraqi lieutenant, which infuriated the Islamic republic and its allies.

Trump said the strike came in response to a hail of attacks on US interests in Iraq that has continued since. With only weeks left in the White House, he has warned that if there are new attacks, "I will hold Iran responsible". War-scarred Iraq remains torn between former occupation power the United States and neighboring Iran, Washington's arch-enemy, whose influence has increased greatly since the US-led invasion that toppled Saddam Hussein in 2003.

Iraq's Prime Minister Mustafa Al-Kadhemi, who took office in May, has recently endured blistering threats from the powerful pro-Iranian paramilitary groups which Washington blames for the rocket attacks. Security sources say tensions flared after the arrest of a man who planned another attack on the US embassy, a fighter of Asaib Ahl al-Haq (AAH), a faction of the Hashed al-Shaabi paramilitary network.

Outraged AAH fighters spread out through

Baghdad's streets and threatened to personally target Kadhemi unless their brother-in-arms was let go, the sources said. "We warn Kadhemi that if you don't back off, you will be punished," said a masked, gun-toting fighter in one of several videos circulating online. Another group threatened to "cut off the ears... of the traitor".

'Make or break'

Pro-Iran forces accuse Kadhemi, who is also Iraq's spy chief, of complicity in the killing of Soleimani, who was head of external operations for Iran's Revolutionary Guards, and Hashed's deputy leader Abu Mahdi Al-Muhandis. Kataeb Hezbollah, another hardline Hashed faction, has piled on the pressure, with a spokesman urging "treacherous Kadhemi not to test the patience of the resistance". The Iraqi prime minister has urged calm but also warned that "we are ready for a decisive confrontation if necessary".

The war of words has heightened tensions in a country that remains politically fragile after years of war and insurgency and is battling the COVID-19 pandemic with its economy reeling from the sharp fall in world demand for oil. "If there is an escalation, it's make or break for the government," said Sajad Jiyad, a fellow at US think-tank The Century Foundation. "The potential for the Kadhemi government to fall apart is quite high," he said, arguing that the pro-Iran groups "have political allies that may unseat him".



BAGHDAD: An Iraqi supporter of the Hashed al-Shaabi (Popular Mobilization) paramilitary units walks past posters depicting late Iraqi commander Abu Mahdi Al-Muhandis (right) and Iranian Revolutionary Guards commander Qasem Soleimani at a conference hall on Wednesday. —AFP

In the standoff, the government has refrained from keeping in detention fighters of Hashed, a movement that is formally part of the Iraqi security apparatus. Security sources told AFP that the Iraqi intelligence service would hand over the AAH fighter to the Hashed's own security directorate.

This echoed a similar episode in June, when elite security forces under Kadhemi's command arrested 14 members of Kataeb Hezbollah on the same charges, then also transferred

them to the Hashed. Thirteen were released within hours, and the last was let go later.

Such compromises show Kadhemi is opting for the status quo over an escalation with armed groups, said Jiyad, the analyst. "People are tired of seeing the law trampled on," said one politician, speaking on condition of anonymity. "But the armed forces are afraid to take the initiative because they do not feel they are supported by the political leadership." —AFP

Zarif says Trump aims to fabricate 'pretext for war'

TEHRAN: Iran's Foreign Minister Mohammad Javad Zarif yesterday accused outgoing US President Donald Trump of aiming to fabricate a "pretext for war" as tensions mount between the two countries. His remarks come ahead of the first anniversary of the US killing of top Iranian military commander Qasem Soleimani in a drone strike in Baghdad on Jan 3. US aircraft carrier USS Nimitz has been patrolling Gulf waters since late November and two American B-52 bombers recently overflew the region.

"Instead of fighting (the novel coronavirus) in US, @realDonaldTrump & cohorts waste billions to fly B52s & send armadas to OUR region," Zarif wrote on Twitter. "Intelligence from Iraq indicate plot to FABRICATE pretext for war," he added. Trump ordered a drone strike on January 3 this year to kill Soleimani near Baghdad's international airport. Days later, Iran launched a volley of missiles at Iraqi bases housing US and other coalition troops, with Trump refraining from any further military response. "Iran doesn't seek war but will OPENLY & DIRECTLY defend its people, security & vital interests," Zarif said. —AFP

Iran to honor Soleimani

TEHRAN: Iran this week honors military commander Qasem Soleimani who was assassinated a year ago by arch-enemy the United States and is revered as a heroic warrior across the Islamic republic. Since his death in a January 3 Baghdad drone strike that sparked mourning across Iran at mass funeral processions, the "martyr" Soleimani has entered the ranks of Iran's glorious generals, immortalized in portraits, sculptures, ballads and an upcoming TV series.

The commemorations on Sunday come only weeks before US President Donald Trump, who ordered the killing, leaves the White House and Joe Biden takes over, offering hopes of a somewhat less bellicose relationship. Soleimani's killing at age 62 sharply heightened tensions between Washington and Tehran, whose decades-old animosity had deepened when Trump withdrew from Iran's nuclear deal and launched a "maximum pressure" campaign to isolate Iran.

Within days, Iran retaliated to the killing of

a military leader long deemed untouchable by firing rockets at Iraqi bases housing US forces, which claimed no lives but caused injuries and preceded a tragedy. In the tense hours that followed the rocket strikes, when it appeared the conflict could escalate further, Iran accidentally shot down a Ukrainian passenger plane near Tehran, claiming the lives of all 176 aboard.

A year on, Iran is readying to honor Soleimani, whom the United States had labeled a "terrorist" in 2005, but whose portrait has been displayed by supporters in Gaza, Iraq, Lebanon, Pakistan, Syria and Yemen. The anniversary comes as sanctions-hit Iran remains in the grip of the region's worst outbreak of the novel coronavirus, which has killed more than 55,000 out of more than 1.2 million people infected in the country.

'Courage and resistance'

Soleimani headed the Quds Force, the foreign operations arm of the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps, which directly answers to Iran's supreme leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei. A veteran of the 1980-88 Iran-Iraq war, he went on to oversee Iran's military operations in Syria, Iraq and elsewhere.

In the eyes of many Iranians, the country's

projection of power beyond national borders under Soleimani saved the multi-ethnic nation from the conflict and disintegration suffered by Iraq, Afghanistan and Syria. Khamenei had already declared him a "living martyr" before his death, and in 2019 Soleimani became the only recipient of the highest military honour, the Order of Zolfaghar, since the revolution.

Khamenei said this month that "Soleimani embodies Iranian values" such as "courage and resistance spirit". Iran regards Soleimani as having joined the hallowed ranks of warriors who fell for the motherland, from the era of the Persian empire into modern times. In one of the dozens of songs broadcast during his multi-city funeral procession, Soleimani was compared by the poet Milad Erfanpour to the mythical heroes of the Persian epic Shahnameh, The Book of Kings.

"We have had many heroes, some of them fictional, in our long history, but Soleimani was a real human being whom we have known in flesh and soul," Erfanpour told AFP. The late general's appeal transcended political, religious and class divisions, said academic Mehdi Zakerian, who noted that "in his speeches, Soleimani always spoke to all Iranians and not just to one social class". —AFP

International

Syria regime auctions off land of displaced

Family farms taken over by regime loyalists and cronies

BEIRUT: Many Syrians forced from their homes by their country's brutal, decade-old war are now shocked to discover that their family farms have been taken over by regime loyalists and cronies. Rights groups and legal experts say local authorities in parts of northwest Syria recaptured by government forces have staged auctions to effectively "confiscate" fertile land and punish opponents.

One refugee, 30-year-old Salman, said he always knew it would be difficult to return to the family plot in Idlib province he abandoned during an offensive a year ago by President Bashar Al-Assad's forces. But whatever hopes he still had to return one day were all but crushed when he learnt the rights to cultivate the land had been sold off to a complete stranger. "What right does someone have to come and take it?" the refugee, who asked to use a pseudonym, told AFP by phone from Greece where he illegally moved a few months ago.

Salman said he used to plant lentils, barley and black cumin on the 37 acres of land he owns with his brothers, earning up to \$12,000 each harvest. He discovered through a post on social media that the rights to the land were being auctioned off. "We were shocked," he told AFP. "This land was left to us by our ancestors and we want to pass it down to our children."

'Exploiting displacement'

Several other Syrians displaced from southern Idlib and adjacent Hama and Aleppo provinces told AFP that they too have had their plots expropriated. Some learnt about it through social media advertisements run by the regime-affiliated Farmers' Union in Idlib or through acquaintances still living nearby. In October, the Farmers' Union said that it was auctioning off the right to use and cul-

tivate plots owned by Syrians "who don't reside in government-controlled areas".

Victims found they were being blamed for their misfortune. The union said the original deed-holders were "indebted" to Syria's Agricultural Cooperative Bank (ACB), which offers loans to farmers - including those who are now finding it impossible to settle dues from outside government-controlled territory. The land owners who spoke to AFP all denied having outstanding payments. "It's just an excuse," Salman said.

Other auctions are being organized by regime-linked local security committees, without any mention of outstanding debts, said opposition watchdog group The Day After and war monitor the Syrian Observatory for Human Rights. Assad's Russian-backed forces have over the past three years pushed deeper into Syria's last major opposition bastion in the northwest.

Their latest offensive in early 2020 forced nearly a million people out of their homes, according to the United Nations. Only 235,000 have returned since a ceasefire took hold in March. Grappling with a deep economic crisis compounded by Western sanctions, Damascus is looking to make use of fertile land to boost agricultural production. Rights groups, including Amnesty International, have condemned the land expropriations in former rebel strongholds. "The land auctions exploit displacement for economic benefit," said Diana Semaan, Amnesty's Syria researcher. Authorities, she said, are "seizing lands illegally and in violation of international law".

'It's a facade'

In November, an Aleppo security committee said it was taking bids for plots in reconquered villages, according to documents ob-



DURAYKISH, Syria: A handout picture released on Wednesday shows Syrian President Bashar Al-Assad and his wife Asma during the afforestation of Harsh al-Tufaha (Apple Forest). —AFP

tained by The Day After activist group and the Observatory. Amir, a displaced 38-year-old from Aleppo, said he was informed less than two months ago by his former neighbour that authorities were taking offers for his 20 acres of land there. Amir asked the neighbor to bid on his behalf, but he declined. "Someone who has relatives with intelligence services in the area" won the bid, said Amir, a father of five who now makes less than \$2 a day picking olives in Idlib. —AFP

News in brief

IS ambush kills 37 Syria soldiers

BEIRUT: Islamic State group jihadists killed 37 soldiers when they ambushed a bus Wednesday in one of the deadliest attacks since the fall of their "caliphate" last year, a monitor said. The Syrian Observatory for Human Rights said the attack in the eastern province of Deir Ezzor targeted the regime soldiers as they travelled home for holidays. —AFP

Israel hit 50 Syria targets

JERUSALEM: Israel's military, which rarely comments on individual strikes in Syria blamed on its forces, said yesterday it had hit about 50 targets in the neighboring country in 2020. The annual report released by the Israel Defense Forces did not provide details about the targets hit, but Israel is believed to have launched hundreds of strikes in Syria since the start of the civil war in 2011. —AFP

Syria war killed 6,800 in 2020

BEIRUT: The Syrian conflict claimed at least 6,800 people in 2020, the lowest annual death toll since it began nearly a decade ago, a war monitor said yesterday. According to figures compiled by the Syrian Observatory for Human Rights, more than 10,000 people were killed in the conflict in 2019. The overall tally since the start of the conflict has crept up to 387,000, including 117,000 civilians. —AFP

Hope for Libya's war amputees after long wait

MISRATA, Libya: For Radwan Jibril, wounded in a bastion of Libya's 2011 revolution, losing his leg became "inevitable" and he had a prosthetic replacement, but thousands of other amputees are still waiting. An orthopedic center is finally scheduled to open in March to provide prostheses to amputees in the North African country riven by conflict for the past decade.

Jibril, like so many others, was hit by shrapnel in his western hometown of Misrata, which endured a devastating siege during the revolt that brought down longtime dictator Muammar Gaddafi. "Despite several medical stays abroad, amputation was inevitable because the injury had been so badly treated. It was all a big shock," he said. "I was fitted with a prosthesis in Italy but it took a long time to get used to it," said the 38-year-old Libyan, who sports a light beard.

With the support of family, he has opened a fishmonger's where he serves customers as best as he can with "this foreign body", he told AFP, shuffling from stall to stall with one leg stiff. Now, he feels "like a new man again". His prosthesis, however, is starting to wear out, and "with hundreds, if not thousands, waiting their turn, it won't be easy" to have it serviced, he said.

Mohamad Al-Nouri, 28, had a hand amputated because of an injury while fighting in 2019 in the ranks of the Tripoli-based Government of National Unity (GNA) against an abortive assault on the capital by forces of eastern strongman Khalifa Haftar. He was fitted with an artificial hand but is waiting to go to Germany for a permanent prosthesis. "I don't think I can go back to the cafe where I



MISRATA, Libya: Patients wait for a consultation at the National Center for Artificial Limbs on Dec 17, 2020. —AFP

worked... I still need a lot of time to regain my confidence," said the young man.

A national centre for prostheses, being established in the port city of Misrata, already has a patient waiting list of more than 3,000 amputees, said its director Al-Sadeq Al-Haddad. "In five years, we hope to be able to provide prostheses to all amputees in Libya," said Haddad. "This will help them get their lives back, together with psychological and physical support," he said.

With Libya's health sector left in tatters by multiple conflicts since the revolution, war-wounded Libyans are often sent abroad for treatment, at the expense of the state. The center, to be housed in a brand new building, will save the government a "significant sum" of money, said its director. "A team of Hungarian specialists are to train technicians and run a rehabilitation service for a year," Haddad said. —AFP

International

Peacekeeping mission in Darfur ends, stoking fears

Darfuris hold protests against UNAMID departure

NYALA, Sudan: The United Nations-African Union mission in Darfur was set to end 13 years of peacekeeping in the vast Sudanese region yesterday, even as recent violent clashes leave residents fearful of new conflict. Fighting erupted in Darfur in 2003, when ethnic minority rebels rose up against the Arab-dominated government in Khartoum, which responded by recruiting and arming notorious Arab-dominated militia known as the Janjaweed.

A total of 300,000 people were killed and 2.5 million displaced, according to the United Nations. "The joint United Nations-African Union mission in the Darfur region of Sudan (UNAMID) will officially end operations on Thursday, when the Government of Sudan will take over responsibility for the protection of civilians in the area," the mission said in a statement on Wednesday.

The bitter conflict has largely subsided in recent years and longtime autocrat Omar Al-Bashir - wanted by the International Criminal Court for genocide and other alleged crimes in the western region - was deposed last year. But the country's transitional government is fragile, and ethnic and tribal clashes still periodically flare in Darfur, including clashes last week that left at least 15 people dead and dozens wounded.

Darfuris, many of whom remain in teeming camps years after they fled their homes, have held protests in recent weeks against the mission's imminent departure. "The lives of Darfuri people are at stake, and the United Nations should reconsider its decision," Mohamed Abdelrahman told

AFP on Wednesday at Kalma camp in Nyala, the capital of South Darfur. He is among hundreds who staged a sit-in outside the mission's headquarters at the camp.

'Big trouble' ahead

Protesters held up banners reading: "We trust UN protection for IDPs (internally displaced people)," and "we reject UNAMID's exit". The UN said that the phased withdrawal of the mission's approximately 8,000 armed and civilian personnel will begin in January and be completed inside six months. Longtime Kalma resident Othman Abulkassem fears the troops' departure signals "big trouble" for Darfuris, leaving them at risk of further violence.

UNAMID spokesman Ashraf Eissa sought to allay those fears. "We understand the concerns of the Darfuri population especially IDPs and other vulnerable groups, but the situation has improved a great deal over the past few years," Eissa told AFP. "The responsibility now lies with the transitional government and the Sudanese people themselves to enhance peace and security in Darfur."

A UN political mission - the United Nations Integrated Transition Assistance Mission in Sudan (UNITAMS) - will be installed in Darfur after UNAMID's departure. It will be tasked with assisting Sudan's transition, peace-building, and aid disbursement. Following last week's clashes, Sudanese authorities said government troops will be deployed to the region to contain any violence.



NYALA, Sudan: Sudanese internally displaced people stage a sit-in to protest against the end of the mandate of the United Nations and African Union peacekeeping mission (UNAMID) in Kalma camp on Wednesday. —AFP

Yesterday, acting foreign minister Omar Qamareddine said UNAMID "contributed to achieving peace." "It's true that its tenure was marred by some obstacles but it was, overall, good," the minister told a Khartoum press conference, adding that the deployment of government troops across the region will be completed by March.

