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All ministers tender their resignations to premier

Proposed money transfer fees not targeting expats: MP

Firemen battle massive tire dump blaze



KUWAIT: Firefighters battle to control a blaze at the tire dump in Rehaya in Jahra governorate yesterday. — KUNA (See Page 3)

By B Izzak

KUWAIT: Cabinet members yesterday collectively submitted their resignations to HH the Prime Minister Sheikh Sabah Al-Khaled Al-Hamad Al-Sabah, an official statement said yesterday. The statement said Sheikh Sabah yesterday received Deputy Prime Minister and Defense Minister Sheikh Hamad Jaber Al-Ali Al-Sabah and other ministers. Sheikh Hamad then handed the premier the resignations of all the ministers, placing them at his disposal.

If the prime minister accepts the resignations, which is the most likely scenario, he will then submit his resignation and the resignations of the entire Cabinet to HH the Amir Sheikh Nawaf Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah. It is up to HH the Amir to accept or reject the resignation of the Cabinet. In case he accepts the resignation, he will either ask Sheikh Sabah to form a new Cabinet or could ask another person.



KUWAIT: Deputy Prime Minister and Defense Minister Sheikh Hamad Jaber Al-Ali Al-Sabah submits the resignations of all ministers to HH the Prime Minister Sheikh Sabah Al-Khaled Al-Hamad Al-Sabah yesterday. — KUNA

The government has boycotted regular meetings of the National Assembly since last Wednesday, a day after three opposition lawmakers filed to grill the prime minister over a number of allegations, including the government's

support for the re-election of Marzouq Al-Ghanem as speaker despite strong opposition. Ministers have also boycotted meetings of Assembly panels since last Wednesday.

Continued on Page 2

News in brief

No flying drones without permit

KUWAIT: Amateurs who fly remote-control drones and gliders cannot practice the sport without permits from the Directorate General of Civil Aviation (DGCA) and other competent authorities, the military announced yesterday. These amateurs must adhere to navigation safety measures to spare themselves legal action. — KUNA

Egypt reopens airspace to Qatar

CAIRO: Egypt has reopened its airspace to Qatari flights. Cairo's civil aviation chief said yesterday. "The Egyptian Civil Aviation Authority at dawn on Tuesday approved requests by Qatari authorities to allow Qatari airlines to pass through Egyptian airspace," Ashraf Noweir told AFP. "This decision allows EgyptAir and Qatar Airways to resume flights." — AFP

GOP donor Adelson dies

WASHINGTON: Billionaire casino magnate and Republican donor Sheldon Adelson has died at the age of 87, according to a statement released yesterday from the Las Vegas Sands company. A supporter of outgoing US President Donald Trump as well as Israel's Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu, Adelson rose to become one of the richest men on the planet thanks to his sprawling chain of casinos. — AFP

Court suspends farm laws

NEW DELHI: India's top court suspended yesterday the implementation of new agriculture laws that have sparked weeks of demonstrations by tens of thousands of farmers outside New Delhi. The Supreme Court said it wanted to facilitate mediation between the government and the protesting farmers who fear that the legislation will leave them at the mercy of big business. — AFP

Impeachment looms as Trump ends isolation

WASHINGTON: Donald Trump emerged from isolation at the White House yesterday to brand the likely second impeachment of his presidency "absolutely ridiculous" and warn that it has triggered "tremendous anger". Speaking as he boarded Marine One at the White House for a trip to Texas, Trump called his scheduled impeachment in the House of Representatives today a "continuation of the greatest witch hunt in the history of politics".

ry of politics".

Trump also said social media giants like Twitter and Facebook have made a "catastrophic mistake" in banning him after his incendiary comments to the crowd before it invaded Congress. "They are making a catastrophic mistake... They're dividing and divisive and they're showing something that I've been predicting for a long time," Trump told reporters.