But many are skeptical. "If the protection of internally displaced people is assigned to the government forces, it will be like handing Darfuris to the forces that committed massacres and

rape against them," said 25-year-old Darfuri Intisar Abdelhay.

Thousands of Janjaweed militiamen were incorporated into Sudan's powerful paramilitary Rapid Support Forces, whose head Mohamed Hamdan Daglo is a key figure in the transitional government. The Janjaweed stand accused by human rights groups of carrying out widespread killings and rapes as part of a broader campaign of "ethnic cleansing" in the early years of the conflict.—AFP

Yemen govt vows to bring stability after deadly attack

ADEN: Yemen's new power-sharing government vowed yesterday to bring stability to the war-torn country, a day after deadly blasts rocked Aden airport in an attack targeting cabinet members. At least 26 people, including three members of the International Committee of the Red Cross and a journalist, were killed and scores wounded in the explosions as ministers disembarked from an aircraft in the southern city.

All cabinet members were reported to be unharmed in what some ministers charged was an attack by the Iran-backed Houthi rebels who control the capital Sanaa and are based in northern Yemen. AFP video footage shows what appears to be a missile strike followed by a ball of intense flames, in part of the airport which moments before had been packed with crowds.

But it is still not fully clear what caused the explosions. Foreign Minister Ahmed bin Mubarak told AFP yesterday that the new unity government was



ADEN: A damaged van is pictured in front of the airport of this southern Yemeni city yesterday, a day after explosions rocked the building, killing or injuring dozens of people. —AFP

up to tackling the challenges facing a country that has long been the Arab Peninsula's most impoverished nation. "The government is determined to fulfill its duty and work to restore stability in Yemen," he said. "This terrorist attack will not deter it from that."

The cabinet convened for the first time in Aden yesterday, during which members held a moment of silence for those who were killed in the attack. Tens of thousands of people, mostly civilians, have been killed and millions displaced in Yemen's grinding five-year war, which has triggered what the United Nations calls the world's worst humanitarian disaster. —AFP

Worshippers at a loss as 'crossover' prayers cancelled

LAGOS: Across Nigeria, New Year's Eve is usually marked by millions of Christians gathering in churches to usher in the New Year, praying for a better year ahead. But this year, the all-night celebrations have been widely canceled because of COVID — and many worshippers, desperate to turn the page on 2020, say they feel a void. Every December 31, chants of "Amen" and "Hallelujah" rend the air of many Nigerian towns. Hugs and handshakes are exchanged, and at midnight the glow of fireworks lights up the skyline.

It is not uncommon to hear optimistic declarations such as "This year is my year" - or to see thousands, sometimes tens of

thousands, of worshippers break into a dance of celebration at mass events. But in several states across southern Nigeria, government-imposed COVID-19 restrictions mean that "crossover," a key day in the calendar for Nigeria's estimated 86 million Christians, will not happen this time.

As of Wednesday, Nigeria had registered over 85,500 cases from COVID-19 and 1,260 deaths. The country has seen a surge in cases in the last few weeks, although but lack of testing means the number may be higher. In Lagos, a metropolis of some 20 million souls, religious gatherings have been capped at 50 percent of the usual capacity for the venue.

In Nigeria, that can still be a lot of people - some churches are as big as stadiums, able to seat as many worshippers as a major football final. But services must not exceed two hours, and there is a midnight to 4:00 a.m. curfew. Many churches in Nigeria are accustomed to praying until the sun rises on the New Year. —AFP

International

Post-Brexit students mourn as UK leaves EU exchange scheme

Johnson takes Britain out of 'door-opening' Erasmus program

PARIS: Lucas Santerre, an 18-year-old French student with a fondness for Victorian architecture, had dreamed of spending a year studying in Britain under an EU scheme that has helped millions of students immerse themselves in another culture. But British Prime Minister Boris Johnson announced last week that he was taking his country out of the Erasmus program, severing yet another link with the Continent.

Santerre, who is in his first year of cultural studies at Lille University in northern France, had envisioned himself visiting castles during time out from his studies at Leeds University. He also planned to take a trip to Hadrian's Wall, the epic Roman-era boundary that stretches along England's border with Scotland. But those hopes were dashed when Johnson, after striking a post-Brexit trade deal with Brussels, announced that Britain would leave the Erasmus student-exchange scheme that has spawned countless cross-border friendships, courtships and careers. Johnson, who passed up an invitation to remain in Erasmus after Brexit - six non-EU members including Turkey and Norway currently take part in the scheme - said that with nearly twice as many Europeans studying in Britain as Britons going abroad it had become "extremely expensive" for his country.

The announcement was met with howls of despair among Remainers, who praised Erasmus's contribution to forging a generation of outward-looking pro-EU Britons. Writing in the Guardian about his experience as an Erasmus student in 1989 in Rotter-

dam, philosopher Julian Baggini said it taught him "not only what is valuable in cultures we are often quicker to parody than to understand, but what is strange in ourselves."

Opening doors

Since its inception in 1987, some nine million people have benefitted from Erasmus to study or train in another EU country in what came to be seen by many students as a rite of passage. Adrian Toomey, head of marketing at a training firm in Devon, who spent six months at a business school in Paris in 1999/2000 told AFP it had taught him "there is more to life than where you're from".

"It opened doors you didn't realize were there," said the 43-year-old father of three, who went on to work for a French cheesemaker before moving back to Britain. Across Europe, Erasmus was seen as another casualty of the nationalism that drove Brexit. The program had "stripped away the Europe concocted in the wilder corners of the Tory imagination and allowed young people to see their continent for themselves," the Irish Times wrote.

"That's why the Brexiteers despise Erasmus - because it's an open challenge to everything they purport to believe in". The pro-Brexit camp dismissed the outcry as hysteria from what they portrayed as a pro-EU elite. Writing in the Spectator magazine, Conservative MP David Johnston argued that Erasmus had "overwhelmingly benefitted the children of



LONDON: A jogger runs across the Millennium Bridge across the River Thames with St Paul's Cathedral in the background yesterday. —AFP

the affluent and not those of the working class" for whom "Europe really isn't the most interesting region of the world... particularly if your family tree traces back to Asia, the Americas or the Caribbean."

Victim of its success

Home to several of the EU's top universities, Britain had long been one of the most sought-after

destinations for students anxious to improve their English and sample British student life. Britain used to be the top choice of French Erasmus students, according to the Erasmus+ France agency which runs the scheme in France. But Brexit had already diminished Britain's allure, knocking it to third place among French exchange students in 2018-19, after Spain and Ireland. —AFP

Boris Johnson's father seeks French citizenship

PARIS: British Prime Minister Boris Johnson's father Stanley confirmed plans yesterday to seek French citizenship as the free movement of Britons in the EU comes to an end under the Brexit pact delivered by his son. Speaking to France's RTL radio in French, Stanley Johnson said: "It's not a question of becoming French. If I understand correctly I am French! My mother was born in France, her mother was completely French as was her grandfather. "For me it's a question of obtaining what I already have and I am very happy about that," the 80-year-old added. The father of the politician who ended Britain's 47-year-old membership of the EU was among the first civil servants appointed to Brussels after Britain joined the EU in 1973. He worked for the European Commission and served as a member of the European Parliament.

He initially campaigned against leaving the EU before changing his mind a year after Britain voted to leave the union in 2016. "I will always be European, that's for sure," he told RTL. "You can't tell the English: you're not European. Europe is more than the single market, it's more than the European Union. That said, to have a link like that with the EU is important," he said, apparently referring to an EU passport. His plans to seek a French passport had already been revealed by his daughter Rachel in a book published in March. —AFP

Hope, skepticism as Moscow launches vaccination drive

MOSCOW: Vera Stepanova waits nervously at a Moscow clinic for her turn to be vaccinated with Russia's Sputnik V jab. The 73-year-old spent a sleepless night in anticipation and says she has no doubts about taking the vaccine. "I'm so afraid of this disease. We have to protect ourselves," the retired school principal says, her face covered by a surgical mask. "I waited for my turn and I came with pleasure, hoping that everything will be all right."

Stepanova was among a group of older Russians receiving the vaccine this week as Moscow launched a campaign to inoculate residents aged over 60. For many the vaccination comes as a relief, a chance to leave their homes or see their grandchildren without fear. "I'm tired of staying at home. I would like to get antibodies faster so that I can go for a walk," says Stepanova's 82-year-old husband Georgy.

But not everyone is lining up for Sputnik V. Many Russians are deeply sceptical of being vaccinated - a huge hurdle for the country in a week that also saw officials confirm that its death toll from the virus is more than three times higher than previously reported.

'Apprehension, mistrust'

An Ipsos poll this week showed that only 43 percent of Russians want to be vaccinated, against 69 percent in the United States and 65 percent in Germany. Other polls in Russia put that figure at only 38 percent. "It is worrying," infectious disease specialist Irina Shestakova conceded in an interview with the RIA Novosti news agency. "The countries that win will be those that vac-

inate the majority of the population as quickly as possible," she said.

Lev Gudkov, the director of Russia's Levada polling centre, said some of the concern was fuelled by a propaganda drive around Sputnik V, which President Vladimir Putin announced as the world's first officially registered vaccine in August. The announcement prompted worries that Moscow was rushing to win the race to produce a vaccine, an idea reinforced by its being named after the first satellite launched by the Soviet Union in 1957 at the height of the Cold War.

"This massive campaign is arousing great apprehension and mistrust," Gudkov said. "People understand that for Vladimir Putin, the vaccine is part of Russia's confrontation with the West." Scepticism has also been fed by concerns over official coronavirus figures in Russia, where despite huge numbers of cases the official death rate has remained relatively low. The government has defended its methodology of counting only COVID deaths that are confirmed by autopsies, but a Levada survey in November showed that just 27 percent of Russians had faith in the official math.

'No alternative' to vaccine

A count of excess deaths so far in 2020 released this week by state statistics agency Rosstat showed more than 186,000 people had died as a result of the virus. That is three times the fatality count of 57,019 on the official daily tally and places Russia third on the world ranking of deaths from COVID. As a second wave of infections - one that shows no sign of slowing - pummels Russia, the authorities have not reimposed the kind of strict lockdown seen here last winter or in effect in parts of Europe.

Instead, they are redoubling efforts to get sceptical citizens to clinics, with Moscow Mayor Sergei Sobyanyin saying this week that vaccinations are the only way forward. "You have to get vaccinated. There is no alternative," he said. The numbers show the end is not yet in sight. In a city of more than 12 million, just 50,000 people in Moscow have so far received Sputnik V and only 70,000 are registered to be vaccinated. —AFP

International

US hits record daily COVID-19 deaths

World looks to vaccines in 2021

WASHINGTON: The US logged its highest ever daily death toll from the coronavirus Wednesday as the world prepares to turn the page on a grim year defined by the pandemic, with much of the globe united in one hope for 2021: That a slew of new vaccines will stamp out COVID-19. New Year's Eve marks one year since the World Health Organization first mentioned a mysterious pneumonia in China later identified as COVID-19, which went on in 2020 to kill more than 1.79 million people and devastate the global economy in unprecedented ways.

In the world's worst-hit country, the US, the numbers keep climbing: On Wednesday more than 3,900 people died of COVID-19, a new record, bringing the toll since the pandemic began to more than 19.7 million infections and 341,000 lives lost. And experts believe the worst is yet to come, as US healthcare workers brace for a surge in cases after major holiday gatherings.

But international efforts helped develop vaccines in record time. On Wednesday Britain approved a lower-cost vaccine developed by the University of Oxford and drug firm AstraZeneca, making it the third jab to win approval in the Western world, after the Pfizer-BioNTech and Moderna vaccines.

Britain, hard hit by a worrisome new strain of the virus and now divorced from the European Union due to Brexit, will "move to vaccinate as many people as quickly as possible," tweeted

British Prime Minister Boris Johnson. Unlike the Pfizer-BioNTech and Moderna vaccines, the one from AstraZeneca and Oxford does not need to be stored at very low temperatures. It can be kept, transported and handled in normal refrigerated conditions, making it easier and cheaper to administer, which is particularly important for less wealthy nations.

Hours later, Argentina became the second nation to approve the vaccine, and was soon followed by El Salvador. Argentina and Mexico have agreements to distribute the vaccine in Latin America. But the United States and European Union indicated that they would not soon follow suit.

Moncef Slaoui, the chief advisor to Operation Warp Speed, the military-led US vaccine effort, told reporters that he expected approval "sometime in early April". He did not fault Britain's health agency but said the United States was following its own trials and evaluations. He also voiced hope that Johnson & Johnson's Janssen vaccine - which, in contrast to initially approved jabs, requires just one dose - could be ready for approval in the United States in the first half of February.

Russian, Chinese vaccines

Russia and China also claim to have developed COVID-19 vaccines, and have already started administering them. Chinese pharmaceutical giant Sinopharm on Wednesday said Phase 3



MEXICO CITY: Paramedics move a patient suspected of being infected with the novel coronavirus into the 22 Battalion of the Military Police Hospital on Wednesday. — AFP

trials of its candidate had shown 79 percent effectiveness, short of the more than 90 percent achieved by Pfizer-BioNTech and Moderna. The firm has applied to China's drug regulator for approval.

But Beijing has struggled to gain international trust for its vaccines, hindered by a lack of data transparency as well as criticism over its handling of the initial outbreak of the virus in the central Chinese city of Wuhan. Earlier this week, a Chinese court handed a four-year

prison term to a citizen journalist who provided rare unvarnished reports from Wuhan of the early days of the pandemic.

A new official Chinese study said that infections in Wuhan may have been 10 times higher than official figures suggest. China's Centre for Disease Control found that 4.4 percent of the city's 11 million people had developed antibodies against the virus causing COVID-19 by April - meaning around 480,000 infections, far above the official tally of 50,000 cases to date. — AFP

Canada to require negative COVID test for entry

OTTAWA: Canada will require travellers to obtain a negative COVID-19 test before being allowed into the country, the government announced Wednesday. The polymerase chain reaction (PCR) tests will need to be conducted within three days of boarding a flight, officials told a news conference. Upon arrival travellers will still have to quarantine for 14 days.

Intergovernmental Affairs Minister Dominic LeBlanc said the new measure - along with increased monitoring at Canadian airports - would be in place "quickly," but did not provide a specific date. It comes after a new strain was identified in Britain, and has already spread to Canada. At the same time, Ontario's finance minister, Rod Phillips, was publicly chided this week for taking a family vacation in the Caribbean just as Canada's most populous province went into lockdown and the number of new daily COVID-19 cases across Canada hit record highs.

"Although most Canadians have heeded advice for non-essential travel, some Canadians are still travelling for non-essential reasons. This is deeply concerning," said deputy chief public health officer Howard Njoo. "We must iterate that now is not the time to travel," he said. Only about two percent of COVID-19 cases in Canada have been traced to recent travel.

Its borders have been closed to most non-essential travel since March, and last week Canada halted entry of all flights from



TORONTO: In this file photo taken on April 1, 2020, a passenger wheels her luggage at Toronto Pearson International Airport. — AFP

Britain over the new virus variant. Days later, Ottawa confirmed the first cases of the particularly infectious coronavirus variant in Canada. Ontario Premier Doug Ford, meanwhile, has criticized Phillips for vacationing outside Canada when officials are urging against travel, and has ordered him back home.

"I have let the minister know that his decision to travel is completely unacceptable and that it will not be tolerated again - by him or any member of our cabinet and caucus," Ford said in a statement. "I have also told the minister I need him back in the country immediately." As of Wednesday, Canada reported 571,070 COVID-19 cases, including 15,440 deaths. — AFP

News in brief

Cuban asylum seekers protest

CIUDAD JUAREZ: Several hundred Cuban asylum seekers protested on the US-Mexican border into the early hours of Wednesday, pleading to be allowed into the United States while their applications are processed. US authorities deployed border agents and used barbed wire to block a bridge between El Paso, Texas and the Mexican city of Ciudad Juarez where the crowd massed from late Tuesday. The protesters alleged they had faced human rights violations while stuck in Mexico. — AFP

Colombia eradicating coca

TUMACO, Colombia: Colombia beat its record for eradicating coca crops for the second year in a row, the government said Wednesday, although the country still remains the world's leading producer of cocaine. "We have achieved the highest level of manual coca eradication ever recorded by Colombia: 130,000 hectares (321,000 acres)," President Ivan Duque said in a statement to the press. That area, roughly the same size as the city of Los Angeles, exceeds the last record set in 2019, when the government got rid of 94,000 hectares of coca, the main ingredient of cocaine. In 2019, 1,137 tons of cocaine were produced in Colombia, a number slightly higher than the previous year, the UN reported. — AFP

International

Republican senator to object to certification of Biden win

Trump has refused to acknowledge his defeat

WASHINGTON: A Republican senator said Wednesday that he will object to Congress's certification next week of the results of the Nov 3 US presidential election, a move that may slightly delay - but not derail - the final confirmation of Democrat Joe Biden's victory. Several Republican members of the House of Representatives have also said they plan to object to the January 6 certification of the Electoral College vote but Josh Hawley of Missouri was the first senator to confirm so publicly.

Vice President Mike Pence is to lead the joint session of Congress which certifies the Electoral College results that determine the winner of the White House race. Biden won 306 of the Electoral College votes that represent the returns of the popular vote in each of the US states while incumbent Donald Trump won 232.

Congressional certification of the Electoral College results has historically been a formality but Trump has refused to acknowledge his defeat and spent the past two months making claims of election fraud while not producing any credible evidence. Dozens of lawsuits brought by the Trump campaign and his Republican allies alleging election irregularities have been dismissed by courts around the country.

Republican Senate Majority Leader Mitch McConnell has reportedly sought to dissuade fellow Republican senators from objecting to certification of the results but Hawley said he plans to do so anyway and he may be joined by other Republican senators.

At least one member of the House and one member of the Senate needs to lodge an objection to certification to send it to

the floor for debate and a vote. A vote would be doomed to failure, however, in the Democratic-controlled House and would also be unlikely to pass in the Republican-majority Senate, where a number of Republican senators have already acknowledged Biden's victory.

'Election integrity'

Nancy Pelosi, the Democratic speaker of the House, said Wednesday that Hawley's move would come to nothing. "I have no doubt that on next Wednesday, a week from today, that Joe Biden will be confirmed by the acceptance of the vote of the Electoral College as the 46th president of the United States," Pelosi said.

Jen Psaki, a spokeswoman for the Biden transition team who has been tapped to be next White House press secretary, also said the move would not prevent Biden from taking office on Jan 20. "Let me first say the American people spoke resoundingly in this election and 81 million people have voted for Joe Biden and Kamala Harris," Psaki told reporters. "Regardless of what anyone is up to on January 6, President-elect Biden will be sworn in on the 20th," she added.

Hawley said he was objecting to certification because of concerns about "election integrity" and noted that Democrats had done so in the past. "Following both the 2004 and 2016 elections, Democrats in Congress objected during the certification of electoral votes in order to raise concerns about election integrity," he said in a statement. "And they were entitled to do so. "But now those of us concerned about the integrity of this



Josh Hawley

election are entitled to do the same," Hawley said. "At the very least, Congress should investigate allegations of voter fraud and adopt measures to secure the integrity of our elections." Trump has called on his supporters to converge on Washington on January 6 to pressure lawmakers not to certify Biden's win. The rally could draw thousands of Trump backers who believe his unfounded claims that massive voting fraud caused his defeat and prevented him from serving a second term. — AFP

News in brief

US serial killer Little dies

LOS ANGELES: Samuel Little, the United States' most prolific serial killer according to the FBI, died in California aged 80 on Wednesday, prison officials said. Little confessed to 93 murders - mostly of women - carried out between 1970 and 2005, but his coast-to-coast killing spree went undetected for decades. The former boxer's victims were mostly drug addicts and prostitutes, and in many cases the women were never identified or their deaths were not investigated. — AFP



Samuel Little

US police shoot man dead

WASHINGTON: Police in Minneapolis shot a man dead during a traffic stop on Wednesday, seven months after the killing of George Floyd by an officer in the same US city. It comes amid an increase in violent crime in the Midwestern city, which was convulsed by protests following Floyd's death. No details about the shooting victim, or the officers involved, were immediately available. — AFP

10 missing after Norway mudslide buries homes

OSLO: Rescue workers were still searching yesterday for survivors from a landslide that destroyed homes in a Norwegian village close to Oslo leaving 10 people unaccounted for, including two children, and 10 injured. Work continued overnight after a whole hillside collapsed in Ask, 25 km northeast of the capital. Homes were buried under mud and some houses were left teetering on the edge of a crater caused by the slide, with several falling over the edge as the day went on.



GJERDRUM, Norway: A police helicopter is seen near a destroyed house in a crater left behind by a landslide in the town of Ask yesterday. — AFP

"It is important for me to stress that we are looking for survivors," chief of operations Roger Pettersen told reporters. "Now there's daylight and that will help us in our work with better visibility," he said. Police said one of the 10 people hurt had been seriously injured and was transferred to Oslo for treatment. One-fifth of Ask's 5,000 population have been evacuated.

Prime Minister Erna Solberg visited the village on Wednesday and described the landslide as "one of the largest" the country had seen. The authorities issued an appeal to people not to set off fireworks for New Year's Eve which could hinder the use of helicopters and drones equipped with thermal cameras. The Norwegian Water Resources and Energy Directorate said the disaster was a "quick clay slide" of approximately 300 by 700 m. Quick clay is a sort of clay found in Norway and Sweden that can collapse and turn to fluid when overstressed. — AFP

International

Hong Kong media tycoon Lai ordered back to jail

Lai also faces charges of fraud, joining unlawful assemblies

HONG KONG: Hong Kong pro-democracy media tycoon Jimmy Lai was ordered back to jail yesterday as the city's highest court granted prosecutors an appeal against his bail. Lai, a vocal Beijing critic, is one of the highest-profile figures charged under a sweeping security law that China imposed on the financial hub in late June in a bid to stamp out dissent.

The 73-year-old served 20 days in custody before being granted bail last Wednesday on stringent conditions including a HK\$10 million (US\$1.3 million) bond and a surrender of all travel documents. He was placed under house arrest and banned from speaking publicly, including on Twitter. But the Court of Final Appeal yesterday granted the prosecution leave to appeal the bail decision, after they said a lower court judge may "have erred in his construction or application" of Article 42 of the new legislation.

That article states that bail should not be granted unless the judge sees sufficient grounds to believe the defendant will not commit the alleged offence again. "We have held that it is reasonably arguable that the Judge's decision was erroneous and that his order admitting the respondent to bail was invalid," a determination handed down by the appeal committee of the Court of Final Appeal read.

It also granted the prosecution's application for Lai to be held in custody pending the ap-

peal, to be heard on Feb 1. Lai is accused of colluding with foreign countries by calling on overseas governments to sanction Hong Kong and China in response to an ongoing crackdown on pro-democracy activism in the city. More than 1,000 of his tweets and a number of media interviews he gave have been examined by the prosecution.

Lai was the first defendant charged under the security law to be granted bail, but prosecutors rushed to the top court to apply for an appeal. Prosecutor Anthony Chau argued that bail should not be considered in national security cases and likened the seriousness of national security offences to murder and treason. "Normally in this kind of grave offence, the court cannot grant bail," Chau said in court.

China's top party mouthpiece People's Daily had criticized the bail decision and threatened that Lai could be extradited to mainland China for trial. Lai also faces separate charges of fraud and joining unlawful assemblies during the massive, often violent, pro-democracy protests of 2019. On Tuesday, the mogul resigned as chairman and executive director of Next Digital, which owns the Apple Daily newspaper he founded three decades ago.

Lai tendered his resignation "in order to spend more time dealing with his personal affairs", Bloomberg News reported citing a statement from the media group. China's



HONG KONG: Media tycoon Jimmy Lai is escorted onto a prison van outside the Court of Final Appeal yesterday after he was ordered back to jail as the city's highest court granted prosecutors an appeal against his bail. — AFP

authoritarian leaders guaranteed Hong Kong would maintain key freedoms and autonomy after its 1997 handover by Britain, under a model dubbed "One Country, Two Systems".

But a historic retreat from that promise is

under way, in response to recent years' unrest. Since the national security law's imposition, Beijing increasingly calls the shots. Voicing certain opinions can now carry up to a lifetime prison sentence. — AFP

China's first vaccine hustled to market

BEIJING: China has granted "conditional" market approval to a Sinopharm vaccine with a reported 79 percent efficacy rate against COVID-19, health authorities said yesterday, a major stride towards inoculating the world's largest population. The Sinopharm jab, which has surged ahead of a raft of Chinese competitors during Phase 3 trials, could signal a breakthrough in the battle to squash the pandemic in Asia.

Around 4.5 million doses of largely unproven emergency vaccines made locally have already been given to health workers and other workers destined for overseas jobs, according to authorities. On Wednesday, Sinopharm announced its leading candidate had a 79.34 percent efficacy rate. That is lower than rival jabs developed in the West by Pfizer-BioNTech and Moderna - with 95 and 94 percent rates respectively - but still a game-changer for China.

Chen Shifei, deputy commissioner of the National Medical Products Administration, yesterday told reporters his agency had granted a "conditional listing" to Sinopharm's vaccine. A conditional listing helps hustle emergency drugs to market in cases when clinical trials are yet to meet normal standards but indicate they will work.

"The known benefits of Sinopharm's new inactivated coronavirus vaccine are bigger than the known and potential risks," Chen added. The listing allows the government to "extend vaccination to high-risk groups, those susceptible to a severe viral infection... and the elderly," Zeng Yixin, Vice Minister of the National Health Commission told reporters.



BEIJING: Wu Yonglin, President of China National Biotech Group (CNBG) Sinopharm, speaks at a press conference yesterday. — AFP

But China faces the unprecedented challenge of getting vaccines to a population of more than 1.3 billion people. "The general view is you have to vaccinate 60 to 70 percent to establish universal protection," Zeng added. Beijing plans to vaccinate millions this winter in the run-up to Lunar New Year. "I'm convinced - and please be convinced - that the production of COVID-19 vaccines can meet the demand of large-scale vaccination we have in China," Mao Junfeng, head of Consumer Goods Industry Department added.

China has also pledged to swiftly share its vaccines with lesser developed countries at a "fair price", as it seeks global leadership in the recovery from a pandemic which first emerged in the central Chinese city of Wuhan a year ago. As a winter wave of virus infections batters much of the world, spurring fresh lockdowns and grim spikes in death tolls, attention has returned to China's management of the pandemic.

China has broadly stamped out the virus inside its borders, introducing swift local lockdowns and mass testing when cases emerge. Beijing has been at pains to retool the pandemic story in its favor, touting the fast reflexes of its Communist leadership in locking down the country and restarting the economy. China is forecast to be the only major economy to post positive growth this year. — AFP

News in brief

China confirms doctor jailed

BEIJING: A Uighur Muslim doctor has been jailed on terrorism charges, Beijing confirmed yesterday, a day after her family told US politicians she had been sentenced to 20 years. Gulshan Abbas vanished into detention two years ago, but her relatives told a US congressional committee Wednesday that the 58-year-old had been sentenced to 20 years in prison because of activism on behalf of Uighurs. Rights groups say an estimated one million Uighurs and other Turkic minorities languish in detention camps in China's northwestern Xinjiang region in prison-like conditions. China insists they are "vocational training centers". — AFP

Ivory smugglers jailed

BEIJING: Seventeen people have been jailed - including two for life - for running China's largest ever ivory smuggling ring, moving millions of dollars of tusks from west Africa into the mainland's vast domestic market. Demand for ivory carvings and jewelry among China's expanding middle class led to poaching crisis across Africa, and although a 2018 ban on ivory trade in China has improved the situation, a vast black market still exists. A court in the southern city of Guangzhou on Tuesday handed long prison terms to 17 people involved in smuggling over 20 tons of ivory worth more than 1 billion yuan (\$156 million). — AFP

International

Clerics among 26 held after Pakistan temple destroyed

Protests held outside Supreme Court calling for justice

KARAK, Pakistan: At least two dozen people, including several Muslim clerics, were detained yesterday after a mob attacked and set fire to a Hindu temple in northwest Pakistan, police said. Around 1,500 Muslims on Wednesday descended on the temple - which was destroyed in similar circumstances in 1997 - after staging a protest against renovations at an adjoining building owned by Hindus. The temple is located in a remote village in Karak district, some 160 km southeast of Peshawar.

"We have arrested 26 people including local clerics for destroying a place of worship and inciting people to riot", local police official Fazal Sher told AFP. He added police were looking for a further 50 people identified from videos of the attack. Discrimination and violence against religious minorities are commonplace in Pakistan, where Muslims make up 97 percent of the population and Hindus around two percent.

Irfanullah Khan, the district police chief, also confirmed the arrests. He told AFP that a house adjacent to the temple was recently bought by the Hindu community and was being renovated, which offended locals. Hindus have not lived in the area since the partition of British-ruled India in 1947 when Pakistan was created, but Hindu devotees occasionally visit the temple and the

tomb of the Hindu saint Shri Paramhans, who according to Hindu faith died in the village in 1919.

"These people have brought a bad name to our area and tarnished the image of the state," one local resident, Ameen Pashteen, told AFP. In Karachi, the capital of Sindh province and where the majority of the country's Hindus live, more than 200 people protested outside the Supreme Court calling for justice. "You must respect other people's religion. We are Pakistanis, and for God's sake, nobody needs to give us a certificate of loyalty", said Mangla Sharma a Hindu member of Sindh's provincial assembly.

Gopal Kamuary, president of the Pakistan Hindu Council, accused local authorities of standing by as the attack happened. "In the video of the attack, the administration is just watching silently as the mob dismantles the temple. What kind of justice is that", Kamuary said. Earlier this month, the United States placed Pakistan on a list of "countries of particular concern" for religious freedom violations. "The destruction of the Hindu temple in Karak is yet another example of persistent discrimination faced by the beleaguered Hindu community in Pakistan", said Rimmel Mohyidin, Pakistan campaigner at Amnesty International. — AFP



KARAK, Pakistan: Policemen inspect a burnt Hindu temple yesterday, a day after a mob attack in this remote village some 160 km southeast of Peshawar. — AFP

Delhi leads India clampdown on New Year events

NEW DELHI: New Delhi and other major cities across India yesterday ordered curfews for New Year's Eve as they stepped up efforts to head off a new coronavirus wave. In the capital, the curfew would run for two days from 11:00 pm until 6:00 am with gatherings limited to five people even before the shutdown, authorities said. Normally, tens of thousands of revellers pack central Delhi to see in the New Year.

But with frantic efforts being made to track thousands of people who have recently returned from Britain because of the new coronavirus strain, the city of 20 million people joined a growing number of Indian states that have imposed draconian restrictions on New Year gatherings. The financial capital Mumbai and other major cities in Maharashtra state have ordered a night-time shutdown until Jan 5.

Rajasthan and Uttarakhand, which both generally draw large numbers of foreign tourists for end-of-year holidays, Tamil Nadu, Gujarat and Karnataka have all ordered curfews for New Year. India has officially recorded more than 10 million coronavirus in-



NEW DELHI: A vendor selling decorations arranges his stall on New Year's Eve yesterday. — AFP

fections, the world's second-highest caseload behind the United States.

But with 150,000 fatalities for a population of 1.3 billion, the death rate is one of the world's lowest and the number of new infections has slowed dramatically in recent weeks. The appearance of the new strain of coronavirus has worried authorities, however. At least 25 cases of the variant - which potentially spreads faster according to experts - have been found among people who have returned from Britain. A major operation has been launched to find thousands of people who arrived from Britain before flights were suspended on Dec 23. — AFP

Tokyo tops 1,300 daily virus cases

TOKYO: Tokyo reported over 1,300 new coronavirus infections yesterday, a daily record, as officials warned that a state of emergency might be needed to tackle spiking cases. Prime Minister Yoshihide Suga held emergency talks with ministers late yesterday but did not immediately outline plans for any new measures. "The trend is clearly increasing. I regard this as very serious," Suga told reporters, as he urged people to wear masks, wash their hands, and avoid crowds and non-urgent outings.

"I again instructed the ministers to make sure that we will use this holiday to secure an adequate system to provide medical care by coordinating efforts with local governments," he said. He spoke after the Japanese capital reported 1,337 new cases, a record that far exceeds the previous high of 949 cases last Saturday. Local media said nationwide cases exceeded 4,000, another daily record.

Tokyo Governor Yuriko Koike warned the rapid increase in cases was "an extremely serious situation". "For the coronavirus, there is no year-end and no new year holiday," she told reporters. Japan has seen a limited outbreak compared to

other parts of the world, with fewer than 3,500 deaths since recording its first case in January.

It has also avoided the harsh lockdown measures in many other countries, although the government imposed a state of emergency in the spring, calling on businesses to close and asking people to stay at home. That measure, however, carried no penalty for non-compliance and was lifted after several weeks when cases fell.

Infections stayed low during the summer, but in recent weeks a spike has alarmed officials and medical professionals, prompting calls for a new state of emergency, which the government has been reluctant to implement for fear of the economic fallout. If cases continue to rise, the city "may have no choice but to request" the central government implement it, Koike warned on Wednesday.