Trump denied his speech last week to thousands of supporters, encouraging them to march on Congress, had anything to do with violence that broke out shortly after. "They've analyzed my speech in my words and my final paragraph, my final sentence, and everybody to the tee just thought it

Continued on Page 2



WASHINGTON: US President Donald Trump walks to Marine One after speaking to the press on the South Lawn of the White House yesterday. — AFP

Pompeo alleges Iran new 'home base' of Qaeda

WASHINGTON: US Secretary of State Mike Pompeo alleged that archenemy Iran has become a new "home base" for Al-Qaeda worse than

Afghanistan, an assertion questioned by experts. In a speech a week before leaving office, Pompeo confirmed a New York Times report that Al-Qaeda's second-in-command was killed last year in Tehran, although he did not say that Israel carried it out.

"Al-Qaeda has a new home base. It is the Islamic Republic of Iran," Pompeo said in a speech at the National Press Club. "I would say Iran is indeed the new Afghanistan - as the key geographic hub for Al-Qaeda - but it's actually worse. Unlike in Afghanistan, when Al-Qaeda was hiding in the mountains, Al-Qaeda today is operating under the

hard shell of the Iranian regime's protection." He urged more international pressure, calling the alleged alliance a "massive force for evil all over the world".

President Donald Trump's hawkish top diplomat stopped short of urging military action, saying: "If we did have that option, if we chose to do that, there's a much greater risk in executing it." But he announced sanctions on several individuals and a \$7 million reward for information on an Al-Qaeda member he said was believed to be in Iran identified

Continued on Page 2

Mood glum 10 years after Ben Ali ousted

TUNIS: Tunisia, where the Arab Spring started, has also been its relative success story - but celebrations will be muted when it marks tomorrow one decade since protesters ousted its autocratic leader. The revolutionary optimism of the pro-democracy movement that deposed president Zine el Abidine Ben Ali in 2011 has given

way to hopelessness among the one third of young people without a job.

And while Tunisia - unlike most of its regional neighbors - has kept the candle of a fragile democracy burning, widespread popular discontent is now driving many to leave. Tunisians made up the largest number of irregular migrants, more than 12,000, who arrived in Italy last year on boats crossing the Mediterranean.

The North African country's key tourism sector, already hit hard by a string of jihadist attacks in 2015, has all but collapsed amid the COVID-19 pandemic, leaving the resorts that line its coastline

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TUNIS: In this Jan 6, 2021 photo, a former Tunisian protester who was injured during the revolution demands recognition and compensation. — AFP

Local

Kuwait's Amir receives Sheikha Dr Suad Al-Sabah



KUWAIT: His Highness the Amir Sheikh Nawaf Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah receives a copy of the book from Sheikha Dr Suad Mohammad Al-Sabah. — Amiri Diwan and KUNA photos



His Highness the Amir Sheikh Nawaf Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah meets His Highness Sheikh Nasser Al-Mohammad Al-Ahmad Al-Sabah.



His Highness the Crown Prince Sheikh Mishal Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah meets His Highness Sheikh Nasser Al-Mohammad Al-Ahmad Al-Sabah.

KUWAIT: His Highness the Amir Sheikh Nawaf Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah received at Bayan Palace yesterday Sheikha Dr Suad Mohammad Al-Sabah

who presented him with a book about Kuwait under the rules of Jaber bin Abdullah Al-Sabah, the state's third ruler (1814-1859) and Sabah bin Jaber Al-Sabah,

the state's fourth ruler (1859-1866). His Highness the Amir also received His Highness Sheikh Nasser Al-Mohammad Al-Ahmad Al-Sabah. Meanwhile, His

Highness the Crown Prince Sheikh Mishal Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah received His Highness Sheikh Nasser Al-Mohammad at Bayan Palace. — KUNA

Kuwaiti charity distributes aid to Syrian refugees

AMMAN: Kuwait's Al-Najat Charity yesterday distributed relief aid to about 2,000 Syrian refugees in Jordan as part of its winter campaign. Head of Resources, Public Relations and Media Sector at the charity Omar Al-Thuwaini said that this is the second aid campaign of the current year, as it included the distribution of food baskets, blankets and other in-kind assistance. The distribution took place in many areas of Jordan, including the capital Amman, and the Syrian refugee camps, he said. He stressed the association's keenness, despite global health conditions, to be present and supervise the campaign and deliver the aid in cooperation with the Kuwaiti ministries of Social Affairs and Foreign Affairs. The current campaign came to support the Syrians in their "most difficult"



humanitarian crisis in the modern century, Thuwaini added. He called on Kuwait-based donors to contribute to alleviating the refugees' suffering, pointing to a severe shortage of medical care and



medicines, especially for elderly patients and those with chronic diseases due to the COVID-19 pandemic. Moreover, Thuwaini affirmed that Al-Najat Charity will continue to meet the humanitar-

ian appeal of the Syrian refugees and launch charitable convoys, implement and develop projects that include building schools and productive work centers. — KUNA

Mood glum 10 years after...