Yasutoshi Nishimura, the minister in charge of the coronavirus response, also warned Wednesday that a state of emergency would be needed to "protect the lives of the Japanese people" if infections continue to spike. "The medical system will not be able to survive", he said in a video message.

Suga, who took office this autumn after the resignation of Shinzo Abe, has been criticized for his government's response to the third wave of infections, including backing a controversial program promoting domestic travel. The program has been suspended over the new year - when many Japanese travel to visit family - and government officials have urged people to stay home to help suppress the new wave. — AFP

Friday Times Lifestyle

FRIDAY, JANUARY 1, 2021

www.kuwaittimes.net



A vendor decorates his toy store ahead of the New Year in Kuwait City on December 31, 2020. — Photo by Yasser Al-Zayyat

WE WISH YOU A HAPPY

new year

2021

SLOVENIANS HOPE FOR EASIER RIDE IN 2021 WITH DECORATED BIKES



A decorated bicycle is displayed in the small village of Gradisca.
— AFP photos

In shop windows, backyards, on streets and public squares, many Slovenians have opted this year for unusual Christmas and New Year's decorations enshrining the humble bicycle. While the coronavirus pandemic may have hit the small nation of just 2 million hard, locals refuse to give in to the gloom. Instead they prefer to focus on one of the few bright spots of 2020: their country's success in cycling competitions, especially the Tour de France, where Slovenians claimed first and second place. "We wanted to honor the results of our bikers and to promote a positive approach to the current crisis," Tina

Jancigaj Avsec told AFP.

Jancigaj Avsec is one of the organizers of "Life in Karst and Brkini spins on", the group that set off the decoration spree in the southwestern Slovenian region. The wheel, she added, also "symbolizes action, wind in the hair, moving towards the future to face new challenges." This year, Slovenian biker Tadej Pogacar won the Tour de France, while his fellow countryman Primoz Roglic came second in the Tour and went on to win the Vuelta a Espana. Vintage bicycles, racing models, children's bikes and even wheels from old horse-drawn carriages now dot the country-

side in Karst and Brkini, home to long-standing cycling traditions and boasting many small hotels catering to pedal-powered tourists.

During a lockdown to stymie new coronavirus infections, locals have found welcome distraction in driving around to take pictures of the displays and sending them to the organisers, who promised prizes for the top ten. "We wanted to find a positive challenge for people to promote tourism in our region... and to avoid sinking into coronavirus depression," Jancigaj Avsec said. The Karst and Brkini economy is heavily dependent on the

tourist trade. Although Jancigaj Avsec insists the displays are in no way politically motivated, anti-government protesters have been riding their bikes through major cities while criticizing the handling of the coronavirus crisis. Protesters have posted photos online of the decorated bike displays from the Karst and Brkini regions, while left-leaning weekly Mladina described them as "monuments to resistance". — AFP



A decorated bicycle is seen on display in the shopwindow of a store in Sezana.



A decorated bike is displayed at a cafe's shopwindow in Sezana.



Decorated bicycles are displayed in Skopo.



A decorated bicycle is displayed outside the church of Sezana.



A decorated vintage bicycle is seen on display outside a house in Smarje pri Sezani.



A decorated bike and a sign saying "Happy 2021" (Srecno 2021) are seen on display in the small village of Rodik.



A decorated bike is seen on display in a small village of Kriz.



A decorated bike is seen on display in a small village of Kriz.

Nuts! Rogue squirrels attacking New Yorkers in Queens



In this file photo, a squirrel stands on its hind legs as it looks for food in New York's Central Park. — AFP

As 2020 comes to a close some New York residents can add another woe to the long list this year has wrought: vicious squirrels. People living in the Rego Park neighborhood of Queens have reported several squirrel attacks over the past month, with one woman needing emergency attention after a bite to the hand. One resident told local media she leaves the house with pepper spray in case of encountering an aggressive squirrel or a pack, and others voiced fear for their children. "Next thing I know, it's a cage match and I'm losing," Micheline Frederick told the local ABC7 station of an instance that saw a squirrel bite or scratch her neck, necessitating a precautionary rabies shot.

The city's health department advised residents in a statement "to hire a New York State licensed trapper." "Squirrels and many other small rodents are rarely found to

be infected with rabies," the health department said, telling residents to report any animal they spot that seems infected to local authorities. Most squirrels in New York City are of the eastern gray variety, according to the parks department, and along with pigeons are daytime's answer to the metropolis' vast population of rats that roam the nightscape. The parks department warns against feeding squirrels, which can make them fear humans less. — AFP

FRENCH THEATRE LEGEND ROBERT HOSSEIN DIES AGED 93

French actor and director Robert Hossein, famous for his mega-productions of classics such as *Les Misérables* and *The Hunchback of Notre-Dame*, died yesterday at the age of 93, his wife Candice Patou told AFP. Hossein died in hospital after suffering a "respiratory problem", Patou said. Born in December 30, 1927 to an Iranian Zoroastrian composer father and a Russian Orthodox mother Hossein began acting in his teens. He made his name in the 1960s as the shouldering count of Peyrac in the "Angelique" series of baroque romances.

But he was also regularly cast by art-house directors, including Roger Vadim, who picked him to play the suicidal love interest of Brigitte Bardot in *Love on a Pillow* in 1962. In later years he threw his energy into huge stage productions aimed at luring the general public into theatres. "Theatre like you've never seen in the cinema," was how he billed his lavish shows,



In this file photo taken on May 16, 2018 French director Robert Hossein arrives for the screening of the film "Burning" at the 71st edition of the Cannes Film Festival in Cannes, southern France. — AFP

which included an epic production of the gladiator tale *Ben-Hur* at the Stade de France stadium. "He was the prince of theatre for the masses," the former president of the Cannes film festival, Gilles Jacob, wrote on Twitter. — AFP

Lifestyle | Feature

ADIOS MARADONA AND THE BEST EVER BOND: NOTABLE DEATHS IN 2020

From legendary actors Kirk Douglas and Sean Connery to matriarch of the US Supreme Court Ruth Bader Ginsberg, here are some of the notable deaths of 2020.



Oman's Sultan Qaboos

January

* **10:** Oman's Sultan Qaboos, who transformed the former Arabian Peninsula backwater into a modern state and the Gulf's discreet mediator, dies aged 79.



This file photo shows a graffiti depicting Argentine football legend Diego Maradona by street artist Stilos Ilias, painted on a wall off a primary school in Kalamaria neighborhood of Thessaloniki. — AFP photos

February

* **5:** One of the last stars of Hollywood's golden age, Kirk Douglas, dies at his home in Beverly Hills aged 103.

* **25:** Egypt's former president Hosni Mubarak, who was swept from power by the Arab Spring in 2010, dies in a military hospital aged 91.

March

* **8:** "Exorcist" star Max Von Sydow, who also featured in films by his Swedish compatriot Ingmar Bergman dies in France aged 90.

April

* **29:** Bollywood star Irrfan Khan, known for his roles in blockbusters "Life of Pi" and "Slumdog Millionaire", dies from cancer in a Mumbai hospital aged 53.

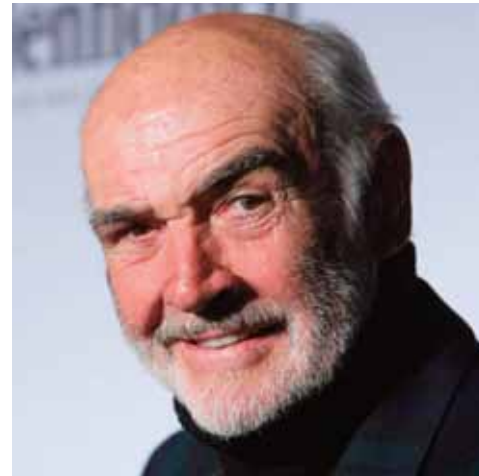
May

* **9:** Little Richard, known for outrageous showmanship and lightning-fast rhythms dies aged 87 after battling cancer. Hits include "Tutti Frutti" and "Long Tall Sally".

* **31:** Artist Christo (Christo Javacheff) who wrapped landmarks such as Berlin's Reichstag and the Pont Neuf in Paris dies aged 84.

June

* **8:** Burundi's President Pierre Nkurunziza, who had ruled the country since 2005, dies from a heart attack aged 55.



Sean Connery



Kirk Douglas



This file photo shows a graffiti depicting US basketball legend Kobe Bryant, 41, and his 13-year-old daughter.

July

* **6:** Italian maestro Ennio Morricone, Oscar-winning composer of film scores for Sergio Leone's spaghetti westerns, dies in Rome aged 91.

* **8:** The sudden death from a heart attack of Ivory Coast's Prime Minister Amadou Gon Coulibaly, 61, plunges the country into political turmoil.

* **26:** Oscar-winning actress Olivia de Havilland, star of "Gone With the Wind", dies at her home in Paris aged 104.

August

* **24:** Former Congolese president Pascal Lissouba, who won his country's first multi-party presidential elections, dies in France aged 88.

* **28:** Actor Chadwick Boseman, who played Black Panther in the Marvel movies, dies of cancer aged 43.

September

* **2:** Chief torturer behind Cambodia's genocidal Khmer Rouge, Kaing Guek Eav, 77, better known by his alias Duch, dies in prison.



Irrfan Khan

Lifestyle | Feature

Friday, January 1, 2021



Chadwick Boseman

* **10:** British actress Diana Rigg, of "Avengers" and "Game of Thrones" fame, dies aged 82.

* **18:** US Supreme Court judge and feminist icon Ruth Bader Ginsburg, dies aged 87.

* **23:** French actress and singer Juliette Greco, the face and voice of radical chic postwar Paris, dies aged 93.

October

* **4:** Japan's most famous fashion designer Kenzo Takada, founder of the Kenzo brand, dies in Paris aged 81 from Covid-19.

* **31:** Legendary Scottish actor Sean Connery, the original James Bond, dies in his sleep in the Bahamas, aged 90.

November

* **11:** Bahrain's Prince Khalifa bin Salman Al-Khalifa, the world's longest-serving prime minister, dies aged 84.

* **12:** Jerry Rawlings, who ruled Ghana for two decades first as a military leader and then as elected president, dies aged 73.

* **25:** Diego Maradona, football's troubled genius and one of the greatest players ever, dies aged 60.

December

* **2:** Former French president Valery Giscard d'Estaing, who legalized abortion and brought the country high-speed trains, dies aged 94 from Covid-19.

* **11:** Film director Kim Ki-duk, the enfant terrible of Korean cinema, dies in Latvia from Covid-19 aged 59.

* **12:** Charley Pride, US country music's first black superstar, dies from Covid-19 aged 86.

* **12:** John le Carre, the master spy novelist, whose real name was David Cornwell, dies aged 89.



'Exorcist' star Max Von Sydow



Olivia de Havilland



Little Richard



French designer Pierre Cardin



Artist Christo (Christo Javacheff)



Fashion designer Kenzo Takada

* **22:** One of France's most beloved character actors Claude Brasseur, dies aged 84.

* **24:** Israeli virtuoso violinist Ivry Gitlis, one of the modern greats of classical music, dies in Paris aged 98.

29: French designer Pierre Cardin died aged 98. — AFP



In this file photo US cinema personality, Angelina Jolie arrives to the El-Geneina airport in West Darfur as the Goodwill Ambassador for the United Nations High Commission for Refugees. — AFP photos



In this file photo taken on December 13, 2007, US actor George Clooney accepts the Peace Summit award for their efforts in trying to alleviate the suffering of the victims of Sudan's Darfur region at the Summit of the Nobel Peace Prize Laureates in Rome.



In this file photo taken on November 13, 2018, British author and screenwriter J.K. Rowling poses upon arrival to attend the UK premiere of the film 'Fantastic Beasts: The Crimes of Grindelwald' in London.

Darfur war: Where celebrities campaigned for peace

From George Clooney to J. K. Rowling and Angelina Jolie, the brutal civil war in Sudan's vast Darfur region prompted A-list celebrities to speak out for its long-suffering civilians. Here's a snapshot, as the UN-AU peacekeeping mission in Darfur comes to an end:

George Clooney

Hollywood megastar George Clooney has campaigned tirelessly to draw attention to the Darfur conflict, which he branded a "genocide" in 2012, accusing Khartoum of crimes against humanity. In 2010, he was named a United Nations Messenger of Peace by then secretary

general Ban Ki-moon in recognition of his work. He set up "Not on Our Watch", a humanitarian group that focuses global attention on Darfur and has raised over \$9 million for the region, with his "Ocean's Thirteen" movie castmates Brad Pitt, Matt Damon and Don Cheadle.

Do they know it's Christmas?

British pop stars in 2004 re-recorded "Do they Know its Christmas," the hit song that raised money for famine-hit people in Ethiopia 20 years earlier, this time to raise money for the hundreds of thousands of people displaced in Darfur. Midge Ure, the Ultravox front man who wrote the origi-

nal Band Aid single with Sir Bob Geldoff, took part, along with Bono, Dido and Robbie Williams and Sir Paul McCartney.

J. K. Rowling

In 2008, children's writers including Harry Potter author J. K. Rowling signed an open letter calling on world leaders to take urgent action over Darfur to protect the stricken region's children. "Children barely old enough to walk, let alone run, have seen their homes burnt and razed to the ground, their mothers raped and their fathers killed," read the letter by the 15 authors, also including Judy Blume and Cornelia Funke.

Angelina Jolie

Hollywood actress Angelina Jolie visited Darfur in 2004 as goodwill ambassador for the UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), later expressing shock at the "unbelievably horrible" conditions. In 2017, she met a teenage boy from Darfur at a refugee camp in neighboring Chad who said he wanted those responsible to be put on trial. "I hope that those responsible for the atrocities in Darfur will be held to account, not only for that young man's sake, but for the world's," she said. — AFP



Prince Harry and Meghan Markle

Harry and Meghan's son reveals 'American accent' on podcast

Prince Harry and Meghan Markle's toddler son Archie was heard speaking for the first time Tuesday, as the couple released their first podcast, with British media seizing on his "American" accent. Archie, born in May 2019, giggles and wishes listeners "Happy New Year" at the end of the couple's debut on the Spotify audio streaming platform. The Daily Mail's royal editor Rebecca English tweeted that "he very much has an American accent," while

The Sun tabloid wrote: "Baby Archie has an American accent." The appearance of 18-month-old Archie comes after the couple have launched a spate of legal actions against the media over alleged breaches of their privacy, while revealing aspects of their private life in ways they control.

Markle earlier this month settled a claim against a news agency that took photographs of her and Archie in a Canadian park. She wrote an opinion piece for The New York Times in November revealing that she miscarried the couple's second baby. This was the first episode after the couple earlier this month announced a deal with Spotify to record "uplifting and entertaining stories". Since ceasing royal duties and moving to California this year, the couple have launched various creative ventures, including a deal with the streaming giant Netflix. For the podcast, they asked famous friends including the singer Elton John, television presenter James Corden,

and New Age guru Deepak Chopra to make recordings talking about their experiences coping with the pandemic and hopes for next year.

"Our collective mental health has been at the forefront of people's minds, and rightly so," says Harry, who along with Markle narrates and links the items. "It's been an awful time for people. I hope we can heal in 2021," says Elton John, who described 2020 as "the worst year I've ever known, and I'm 73." "Cheers to that, Elton," says Harry. The couple also talk about their feelings for each other. "Trust us when we say: love wins," Meghan says. "Love always wins," Harry chimes in. The podcast ends with a gospel song played at the couple's wedding: "This Little Light of Mine." — AFP



Women walk under an umbrella in front of a 2021 sign displayed in downtown Pristina on December 30, 2020, as Kosovars prepare to celebrate the New Year 2021 at their homes, amid the ongoing Covid-19 (novel coronavirus) pandemic. — AFP

Road rage in Berlin as cyclists clog streets in pandemic

It's rush hour on a grey morning in Berlin and a stream of cyclists are gliding along Friedrichstrasse, the fabled shopping street that runs through the city centre. "Move!" one of them yells after illegally mounting the pavement and charging at a defenceless pedestrian. Bernd Lechner, a 40-year-old insurance clerk, manages to dodge the speeding bike just in time, but he's had enough of the "increasingly aggressive" attitude of cyclists in the German capital. "It's getting worse and worse. I'm starting to become more scared of bicycles than of cars," he said. Berlin has long been known as a bike-friendly city, but a sharp rise in the number of cyclists during the coronavirus pandemic has been causing tensions on the road.

The number of Berliners cycling to work or to go shopping has increased by some 25 percent since the start of the pandemic, according to city authorities. All good news for fitness, air quality and public health, since it reduces the number of people using public transport during the fight against Covid-19. But at the same time, police have registered a sharp rise in the number of offences committed by cyclists and a surge in complaints about them from pedestrians, according to Berlin police chief Barbara Slowik.

Compulsory registration?

In an interview with the Berliner Morgenpost newspaper in October, Slowik even proposed compulsory registration for cyclists to make it easier for the authorities to identify those who

break the rules. "More than 50 percent of all traffic accidents involving cyclists are caused by the cyclists themselves," she said. And some are paying with their lives: 17 cyclists have been killed in traffic accidents in Berlin this year, 11 more than in 2019. But the idea of compulsory registration is unlikely to become reality because of the "immense bureaucracy" it would entail, Ragnhild Soerensen of Changing Cities, an NGO that lobbies for sustainable transport, told AFP.

Berlin has about 3 million bicycles, compared with only 1.1 million registered cars, she points out. But the police chief's comments have ignited a fierce debate on the behaviour of cyclists in the city. "We are being pushed around, insulted. Many people think they are better people just because they ride a bike...

This anarchy has to stop," the Tagesspiegel newspaper wrote recently.

'Denigrating cyclists'

According to Soerensen, critics are simply "trying to denigrate cyclists in order to distract attention from the delays in drafting a new transport strategy" to increase the use of public transport. Just three percent of public space in the city is reserved for cyclists, but they make up 18 percent of traffic, says Anika Meenken of the Verkehrsclub Deutschland (VCD) transport association. "Aggressiveness occurs when space is too tight, which naturally leads to more stress," she said.

By way of contrast, cars make up some 33 percent of traffic in the city but take up 58 percent of the space. But Oliver Woitzik, head of

transport for the Berlin police, argues that "we can't just build roads, cycle paths and pavements everywhere". "What would help a lot would be for people to stop putting their own ego first, and also to know when to give up their rightful place" if there is danger involved, he said—a skill that is sometimes lacking among those on both four wheels and two. In any case, cyclists who break the rules are more likely to be fined in future as Berlin is expanding its use of officers on bikes around the city, he told AFP. Their number, currently around 40, is expected to "climb to 100 in the spring" and then continue to grow over the next few years. — AFP



Bicycle and car commuters are seen crossing a busy intersection at Potsdamer Platz in central Berlin. — AFP photos



A cyclist is seen pedaling along the cycle path as cars pass by near the landmark Brandenburger Gate in central Berlin.



An illustration taken on December 30, 2020 in Budapest shows the numbers of the year 2021 painted with light in front of an illuminated Christmas tree.



In this photo a general view shows an entrance gate to Ayno Maina city in Kandahar.



A waiter prepares a water pipe, also known as shisha or hookah, for customers at a restaurant. — AFP photos

AFGHAN YOUTH FEAR TALEBAN RETURN WILL ROLL BACK KANDAHAR'S PROGRESS



Women work in a tailor workshop at the Khadija Kubra Women's Association for Culture in Kandahar.

Once the epicentre of the Taliban's iron-fisted Islamist government, Kandahar city in Afghanistan's restive south is slowly transforming into a vibrant urban center dotted with bustling cafes, co-ed universities and even a women's gym. Every evening, young men head to the Arena club, a trendy cafe in the city of 700,000, to play snooker, watch football on a big screen, or smoke shisha "hubble-bubble" pipes—unthinkable when the Taliban ruled Afghanistan from 1996 to 2001. "There was no such place in Kandahar when we built it and there is still no other such place in the (entire) south," said Nazir Ahmad, the 30-year-old owner of Arena. But the city's youth fear such hard-earned freedoms are on the verge of being lost again as the Taliban ramp up attacks in their former heartland despite peace talks with the government.

Before the insurgents were overthrown by a US-led coalition in the wake of the September 11 attacks, they imposed a harsh version of the Islamic sharia law that banned all kinds of entertainment, from music and movies to flying kites. The public floggings and executions in the city's squares still haunt residents, but Kandahar has undergone a huge transformation. Women can now be seen riding side-saddle on the backs of motorcycles, families enjoy group picnics, and several city spaces have illuminated fountains that spring up at sunset while street vendors serve hot Afghan dishes into the night. Despite that progress, the Taliban are emboldened after a deal with Washington that secured the withdrawal of all foreign forces by May 2021, and they have stepped up their campaign against Afghan forces in rural areas.



Men play cards in a restaurant in Ayno Maina city in Kandahar.



Men gather for a picnic in Ayno Maina city in Kandahar.



A general view shows Ayno Miana city in Kandahar.

'What kind of peace?'

Afghanistan now faces the very real prospect of handing back some power to the insurgent group that US-led forces have been unable to defeat for 19 years. The group already claims to control or contest more than half of the country, including large swathes of territory across southern Afghanistan. Kandahar city remains firmly in the control of government forces, but the Taliban are on the doorstep. "I hope the Taliban have changed and will let this club remain open," Ahmad told AFP. In the city's upscale Ayno Maina neighborhood, loud laughter rings out from the Cafe Delight, another trendy spot. The cafe allows entry to women customers—something still uncommon in the city. "What kind of peace would it be if they closed down our cafe?" asked owner Mohammad Yasin. "We will not comply if the Taliban tell us not to accept female customers."

When the Taliban ruled Afghanistan, girls were banned from school and women accused of crimes such as adultery were stoned to death at sports stadiums. But since their ousting, women have made significant progress in cities, entering the workforce in ambitious positions in the media, politics, and even the security forces.

Changed Taliban?

While they hope peace talks could bring much-needed security to the country, women in Kandahar fear losing some of their hard-won freedoms. "There was only one school for girls and now we have 15," said Mariam Durrani, 36, who has launched several initiatives for women—including an education centre, a radio station, and even a gym where some women attend classes secretly. "There is a possibility that the Taliban may return and that restrictions

could be imposed on women again," she said.

Some, however, have expressed cautious optimism such as Shukria Ali, who works at Radio Merman, a women-led station launched by Durrani which recently received a prize from the press freedom group Reporters Without Borders. "Maybe the Taliban have changed," she told AFP, several weeks before a string of deadly and unclaimed attacks on journalists in the country. Her mother Feroza, who was forced to quit working as a seamstress when the Taliban ruled, still talks little about those bleak years. "If I go out without a burqa today, it's not a problem," said Feroza. "But before (when the Taliban ruled), I would have been thrown in jail." — AFP



A woman works in a tailor workshop at the Khadija Kubra Women's Association for Culture in Kandahar.



A woman exercises on a treadmill at a women's gym in Kandahar.



Disc jockey Habiba Quraishi, 19, speaks during a broadcast at the Merman radio station in Kandahar.

Word Search

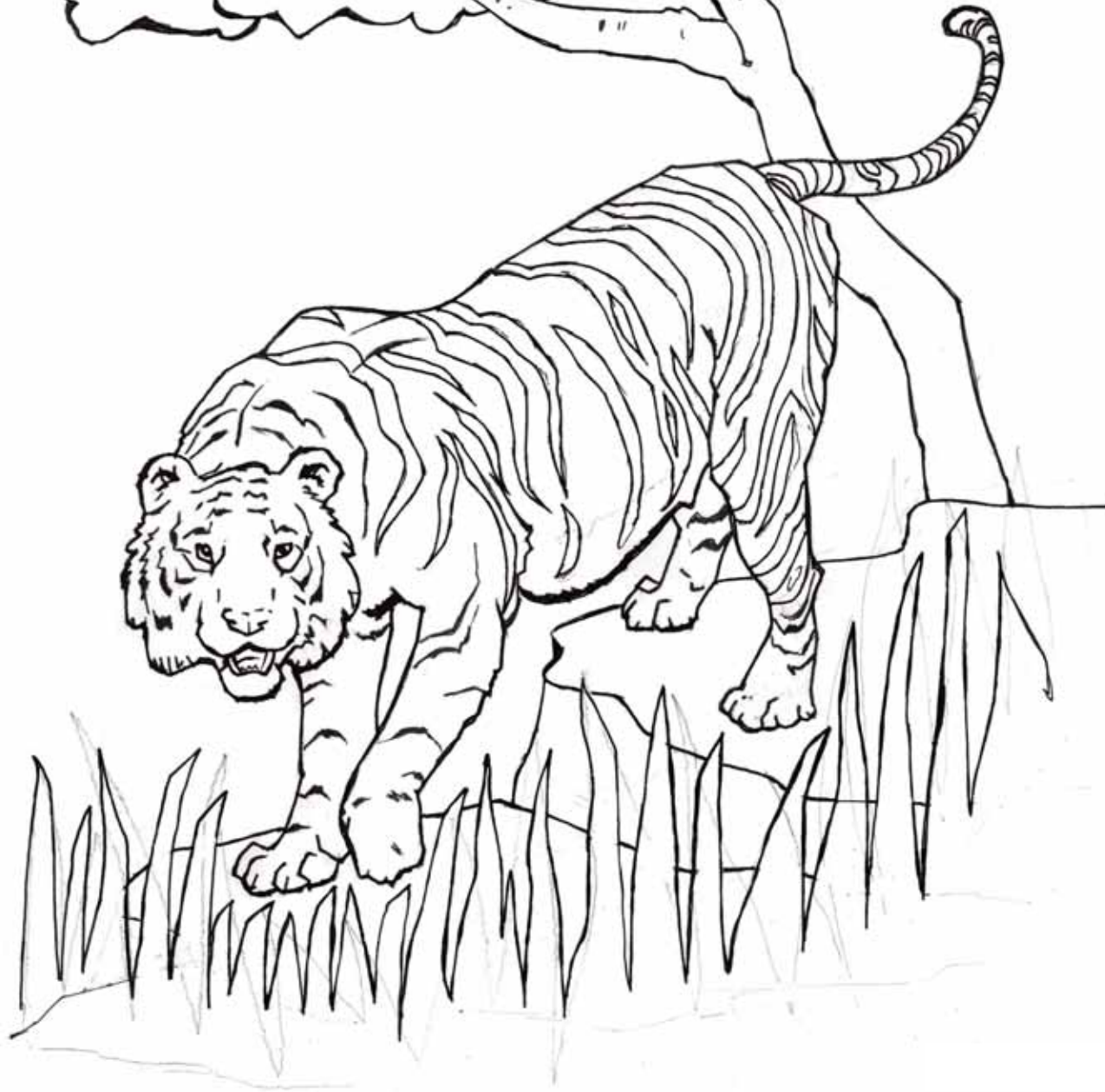
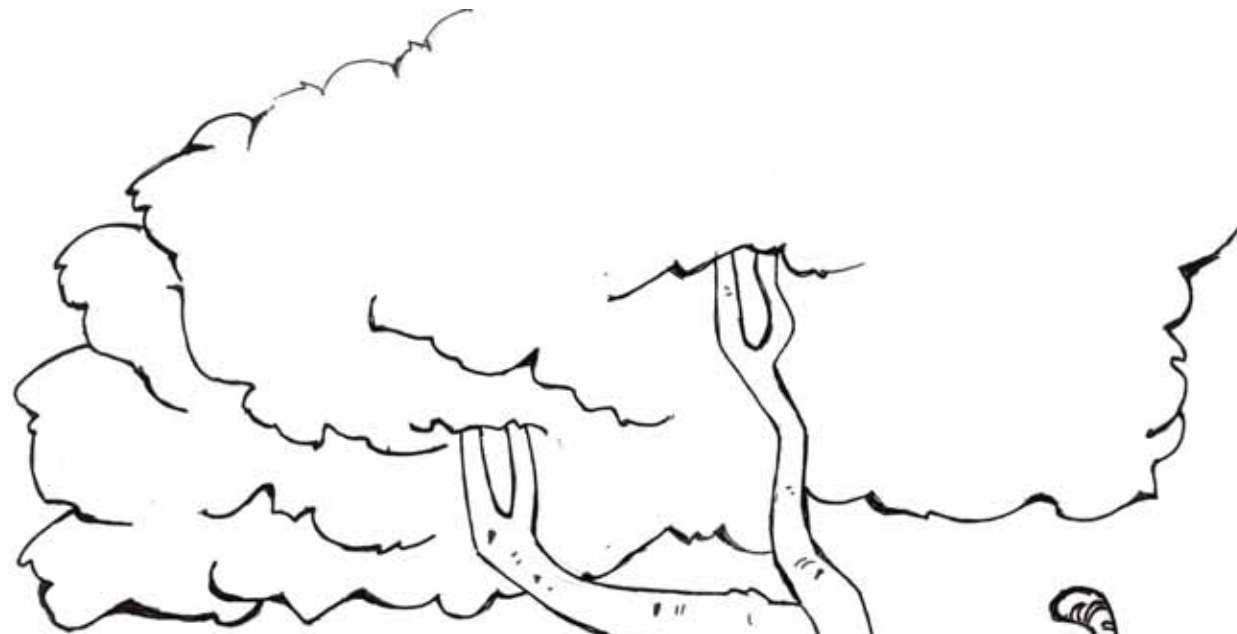


Dragon Word Search

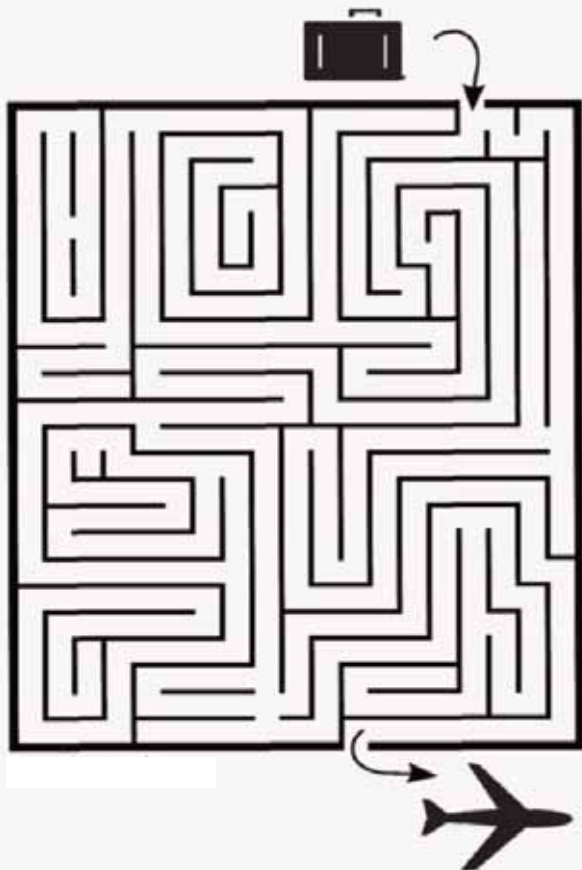
- | | | |
|-----------|----------|----------|
| ADVENTURE | DREAM | MYSTICAL |
| AWE | FIRE | MYTH |
| BEHEMOTH | FLYING | REPTILE |
| CASTLE | GIANT | SCALES |
| CAVE | GREEN | SORCERER |
| CLAWS | HOWL | SPELL |
| COLOSSAL | KINGDOM | TAIL |
| CONQUER | LEGEND | TREASURE |
| CUNNING | MAGICAL | VANISH |
| CURSE | MEDIEVAL | WINGS |
| DRAGON | MONSTER | WRINKLED |



Color It

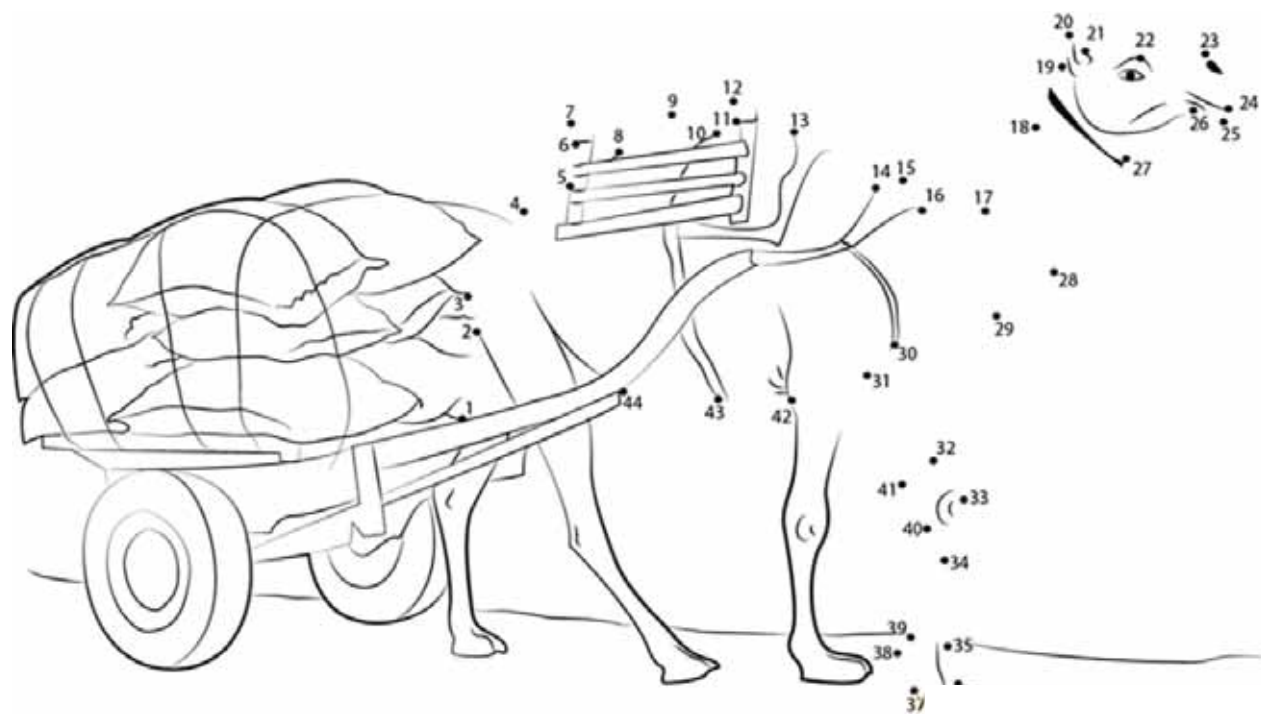


Kids Mazes



Ever wonder how your suitcase gets from the check in counter to the airplane? Be careful, you don't want to be without your toothbrush for vacation!