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mostly deserted. It was in Tunisia where the revolts started after young street vendor Mohamed Bouazizi, cheated and humiliated by local officials, set himself on fire on Dec 17, 2010.

His desperate protest triggered a wave of popular revolts across North Africa and the Middle East, briefly raising hopes of bringing political freedom to millions. While those hopes were broadly dashed, and Syria, Libya and Yemen were plunged into brutal wars,

small Tunisia steered a more hopeful path following Ben Ali's flight to Saudi Arabia on Jan 14, 2011.

The country has since had nine governments in 10 years, but the transfers of power have been peaceful, despite initial turmoil and the deadly Islamist attacks. The Nobel Peace Prize was in 2015 awarded to Tunisia's so-called Quartet of human rights, legal, labor and business groups "for its decisive contribution to the building of a pluralistic democracy ... in the wake of the Jasmine Revolution of 2011".

A new constitution agreed in 2014 by Islamists and the opposition was hailed as a historic breakthrough. The country has since held several elections deemed fair by local and foreign observers, most recently bringing to power President Kais Saied, a jurist, in late 2019. Former bloggers have launched independent media outlets and a revived Tunisian cinema now

dares to tackle once taboo subjects, while a dynamic civil society has emerged.

But discontent has been fuelled by the continued economic malaise, widely blamed on a political class paralyzed by infighting. Critics accuse powerful families of maintaining a crony capitalist system where rules and credit lines shield them from open competition. The economy contracted by nine percent in 2020, the World Bank estimates, and people have taken to the streets once more in marginalized regions to demand jobs and investment.

"We have not moved from a democratic transition to an economic transition," journalist Zied Krichen told AFP. The public sector has raised salaries and bloated its payroll, with the number of civil servants rising by 50 percent from 2010 to 2017. But this has failed to meet "the enormous expectations", said Krichen. "The

various governments have tried to buy social peace without having a long-term policy of economic development or social integration."

The crisis has fuelled nostalgia in some quarters for the stability of the years under Ben Ali. Some former protesters meanwhile look back with bitterness on the years since they rallied for "freedom, work (and) national dignity", often at great personal cost. A preliminary count by Tunisian authorities in 2012 found that 338 people were killed and 2,147 wounded during the popular uprising.

Those figures shrank to 129 killed and 634 injured in an online list published in Oct 2019 by the Tunisian Higher Committee on Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms. While many victims and families are still waiting for recognition and compensation, few of those responsible have been held to account. — AFP

Pompeo alleges Iran new 'home...

Continued from Page 1

both as Muhammad Abbatay or Abd al-Rahman Al-Maghrebi.

Iran's Foreign Minister Mohammad Javad Zarif dismissed the allegations yesterday, pointing to US ties with Saudi Arabia. "No one is fooled," Zarif tweeted. "All 9/11 terrorists came" from Pompeo's "favorite" Middle East "destinations" he added. "NONE from Iran." The majority of the perpetrators of the Sept 11, 2001, attacks in New York came from US-ally Saudi Arabia.

Iran, a Shiite clerical state, is ideologically opposed both to Al-Qaeda and the Islamic State group, extreme Sunni movements that are predominantly Arab, and has fought on fronts abroad against both. Many experts believe that Tehran has allowed Al-Qaeda operatives to use its territory - comparatively safe from the US

military - to provide guarantees that the extremists will not target Iran.

Pompeo acknowledged that late Al-Qaeda founder Osama bin Laden himself "considered Al-Qaeda members inside the Islamic Republic of Iran to be hostages" and that there was no evidence Iran backed the Sept 11, 2001 attacks, mostly carried out by Saudi nationals. But Pompeo, a former CIA chief, said that Iran in recent years has permitted Al-Qaeda greater freedom of movement including issuing travel documents, and that the group has "centralized leadership" in Tehran.