Join the dots



Word Scramble

Signs of Spring



This spring Peony is going on a field trip with her class to the state park. Her teacher gave the class a list of things to look for in the woods and meadows, but the words got all mixed up. Can you help Peony unscramble her list?

1. OFGR -----
2. FEUYRBTLT -----
3. SRSGA -----
4. ORMHTARWE -----
5. SNTGLHUI -----
6. UDB -----
7. DDNLIAENO -----
8. ORELWF -----
9. EBE -----
10. GLBDYAU -----
11. OMLOB -----
12. ERGEN -----

Find the way



CLINIC PAGE



Kuwait Times

248 33 199

Friday, January 1, 2021

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- 6- Non-invasive diagnostic procedures echocardiography, exercise stress test, and 24 hour blood pressure and Holter monitoring

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 ENT Consultant, Laryngologist

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- ◆ Laryngology Fellowship, McGill University- Canada.
- ◆ Fellow of the European Board of Otolaryngology – Head & Neck surgery.
- ◆ Member of the American Academy of Otolaryngology Head & Neck Surgery.
- ◆ Member of the British Laryngological Association.
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- ◆ Member of the Canadian Society of Otolaryngology Head & Neck Surgery.

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- ◆ Treatment of Irritable Bowel Symptoms
- ◆ Colonoscopy & Gastroscopy
- ◆ Stomach Balloon insertion & removal
- ◆ Bariatric Surgery - Lap Sleeve Gastrectomy
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- ◆ Laparoscopic mini bypass
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- ◆ Fellow of American College of Surgery
- ◆ Canadian Board of General Surgery
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Health & Science

Friday, January 1, 2021

26 Belgian retirees die after visit by Santa

BRUSSELS: At least 26 residents of a Belgian retirement home have died since a visit by a volunteer dressed as Santa Claus who has since tested positive for COVID-19. A Flemish health official told AFP yesterday it is not yet certain that it was the visitor who brought the coronavirus to the Hemelrijck home in Mol on December 5.

But 26 residents have died since the visit,

and 85 more have tested positive for the coronavirus, along with 40 staff. The outbreak was detected a few days after the visit, and prominent virologist Marc Van Ranst reported on Twitter that most of the infections came from the same source.

The white-bearded, red-robed figure of Sinterklaas, the equivalent of the English-speaking world's Santa Claus, brings gifts to

Belgians every December 6. This year's festivities, however, have been clouded by the coronavirus pandemic, which has hit Belgium particularly hard, especially at its retirement homes.

No inquiry has been launched in the absence of a formal complaint, regional health spokesman Joris Moonens said, and there is no suggestion the volunteer knew he

was infected. But a crisis manager has been appointed for Hemelrijck - which housed 169 people before the COVID outbreak - to help staff, residents and relatives cope "in this difficult period". Belgium has one of the highest per capita coronavirus death tolls in the world and more than half of the deceased - 11,066 people - were retirement home residents. — AFP

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Academic Certificates - Training

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

Scope of clinical Practice.

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- Gallbladder stones surgeries.
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Expected Weather for the Next 24 Hours

BY NIGHT: Cold and Partly cloudy with light variable wind with speed of 06 - 20 km/h with a chance for scattered light rain.

BY DAY: Fair and Partly cloudy with light variable wind with speed of 06 - 20 km/h with a chance for scattered light rain.

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

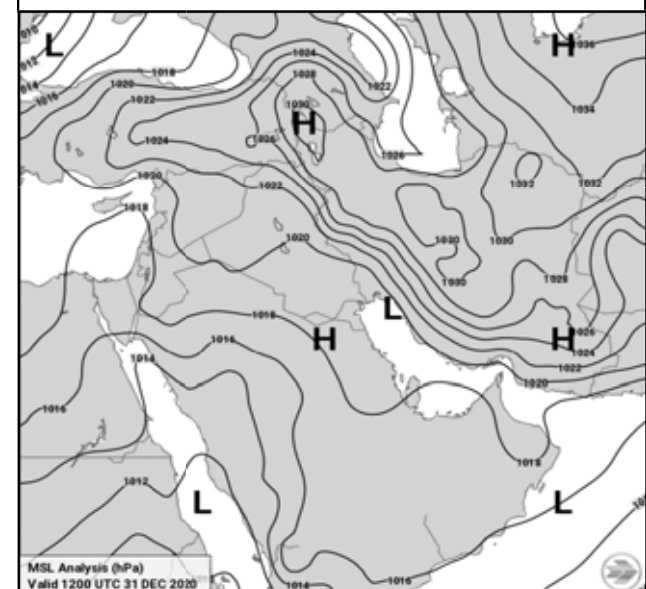
WEATHER WARNING

No Current Warnings

STATION	MAX. REC.	MIN. EXP.
KUWAIT CITY	21 °C	13 °C
KUWAIT AIRPORT	21 °C	10 °C
ABDALY	23 °C	07 °C
BUBYAN	19 °C	10 °C
JAHRA	22 °C	11 °C
FAILAKA ISLAND	- °C	- °C
SALMIYAH	19 °C	15 °C
AHMADI	- °C	- °C
NUWAISIB	21 °C	12 °C
WAFRA	22 °C	11 °C
SALMY	19 °C	09 °C

SFC. CHART

31/12/2020 1200 UTC



4 DAYS FORECAST

DAY	DATE	WEATHER	Temperatures		Wind Direction	Wind Speed
			MAX.	MIN.		
Friday	01/01	Fair and Partly cloudy with a chance for scattered light rain	21 °C	10 °C	VRB	06 - 20 km/h
Saturday	01/02	Fair and some scattered clouds will appear	22 °C	09 °C	NW-VRB	06 - 26 km/h
Sunday	01/03	Fair and Partly cloudy with a chance for scattered light rain	22 °C	09 °C	NW-VRB	06 - 26 km/h
Monday	01/04	Fair and Partly cloudy with a chance for scattered light rain	21 °C	10 °C	VRB-SE	08 - 28 km/h

TOMORROW PRAYER TIMES

Fajr	05:17
Sunrise	06:42
Zuhr	11:50
Asr	14:41
Sunset	17:00
Isha	18:22

RECORDED YESTERDAY AT KUWAIT AIRPORT

MAX. Temp.	20 °C
MIN. Temp.	10 °C
MAX. RH	69 %
MIN. RH	22 %
MAX. Wind	N 21 km/h
TOTAL RAINFALL IN 24 HR.	0 mm

Business

FRIDAY, JANUARY 1, 2021

34 Sterling extends gains, markets mixed as traders see out 2020



35 Brexit fog blurs horizon for anxious Breton fishermen



36 US imposes new tariffs on French, German products



Brexit becomes a reality

UK leaves Europe's customs union and single market

LONDON: Brexit became a reality yesterday as Britain left Europe's customs union and single market, ending nearly half-a-century of often turbulent ties with its closest neighbors.

The UK's tortuous departure from the European Union takes full effect when Big Ben strikes 11:00 pm (2300 GMT) in central London, just as most of the European mainland ushers in 2021 at midnight.

Brexit has dominated British politics since the country's narrow vote to leave the bloc in June 2016, opening deep political and social wounds which remain raw. Prime Minister Boris Johnson, a key Brexit architect, said yesterday that Britain's destiny "now resides firmly in our hands," shortly after MPs approved his trade deal with the EU. Legally, Britain left on January 31 but has been in a standstill transition period during fractious talks to secure a free-trade agreement with Brussels, which was finally clinched on Christmas Eve.

Once the transition ends, EU rules will no longer apply, with the immediate consequence being an end to the free movement of more than 500 million people between Britain and the 27 EU states.

Customs border checks will be back for the first time in decades, and despite the free-trade deal, queues and disruption from additional paperwork are expected.

Symbolic departure

Johnson told Britons that "the destiny of this great country now resides firmly in our hands," in a statement released by his Downing Street office. "This moment is finally upon us and now is the time to seize it." Britain—a financial and diplomatic big-hitter plus a major NATO power—is the first member state to leave the EU, which was set up to forge unity after the horrors of World War II.

The EU has lost 66 million people and an economy worth \$2.85 trillion, but Brexit, with its appeal to nationalist populism, also triggered fears other disgruntled members could



LONDON: Britain's Houses of Parliament is seen at sunrise in London yesterday on the day that the Brexit transition period ends and Britain leaves the EU single market and customs union four-and-a-half years after voting to leave the bloc. — AFP

follow suit. Leaders in both London and Brussels signalled their wish to draw a line. "It's been a long road. It's time now to put Brexit behind us. Our future is made in Europe," European Commission president Ursula von der Leyen said on Wednesday, as she signed the trade pact.

Johnson said that Thursday heralded "a new beginning in our country's history and a new relationship with the EU as their biggest ally."

'New beginning'

Unlike in January, when flag-waving Brexiteers led by populist anti-EU former lawmaker Nigel Farage cheered and pro-EU

"remainers" mourned, no formal events are planned for the end of the transition.

Public gatherings are banned due to the coronavirus outbreak, which has claimed more than 72,000 lives and infected more than 2.4 million in Britain, including Johnson himself. But the historic moment pushed Britain's grim virus struggles from top billing in Brexit supporting newspapers, with the Daily Mail calling it a "new dawn", while the Daily Express looked forward to 11:00 pm as the country's "finest hour".

Johnson is looking not only to a future free of Covid but also of rules set in Brussels, as Britain forges its own path for the first time

since it joined the then European Economic Community in 1973. On Wednesday, he hailed regulatory approval of Oxford University and AstraZeneca's COVID vaccine, and a "new beginning" for a prosperous, more globally focused Britain.

As well as ensuring tariff- and quota-free access to the EU's 450 million consumers, Britain has recently signed trade deals with countries including Japan, Canada, Singapore and Turkey. It is also eyeing another with India, where Johnson plans to make his first major trip as prime minister next month, and with incoming US president Joe Biden's administration. —AFP

Business

Sterling extends gains, markets mixed as traders see out 2020

Traders cheer vaccine authorization, Brexit trade deal

HONG KONG: The pound extended gains against the dollar yesterday as traders cheered the authorization of another vaccine and final ratification of the Brexit trade deal, while Asian markets were mixed as a painful year drew to a close.

While the world economy has been devastated by the coronavirus and lockdowns it has caused, markets have enjoyed a broadly healthy year thanks to governments and central banks stumping up mind-boggling amounts of money to prevent a depression. After falling off a cliff in the first quarter, equities have seen incredible gains from their March troughs—some to record highs—as the promise of ultra-low interest rates, financial backstops and cash injections to people and businesses reassured investors.

The election of Joe Biden as US president in November—lifting hopes for a more calm leadership—and the approval of vaccines spurred another strong rally last month. And this week saw more good news with the passage of a new, \$900 billion US stimulus and an agreement on a post-Brexit trade deal.

While a surge in infections and reimposition of lockdowns in recent weeks has given traders a jolt, expectations that 2021 will see a return to some form of normality has provided much-needed reassurance and support. “Miraculously, we have just about made it over the year-end finishing line in one piece. Even though US stocks are notching year-end record highs, I suspect everyone is more than happy to slam the door

shut on a devastating 2020 and hide it in our deepest memory recesses,” said Axi strategist Stephen Innes. Still, Thursday marked one year since the World Health Organization first mentioned a mysterious pneumonia in China later identified as COVID-19. The coronavirus that causes it has infected more than 82 million people and killed more than 1.79 million.

New weapon against virus

The Oxford–AstraZeneca vaccine became the latest to be approved by authorities on Wednesday, providing a crucial weapon in the battle against the virus as it can be stored, transported and handled at normal refrigerated conditions. It is cheaper and easier to administer than the rival Pfizer–BioNTech and Moderna jabs, which require freezing storage.

“The AstraZeneca vaccine is a potential game-changing accelerator in the Covid-19 battle, being producible rapidly in massive amounts, and storable at room temperatures, instead of environments that mimic the South Pole in the middle of winter,” said OANDA’s Jeffrey Halley.

There was more good news for Britain on Wednesday when parliament gave the nod to Boris Johnson’s trade deal with the European Union after years of tortuous negotiations.

The prime minister called the deal “the beginning of what will be a wonderful relationship between the UK and our friends and partners in the EU”. Britain will leave the European single market



TOKYO: A person riding a bicycle crosses past an electronic quotation board displaying the closing numbers of shares on the Tokyo Stock Exchange in Tokyo. —AFP

and customs union at 11:00 pm (2300 GMT) yesterday. The last-ditch deal averted the prospect of a cliff-edge separation that many feared would have inflicted terrible damage on the British and EU economies. Sterling, in response to the upbeat news, rallied Wednesday and built on the gains in Asian trade, sitting at levels not seen since May 2018. Asian equities were mixed fol-

lowing another positive lead from Wall Street, where the Dow eked out a fresh record. Shanghai rallied 1.7 percent after data showed factory activity stabilized in December, indicating that recovery in the world’s number two economy remains on track. Hong Kong and Taipei were also up, though Mumbai, Singapore, Sydney and Wellington all fell. —AFP

US bans palm oil imports from second Malaysian firm

KUALA LUMPUR: The United States has banned imports from a Malaysian palm oil giant whose products are found in numerous household goods over concerns that its workers face a litany of abuse.

The move against Sime Darby Plantation, one of the world’s biggest producers, marks the second time the US has blocked shipments from a palm oil company in the Southeast Asian nation in just months.

Palm oil is a common ingredient in items ranging from processed foods to cosmetics, with Malaysia and neighboring Indonesia producing 85 percent of the world’s supply. But activists have long claimed that low-paid workers on plantations face abuse, and also blame the industry for driving destruction of rainforests to make way for the vast agricultural estates.

Announcing the ban late Wednesday, US Customs and Border Protection (CBP) said there was evidence Sime Darby workers face abuses including sexual and physical violence, withholding of wages and restrictions on movement. The ban “demonstrates how essential it is for Americans to research the origins of the everyday products that they purchase,” said CBP acting commissioner Mark A. Morgan.

The decision means that all Sime Darby palm oil and palm oil products from Malaysia are barred from entering US ports. It



came after anti-trafficking group Liberty Shared petitioned the CBP to block Sime Darby imports over concerns about labor abuse. In a statement, the producer insisted it was “committed to combatting forced labor and has implemented robust policies to protect workers’ rights”, and pledged to work with US officials to address their concerns.

Shares in Sime Darby Plantation, whose annual exports to the US are worth about \$5 million, fell 3.5 percent in Kuala Lumpur following news of the ban. The company, which supplies major firms such as Nestle and Unilever, employs migrant workers from countries including Indonesia and Bangladesh on its network of sprawling plantations. In October, the US banned imports from another Malaysian palm oil producer, FGV Holdings, following a lengthy probe that found evidence its workers were mistreated. — AFP

Indonesia in \$9.8bn EV battery deal with Korea’s LG

JAKARTA: Indonesia said Wednesday it had signed a \$9.8 billion electric vehicle battery deal with South Korea’s LG as it moves to become a global production hub for the green technology.

The agreement was signed in mid-December, with investments planned in production and supply chains for lithium batteries, which rely on nickel. Mineral-rich Indonesia is a major producer of the metal. Initial development will kick off in February, including plans for a mine and smelter in the remote Maluku islands, said Indonesia’s Investment Coordinating Board head, Bahlil Lahadalia.

“(LG) have the market and technology. But Indonesia has extraordinary reserves of raw materials,” he said. “If we combine the two, I believe this investment will (make us) one of the important players in the world”.

Some other foreign firms are investing in nickel-battery processing plants in Indonesia, including China’s Tsingshan Holding Group. US-based electric vehicle maker Tesla has reportedly expressed interest in potential EV battery investments in Indonesia. — AFP

Business

Brexit fog blurs horizon for anxious Breton fishermen

Last-minute deal saves French industry from choppy waters

LE GUILVINEC, France: In France's northwestern port of Guilvinec, most of the fishing boats are still in harbor after taking shelter from a ferocious winter storm that rocked the Atlantic coast. The last-minute deal between the EU and Britain on their trading relationship now that London has left the bloc, which included European fishing rights in British waters, has perhaps saved the industry in France from even choppier waters.

But as they plan to put out to sea after January 1 when Britain will no longer be part of the EU single market, French fishermen complain they are still lacking full clarity on their future rights.

"We are getting ready to set sail, but we do not know where to," Emmanuel Le Saint told AFP aboard his white and blue trawler, moored not far from the fish market of Le Guilvinec. Le Guilvinec is France's third fishing port after Boulogne-sur-Mer in the north of the country and Lorient in the west.

"We do not really know if we will be going towards British or French" waters, he added, as his crew worked to refuel the vessel. "It's unclear, it's completely unclear," he said, his hands buried in the pockets of his jeans as he stood in the port in the Finistere region of Brittany, fully exposed to the wrath of the Atlantic.

'May have consequences'

Fishermen are particularly worried about whether the British authorities will grant them the necessary licenses in time from January 1 to enter

their waters. "Given that the English (fishermen) are themselves frustrated, they (the British authorities) are not going to do anything to make our life easier", said Jacques Pichon, director of the La Houle group which has 10 trawlers and accounts for approximately 20 percent of operations at Guilvinec market.

"At first glance (the agreement) is less unfavorable than we could have feared," he acknowledged. But he warned: "The fact that the British did not get everything they wanted, and that other European fishermen had to concede more than us in the agreement, may have consequences." Under the last-ditch agreement clinched after marathon talks on Christmas Eve, the EU will cede around 25 percent of the value of hauls fished in British waters by European fleets.

After a transition period of five-and-half years, rules governing mutual access to fishing zones will be negotiated annually. French fishermen's group CNPMM has already complained that annual renegotiation will hamper investment.

Ludovic Le Lay, head of the Hent Ar Bugale fleet, three of whose six boats regularly fish in British waters, expressed particular concern about the annual negotiations. Catch limits "can be changed from one year to the next", he said, worrying about the impact of the agreement "going forwards".

What will become of fishing?

For the French industry, fish caught in British wa-



Fishermen are particularly worried about whether the British authorities will grant them the necessary licenses in time from January 1 to enter their waters.

ters account for 20 percent of the total annual value.

"It's a leap into the unknown in any case, because we are losing overall 25 percent of the value of the catches made in British waters," said Soazig Le Gall-Palmer, head of the Bigouden group, which runs 11 boats. Le Gall-Palmer, who heads a regional producer's organization that groups 700 vessels, noted the fact that the reduction has not been "distributed equally be-

tween species and areas or between the nations of the European Union".

Also concerned about the annual renegotiation, she said: "We will be in doubt every year. Every single year we will have to wait for the agreements." Veteran fisherman Thierry Monfort, just back from a two-week trip into Irish waters for Bigouden, said the new uncertainty was just another blow to the industry. —AFP

Brexit sparks fears of disrupted food, drug supplies

LONDON: Despite the free trade deal signed by London and Brussels, suppliers of food and medicine fear the rapidly introduced changes will disrupt supplies and increase costs, undercutting government claims of a post-Brexit dividend.

While Boris Johnson had promised an "oven-ready" deal a year ago, the British prime minister eventually "delivered us four working days", the Food and Drink Federation complained ahead of Britain leaving the EU's single market at the close of 2020. Minette Batters, president of the National Farmers' Union, said members "do anticipate that there will still be disruption to trade at the border", despite the deal signed on Wednesday.

As many companies rushed to order in more stock or fulfil orders delayed by coronavirus lockdowns, England's Channel ports, particularly Dover, were already overflowing ahead of the deal's announcement. The situation worsened when a number of European countries closed their borders with Britain for two days ahead of Christmas, seeking to curb the spread of a new, more contagious variant of COVID-19.

Thousands of lorries heading to ports got stuck in vast traffic jams and it took several days and the help of the armed forces to unravel the situation. —AFP

Big Money: GE boss secures \$47m bonus

WASHINGTON: Two years after taking the helm at a slumping General Electric, Larry Culp has secured a huge reward: a bonus of around \$47 million and the potential for much more.

The mammoth payoff follows thousands of layoffs at the industrial conglomerate amid the coronavirus pandemic. Culp took over as chief executive in October 2018 and was paid almost \$25 million in 2019, but he could reap as much as \$230 million if GE meets additional targets, according to securities filings reviewed by AFP. The ex-CEO of Danaher, Culp has been credited with stabilizing GE's finances through a series of austerity measures, including asset sales and layoffs. The company justified the bonus citing the executive's performance amid a difficult operating environment. The board launched a charm offensive over the summer to retain Culp as it faced a bruising downturn in aviation that hit orders for its LEAP engine joint-venture with France's Safran. The company in August amended its long-term incentive plan, effectively lowering the bar Culp would have to clear to win the payoff and extended his contract until 2024 with an option for an additional year.

The head of the GE labor union called the package "absolutely outrageous," especially after the company announced some jobs would be shipped overseas. "How can GE justify this type of enormous bonus for its CEO, while workers, their families, and communities are suffering due to layoffs and offshoring?" Carl Kennebrew, president of the Industrial Division of the Communications Workers of America (IUE-CWA) said in a statement.

Lowered bar

Under the revised package, Culp would receive the bonus if GE's share price reaches \$10 and trade above that level for 30 days—lowering the target



price from \$19 previously. When the package was agreed, GE shares were trading at around \$6.65 but have advanced more recently amid optimism surrounding Covid-19 vaccines. GE's stock price has been above \$10 for more than a month and Wednesday afternoon was trading at \$10.73, up 1.6 percent.

Culp's payoff could reach \$230 million if GE shares reach \$17 — well below the original benchmark of \$31 a share. People familiar with the situation said GE recognized that the potential sums are staggering, but noted that Culp must stay with the company through August 2024 to receive the full payout under the amended plan.

"Under Larry's leadership, GE has made significant progress against the goals he set on day one as CEO: improving the company's financial position and strengthening its businesses," said a GE spokesperson on behalf of the board, noting the difficult operating environment this year. —AFP

Business

US imposes new tariffs on French, German products

EU 'regrets' new US tariffs in Airbus-Boeing spat

WASHINGTON: The United States announced Wednesday that it will impose additional tariffs on French and German products as part of a long-running dispute over subsidies for aircraft manufacturers Airbus and Boeing.

The tariffs are on "aircraft manufacturing parts from France and Germany, certain non-sparkling wine from France and Germany, and certain cognac and other grape brandies from France and Germany," which will be added to the list of products taxed since 2019, according to a statement from the US Trade Representative. It said the move was in retaliation to tariffs imposed by the European Union which it considers unfair.

The decision is the latest twist in the 16-year trade battle over aircraft subsidies that turned increasingly sour under the protectionist instincts of US President Donald Trump, and comes despite hopes for a trade truce following Joe Biden's election. The EU was authorized this year by the World Trade Organization (WTO) to levy additional customs duties on American products.

But Washington believes it has been penalized by the method of calculation chosen, which, according to the Trump administration, has led to an excessive amount of customs duties levied on American products. "In implementing its tariffs... the EU used trade data from a period in which trade volumes had been drastically reduced due to the horrific effects on the global economy from the COVID-19 virus," the USTR statement said.

"The result of this choice was that Europe imposed tariffs on substantially more products than would have been covered if it had utilized a normal period. Although the United States explained to the EU the distortive effect of its selected time period, the EU refused to change its approach," the statement said. As a result the US "is forced to change its reference period to the same period used by the European Union," it continued.

The US also deplored an EU decision to exclude the UK from its calculations, which it argued unfairly increased the tariffs.

The feud over European aircraft manufacturer Airbus and its American competitor Boeing is the longest and most complicated ever handled by the WTO. The aviation feud predates Trump, but Washington quickly embraced the opportunity to impose \$7.5 billion in tariffs against Europeans after also being cleared to do so by the WTO last year. Washington imposed punitive tariffs of 25 percent on iconic EU products such as wine, cheese and olive oil and put a 15 percent tariff on Airbus planes in March.

In retaliation, the EU has been imposing customs duties on \$4 billion of American exports since the beginning of November.

The EU regretted the US decision to slap more tariffs on French and German products as part of spat over aircraft manufacturers Airbus and Boeing. Brussels complained that Washington had "unilaterally" disrupted ongoing talks and said it would seek a solution to the row with the incoming administration, which takes



MIAMI: American Airlines flight 718, a Boeing 737 Max, takes off from Miami International Airport on its way to New York in Miami, Florida. — AFP

office on January 20.

The European Commission said it, "regrets that the United States has chosen to add further EU products to its retaliation list in the WTO Airbus case on aircraft subsidies."

"The EU will engage with the new US Administration at the earliest possible moment to continue these negotiations and find a lasting solution to the dispute," it said. The decision is the latest twist in the 16-year trade battle over aircraft subsidies that turned increasingly sour under the protectionist instincts of US President Donald Trump, and comes despite hopes for a

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LVMH, Tiffany finally seal merger at lower price

WASHINGTON: Shareholders of US jeweler Tiffany on Wednesday overwhelmingly approved a merger with France's LVMH, ending months of drama with a marriage of two luxury icons.

About 99 percent of shareholders voted in favor of the union during a special meeting that was held virtually, a spokesperson told AFP. The green light was the last step needed to finalize the tie-up scheduled for early January. The parent to luxury brands such as Louis Vuitton, Dior

and Moët & Chandon, LVMH announced its plan to acquire Tiffany and its iconic robin's egg blue gift boxes at the end of 2019.

But the French company walked away from its proposal in September after claiming a series of poor decisions by Tiffany's board. The companies buried the hatchet in October after Tiffany agreed to a lower price to prevent the deal from collapsing.

The price was dropped by \$3.50 a share to \$131.50, lowering the value of the deal to \$15.8 billion from the original \$16.2 billion. LVMH had already obtained authorization from the authorities for the merger. Tiffany will be removed from the New York Stock Exchange, but the French company has not yet said how it plans to transform the jeweler, which has suffered in recent years from competition from brands favored by millennials. —AFP

China's December factory activity slows, recovery on track

BEIJING: Factory activity in China slowed slightly in December, data showed yesterday, though it continued to grow as the world's second-largest economy stays on track to recover from the coronavirus crisis. While the rest of the world has struggled to overcome the deadly virus, China has bounced back from a rare contraction in the first three months of the year and is expected to be the only major economy to avoid a recession this year.

The closely watched Purchasing Managers' Index (PMI) — a key gauge of manufacturing activity in China — dipped to 51.9 from 52.1 in November, the National Bureau of Statistics said. It was also slightly lower

than the 52.0 forecast by analysts. The dip came as demand for Chinese exports was hit by fresh lockdowns and strict containment measures in key markets including Europe and the United States.

Still, NBS statistician Zhao Qinghe said the country's economic recovery "remained strong".

"The overall manufacturing sector maintained a steady recovery, with the pace at a relatively high level for the year," Zhao said. The manufacturing PMI collapsed to a record low of 35.7 in February after the virus brought much of China to a standstill but economic recovery helped it bounce back to a three-year high in November. The International Monetary Fund expects the Chinese economy to expand by 1.9 percent this year. China's non-manufacturing PMI — a gauge of sentiment in the services sector — fell to 55.7 in December from 56.4 in November.

China has largely curbed the spread of the virus but a series of local outbreaks in cities including Beijing have reduced the number visiting restaurants, cinemas and other public venues. —AFP

Rangers avenge defeat of the season at St Mirren

Morelos strikes for Rangers ahead of Celtic clash

GLASGOW: Alfredo Morelos ended his Scottish Premiership scoring drought as Rangers avenged their only defeat of the season at St Mirren on Wednesday ahead of the Old Firm derby. Steven Gerrard's team, who won 2-0, remain 16 points clear of defending champions Celtic, who beat Dundee United 3-0 at Parkhead. St Mirren wrecked Rangers' treble hopes when they dumped them out of the Scottish League Cup earlier this month. But Gerrard's men remain firmly on course for Premiership glory after a 13th straight league win.

Kemar Roofe fired Rangers ahead with his 12th goal of the season in the 27th minute before Colombian forward Morelos pounced for his first domestic goal since September six minutes later. "I thought it was really patchy but there's a lot of positives to take away," Gerrard told Rangers TV. "Both number nines have scored a goal. I thought Joe Aribo and Glen Kamara were immense—I thought they were really good—and we've kept another clean sheet. So in the main we're happy and we move into the weekend in a good place."

Neil Lennon's Celtic, chasing a record 10th consecutive Scottish league title, appear to be back on track after a major wobble, but know they must win the Ibrox encounter with Glasgow rivals Rangers on January 2. They warmed up for that match with a comfortable win at home. Ismaila Soro opened his account for Celtic midway through the first half before fellow midfielder David Turnbull added a second with a drive five minutes before the interval.

French striker Odsonne Edouard scored a delightful third in the 75th minute, with the only

downside for Lennon being an injury to returning defender Christopher Jullien, who was carried off on a stretcher after crashing into a post. "We played brilliantly and created a lot of really good chances," Lennon told the BBC. "There was good energy and quality. The atmosphere around the place is good and I was really pleased with the substitutes today as well." The match between Livingston and Aberdeen was called off due to a frozen pitch while the game between St Johnstone and Hamilton ended goalless. —AFP

Kuwait Shooting tournament

By Abdellatif Sharaa

KUWAIT: Kuwait Shooting Sport Club will hold the closing ceremony of the late Sheikh Abdullah Al-Mubarak Al-Sabah Cup tournament tomorrow in the presence of the tournament's patron Sheikh Mubarak Abdullah Al-Mubarak Al-Sabah, President of Arab and Kuwait Shooting Federations Engineer Duaij Khalaf Al-Otaibi and KSSC board of directors at Sheikh Sabah Al-Ahmad Olympic Shooting Complex.

Winners of the three top places in the 10 Meters Air Pistol and Rifle as well as Olympic Archery will be awarded with medals and prizes. Engineer Duaij Al-Otaibi pointed to the importance of this tournament which the club is keen to organize annually and lauded the support of all those who contribute to the development of shooting sport. He commended the level Kuwaiti shooters had shown during the Gulf tournament in the Air Rifle and Pistol that was held in December. Otaibi thanked Deputy Minister of the Amiri Diwan Affairs Sheikh Mohammad Al-Abdullah Al-Mubarak Al-Sabah and his brother Mubarak Al-Abdullah for their continued support.



Engineer Duaij Al-Otaibi

'King' James celebrates birthday with milestone in Lakers win

LOS ANGELES: Los Angeles superstar LeBron James celebrated his 36th birthday Wednesday with another NBA milestone, scoring double-digit points for the 1,000th straight game in the Lakers' 121-107 victory over the Spurs in San Antonio. James finished with 26 points to extend his already record streak of double-digit games in the regular season.

He sealed the milestone midway through the second quarter with a turnaround jump hook that gave the Lakers a 46-37 lead. "I just try to live in the moment and just try to continue to get better with my game, try to get better with my teammates and try to just maximize when I'm on the floor," said James, who is in his 18th NBA campaign after leading the Lakers to the 2020 title in the league's quarantine bubble in Orlando.

"I've been blessed to play the game that I love for 18 years and hopefully I can continue to play at a high level," he said. James' double-digit scoring streak began on January 6, 2007, when he was playing for the Cleveland Cavaliers. "It's a tribute to his tenacity level... his commitment to excellence," Spurs coach Gregg Popovich said before the game. "He deserves a lot of credit for being the consummate professional. His mental state along with his physical state really makes him really special."

Shortly after James reached the milestone, Popovich was ejected from the contest for arguing with officials. Assistant Becky Hammon took over on the Spurs bench, becoming the first woman to direct a team in an NBA game. Anthony Davis scored 20 points and pulled down nine rebounds for the Lakers, newcomer Dennis Schroder added 21 points and four assists. Wesley Matthews had his best game since joining the champions, scoring 18 points off the bench as he made all six of his three-point attempts.

Humbled Heat bounce back

In early action, the Miami Heat rebounded from an embarrassing 47-point loss to Milwaukee with a 119-108 NBA victory over the Bucks. The Heat didn't have to wait long for revenge as they hosted the Bucks for the second straight night. Goran Dragic came off the bench to lead Miami with 26 points, Bam Adebayo added 22 points, eight rebounds and 10 assists and Tyler Herro scored 21 points with a career-best 15 rebounds as the Heat rallied to stave off another home defeat.

The Bucks had dominated on Tuesday with an NBA-record 29 three-pointers in their 144-97 triumph. The Bucks, fueled by a triple-double of 26 points 13 rebounds and 10 assists from two-time NBA Most Valuable Player Giannis Antetokounmpo, looked like making it two wins in a row when they led by 14 in the third quarter. Donte DiVincenzo scored 15 points and Jrue Holiday added 13 for the Bucks, but the Heat rallied despite missing Jimmy Butler for the second straight game.



SAN ANTONIO: LeBron James #23 of the Los Angeles Lakers hangs onto the rim after dunking past DeMar DeRozan #10 of the San Antonio Spurs during second half action at AT&T Center on December 30, 2020. —AFP

"You want to constantly develop some grit and toughness during the course of a long season, and our guys responded in an appropriate fashion," said Heat coach Erik Spoelstra, who acknowledged before the game that there was "a lot of anger and frustration" after the blowout loss on Tuesday. "As well there should have been," he said. In Brooklyn, Kyrie Irving scored 17 of his 25 points in the fourth quarter and Kevin Durant added 33 points, 11 rebounds and eight assists as the Nets dealt the Atlanta Hawks their first defeat of the young season, 145-141.

Irving's late burst helped the Celtics withstand 30-point performances from Atlanta's Trae Young and John Collins, powered by Jaylen Brown's career-high 42 points, defeated the Memphis Grizzlies 116-111. The Celtics led by 12 points after the opening quarter and took full control with a 17-0 scoring run in the second period. Los Angeles Clippers star Kawhi Leonard, who missed two games with a mouth injury from an elbow to the face, returned in a protective mask to score a game-high 28 points in his team's 128-105 victory over the Portland Trail Blazers. —AFP

Hamilton knighted in UK's honors list

LONDON: Lewis Hamilton has been knighted in Britain's traditional New Year Honours list after equaling Michael Schumacher's record of seven Formula One world titles. The list recognizes outstanding achievements in various fields including showbusiness, sport and politics, as well as the contributions of a larger number of everyday citizens. There are many awards this year for those seeking solutions to the problems posed by coronavirus as the pandemic drags on. Hamilton, 35, surpassed Schumacher's record number of career race wins during a stellar season in 2020 that was shortened due to the coronavirus pandemic. —AFP

Sports

Atletico extend La Liga lead as Real Madrid slip

Real draw 1-1 at Elche

MADRID: Atletico Madrid extended their lead at the top of La Liga on Wednesday after Luis Suarez fired them to a 1-0 win over Getafe while Real Madrid could only draw 1-1 at Elche. Suarez struck in the 20th minute with a superb header from Yannick Carrasco's cross to move Diego Simeone's Atletico up to 35 points, two ahead of local rivals Madrid after they were pegged back by a Fidel Chaves penalty following Luka Modric's early opener.

Real Sociedad, Sevilla and Villarreal are all a further seven points back, with Barcelona 10 behind Atletico in sixth after their 1-1 draw with Eibar on Tuesday. Atletico have also played two fewer matches than reigning champions Madrid after a scrappy win emblematic of Simeone's reign on his 500th match as club coach. "When I got on the plane to come here I thought that when I left the club (as a player) that I always wanted to come back," said Simeone, who is in his 10th year as Atletico coach.

"I found men (Koke, Saul Niguez) who wanted to get the club out of the bad patch it was in, and I have a relationship with them that goes beyond football." Uruguay forward Suarez's eighth goal of the season was a good as it got for Atletico, who despite fielding a strong line-up did not impress in a match of little incident at the Wanda Metropolitano. However Atletico's third straight win keeps them top of the pile after a fraught last few days in which Diego Costa was allowed to

leave and Kieran Trippier was banned until the end of February for betting breaches.

'Two points dropped'

Zinedine Zidane's Madrid knew that whatever happened in the late fixture they would trail Atletico going into the new year, but they looked on course for a routine win at struggling Elche when Modric opened the scoring in the 20th minute. Croatian Modric pounced to place a perfect header in the top corner after Marco Asensio's long range shot thumped back off the bar, the second time Madrid had hit the woodwork in the early minutes. The away side thought they had a penalty nine minutes before the break when referee Jorge Figueroa Vazquez pointed to the spot for what he thought was an Ivan Marcone handball, but the awarding was cancelled following a VAR check.

Elche then got a spot-kick of their own five minutes into the second half when Dani Carvajal was caught tearing at Antonio Barragan's shirt, with Fidel stepping up to stroke home the leveler. Lucas Boye then hit the post for the hosts before home keeper Edgar Badia made two superb stops deny Carvajal and Sergio Ramos as Madrid pushed for a win that would have kept them level on points with their capital city rivals. "When I look at how we played in the first half, I tell myself it's two points dropped," said Zidane. "Plenty of teams will drop points. It's a hard season, and we still have plenty of matches left."



ELCHE: Real Madrid's Spanish defender Sergio Ramos (center-left) heads the ball with Elche's Spanish defender Josema during the Spanish League football match between Elche and Real Madrid at the Manuel Martinez Valero stadium in Elche on December 30, 2020. —AFP

Granada in Euro hunt

Earlier Granada moved to within two points of the Champions League places after beating Valencia 2-1 in a feisty match where three players were sent off in six second-half minutes. Jorge Molina's powerful header two minutes from time keeps Granada in seventh place on 24 points, two behind fourth-placed Sevilla, Sociedad and Villarreal. Valencia's seventh league defeat of the season leaves them level on 15 points with Real Valladolid, who are third-from-bottom in the rel-

egation zone. Javi Gracia's side haven't won a La Liga match in their last seven attempts and had their task made harder when Jason and Goncalo Guedes were sent off within three minutes of each other midway through the second half. Granada's Domingos Duarte was then shown a straight red card three minutes later after he cynically hacked down Manu Vallejo as he attempted to burst through on goal with the scores still level. Molina punished the beleaguered away side by thumping home Alberto Soro's cross. —AFP

Brentford up to second in English Championship as Swansea draw blank

LONDON: Brentford came from behind to move into second place in the Championship with an entertaining 2-1 win over in-form Bournemouth on Wednesday but Swansea had to settle for a point against Reading. Dominic Solanke gave Bournemouth the lead midway through the first half when he flicked Lloyd Kelly's low driven cross into the roof of the net. But the home side hit back before the break as Henrik Dalsgaard rose highest at the near post to power home an unstoppable header from Mathias Jensen's corner. And they grabbed a winner 11 minutes from time when substitute Tariqe Fosu headed home Bryan Mbeumo's teasing cross at the far post.

That moved Thomas Frank's side above Bournemouth and three points behind leaders Norwich. Swansea missed the chance to climb to second in the table in the later kick-off, frustrated by Reading in a goalless draw on a bitterly cold evening at the Liberty Stadium. Steve Cooper's side had ripped up their poor pitch before Christmas and relaid a new playing surface and this was their first game on it. The Swans dominated and had multiple chances but could not turn their pressure into goals. —AFP

Balotelli gets off to a flying start for Monza

MILAN: Mario Balotelli got off to a flying start for Monza on Wednesday after bagging his first goal for his new club just three minutes into his debut for Silvio Berlusconi's ambitious team. Italy international Balotelli signed a deal until June for the Serie B side earlier this month and made an immediate impact when he met Carlos Augusto's cross to put them ahead in a 3-0 win over promotion rivals Salernitana. Balotelli, who had been without a team since the summer before signing for the club from just outside Milan, also had a goal ruled out for a clear offside before he was substituted just after the hour mark.

Antonino Barilla put the hosts two up just before the break when he

slammed home from close range, and substitute Marco Armellino made sure of the win which takes Monza just two points from the two automatic promotion places when he added a third deep into stoppage time. Salernitana had been leading Italy's second tier at the start of the day but drop to second following their thumping defeat, level on 31 points with new leaders Empoli. "Mario needs to play... I was brave to put him in from the start but he did well to do what he knows best," said Monza coach Cristian Brocchi.

"Our hope is that he can keep improving his match fitness because his quality is undeniable." Former AC Milan owner and Italian prime minister Berlusconi purchased Monza in September 2018 for around three million euros (today \$3.7 million) with the club in the third tier, having sold Milan for 740 million euros in April 2017. Balotelli played under the flamboyant Berlusconi and current Monza CEO Adriano Galliani at Milan between 2013 and 2014 and then on loan from Liverpool for the 2015-16 Serie A season. —AFP

US investors complete takeover of Premier League side Burnley

LONDON: US investment group ALK Capital has completed its takeover of Burnley, acquiring a controlling 84 percent stake in the Premier League club, it was announced yesterday. Delaware-based ALK, which special-

izes in investments in the sport and media sectors, said its managing partner Alan Pace would take over from Mike Garlick as chairman.

Pace, the former president of Major League Soccer's Real Salt Lake, said the move marked "the start of an exciting journey for the entire Claret's family". "With a rich heritage, a brilliant academy, and a passionate fan base, this club has solid foundations to build upon," he said in a statement on the club's website. Garlick, who had held just under 50 percent of the club's shares, will remain on ALK Capital's new board of directors at Burnley. He said the deal represented a "natural progression" for the club, who are in their fifth consecutive season in the English top-flight. —AFP

Sports

Liverpool miss chance to stretch lead after Newcastle stalemate

Liverpool squander the chance to open up 5-point lead

NEWCASTLE: Liverpool squandered the chance to open up a five-point lead at the top of the Premier League in the final English top-flight match of 2020 after being held to a goalless draw by Newcastle on Wednesday. The 0-0 stalemate at St James' Park means the champions go into the New Year with a three-point lead over Manchester United, having played a game more. But they will rue their missed chances in a match in which they enjoyed nearly three-quarters of possession.

Mohamed Salah — top of the Premier League goalscoring charts with 13 goals — missed the target either side of half-time with just goalkeeper Karl Darlow to beat and strike-partner Roberto Firmino saw two headers superbly saved. Three days after lowly West Brom snatched a point at Anfield, Jurgen Klopp's men, who have now won only two of their eight league away games this season, were frustrated once again, although it took a late goal-line clearance from Fabian Schar and Darlow's brilliance to keep them at bay.

Klopp rued his side's profligacy in front of goal. "You might not think I have to tip my hat to my team but I like the performance," he told the BBC. "It was really good. Can we play better football? Yes, but in this game we did more than enough to win it. I think we had four 100 percent chances. We have won against Newcastle before with fewer chances. Tonight we didn't but we accept that. I am happy with the things I saw tonight and I can really work with that.

"The boys are frustrated and rightly so but

not about the performance. It is a basis to build on for the next few days, weeks, months." Newcastle, who came into the match without a win in four games in all competitions, started positively, with returning striker Callum Wilson almost catching goalkeeper Alisson Becker unaware with a speculative early shot. The Reds needed Alisson to be at his best to deny Wilson once again 10 minutes later after he had outpaced defender Nathaniel Phillips.

Liverpool wasteful

Liverpool should have been ahead 11 minutes before the break when Salah beat the offside trap to control the ball in front of the advancing Darlow, only to stab his shot wide of the post, and the keeper produced a fine reaction save in stoppage time to repel Firmino's header from point-blank range.

Mane headed into the side-netting from Trent Alexander-Arnold's 49th-minute corner and when Liverpool turned the screw, with Mane going through his full repertoire of tricks, the Magpies' rearguard came under increasing pressure. Salah had another chance to break the deadlock midway through the second half when he was played in by Firmino but, after steadying himself, directed his effort past the upright. Firmino was equally wasteful when presented with a glorious chance at the far post as Newcastle rode their luck.

It nearly got much better for the Magpies 11 minutes from time when Ciaran Clark met Matt



NEWCASTLE: Newcastle United's Brazilian striker Joelinton is tackled by Liverpool's English midfielder James Milner during the English Premier League football match between Newcastle United and Liverpool on December 30, 2020. — AFP

Ritchie's free-kick with a downward header that Alisson had to turn away. But Schar hacked the ball off his own line ahead of Mane seconds

later and Darlow brilliantly clawed away another Firmino header at the death to preserve his clean sheet. — AFP

Reyna leads charge of Bundesliga's rising teen stars

BERLIN: The Bundesliga returns this weekend after a two-week break with Borussia Dortmund's American midfielder Giovanni Reyna leading a crop of talented teenagers rapidly becoming household names. Reyna, who marked his 18th birthday in November by extending his contract until 2025, scored his first Bundesliga goal on the opening day of this season. He has featured in all of Dortmund's Bundesliga and Champions League games in 2020/21, scoring three league goals — including the equaliser in a 1-1 draw at Frankfurt — and producing six assists.

Reyna, an attacking midfielder who can play on either wing, needs a strong performance at home to Wolfsburg on Sunday after Dortmund's shock 2-1 defeat to Union Berlin a fortnight ago. The result left Dortmund fifth in the league, eight points behind leaders Bayern Munich, who host Mainz on Sunday. Against Wolfsburg, Dortmund could welcome back striker Erling Braut Haaland, who scored ten Bundesliga goals in eight games before being sidelined by a hip injury.

Having forced his way into the Dortmund first-team, Reyna now wants to emulate Haaland and England winger Jadon Sancho, both 20, by deciding games. "You see guys like Sancho and Haaland — I want to be at their level," Reyna told The Players' Tribune.

"I know I can make that jump this season. I've come out of my shell. I now demand the ball." The son of former USA captain Claudio Reyna, he joined Dortmund from New York City FC in July 2019. Shortly after his 17th birthday last January, Reyna made his Dortmund debut, then bagged his first senior goal in February with a jaw-dropping strike in a German Cup game at Bremen.

He marked his Champions League debut the same month with a brilliant pass to set up Haaland for the winning goal in the last 16, first-leg victory over Paris Saint Germain. However, Reyna's raw talent needs polishing. His defensive work was exposed when Union's Liverpool loanee Taiwo Awoniyi got in front of him to head home. Dortmund fielded a youthful side in Berlin where Haaland's understudy Youssoufa Moukoko became the league's youngest goal-scorer at 16 years, 28 days. Down in Bavaria, European champions Bayern Munich are also giving youth a chance.

Musiala impresses for Bayern

Before this season, double Champions League winners Thomas Mueller and David Alaba, who graduated from Bayern's academy more than a decade ago, were the last first-team players to come up through the club's youth structure. That has all changed with 17-year-olds Jamal Musiala and Bright Arrey-Mbi, plus Angelo Stiller, 19, given game time this season for the European champions by Hansi Flick. As Alphonso Davies proved last season in making the left-back berth his own as a then 19-year-old, Flick cares more about talent than age. "Finally, we once again have a few players on our (academy) campus who are breaking through," said Bayern chairman Karl-Heinz Rummenigge. — AFP

Kilmarnock slam racist abuse of manager Dyer

LONDON: Scottish Premiership side Kilmarnock are working with Police Scotland to investigate a letter sent to the club containing racist abuse directed at manager Alex Dyer. The letter arrived on Monday morning following a 2-1 home defeat to Livingston on Boxing Day. "Kilmarnock Football Club utterly condemns a letter which was delivered to the club this morning containing racist abuse directed at our manager, Alex Dyer," Kilmarnock said in a statement. "We are working with Police Scotland to identify any individuals involved in this disgusting act and we will pursue the strongest possible action we can against them. "Racism in any form is completely unacceptable and must be called out whenever and wherever it is found.

"As a club, we have shown our support to rid the game and society as a whole of racial discrimination by taking the knee before each fixture this season and we will continue to do so." Livingston's late winner on Saturday made it five defeats in a row for Kilmarnock and eight losses in nine league games. Dyer responded to the defeat by saying he would have no complaints if the Rugby Park board decided his time was up, but he believes he retains their backing, as well as that of his players. Kilmarnock, who travel to Motherwell on Wednesday, are eighth in the table, three points clear of the relegation playoff place. — AFP



ELCHE: Real Madrid's Spanish defender Dani Carvajal (left) challenges Elche's Argentinean defender Juan Sanchez Mino during the Spanish League football match between Elche and Real Madrid on December 30, 2020. — AFP

Atletico extend La Liga lead; Real slip