"Tehran has allowed Al-Qaeda to fund-raise, to freely communicate with other Al-Qaeda members around the world and perform many other functions that were previously directed from Afghanistan and Pakistan," Pompeo said. Pompeo has championed a hard line on Iran including sweeping sanctions that have ravaged its economy. President-elect Joe Biden is expected to seek a return to diplomacy and has tapped Bill Burns, a widely respected former diplomat who has led secret negotiations with Iran, as CIA chief. — AFP

All ministers tender their resignations...

Continued from Page 1

A number of opposition MPs have urged HHH the Amir to appoint a new prime minister because Sheikh Sabah allegedly failed to respond to the outcome of last month's general elections. Opposition MP Mubarak Al-Hajraf yesterday said the government has violated the constitution by boycotting the Assembly meetings without stepping down.

Meanwhile, MP Osama Al-Shaheen explained yesterday that a draft law he and four other MPs submitted on Monday to impose a 2.5 percent fee on money transfers out of Kuwait "does not target expats or low-income citizens". The lawmaker said their bill is different from a similar bill filed in the previous Assembly which called for taxing remittances by expats only.

Shaheen said the law is targeting big businesses that make huge profits from contracts with Kuwait, then send their profits to foreign countries, thus depriving the domestic economy from benefiting from such profits. He said the bill exempts all personal transfers or those made for personal needs. Shaheen had expected that the government will collect some KD 100 million annually from such fees.

Separately, MP Farz Al-Mutairi submitted amendments to the election law calling to allow Kuwaiti voters to choose two candidates instead of one currently in Assembly elections. Kuwait is divided into five electoral constituencies and each constituency elects 10 MPs. Under the existing law, voters are allowed to pick only one candidate. The amendment wants to increase the choice to two candidates.

Before a controversial amendment in 2012, Kuwaiti voters were allowed to choose up to four candidates, a system that promoted opposition political groups that dominated the Assembly. The single-vote system drastically weakened the chances of opposition groups, which have for years boycotted the elections.

Impeachment looms as Trump...

Continued from Page 1

was totally appropriate," Trump told reporters. With only eight days left in his one-term administration, Trump finds himself alone, shunned by former supporters, barred by social media, and now facing a second impeachment over his instigation of a riot against Congress on Jan 6. His trip to Alamo, Texas, where he will tout claims of success in building a US-Mexican border wall, is his first live public appearance since he rallied thousands of followers on the National Mall to march on Congress.

Although this is not the same Alamo as the famous fortress in another part of Texas, the trip marks something of a last stand for the Republican. Ever since the Nov 3 election, the real estate tycoon has been obsessively pushing a lie that he, not Democrat Joe Biden, was the real winner and last week he called on the huge crowd to "show strength".

Amped up on Trump's rhetoric, the mob burst into Congress, fighting with police, trashing offices and forcing frightened lawmakers to suspend briefly a ceremony legally formalizing Biden's victory. The crisis galvanized many of Trump's former boosters in the corporate and sporting world to turn their backs.

In Congress, where the Republican party has been in thrall to the populist leader for four years, even ultra-loyal senior figures like Senator Lindsey Graham have finally told Trump that he must accept his election defeat. Trump, however, remains in denial. He has yet to congratulate Biden or urge his supporters to stand behind the incoming president after he is inaugurated on Jan 20 - a gesture of political unity considered all but routine after US elections.

And according to Axios, Trump and the top Republican in the House of Representatives, Kevin McCarthy, had a stormy phone conversation yesterday in which Trump claimed that left wing Antifa activists, not his supporters, attacked Congress. "It's not Antifa," McCarthy reportedly responded. "I know. I was there." When Trump continued to

push his conspiracy theory that he was the true election winner, McCarthy reportedly interrupted, telling him: "Stop it. It's over. The election is over."

The House of Representatives will vote on a longshot bid to get Vice President Mike Pence and the cabinet to invoke the US Constitution's 25th Amendment, which would declare Trump unfit to perform his duties and install Pence as acting president. This is unlikely to happen. Although Pence is reportedly furious about Trump's behavior last week, the two met at the White House on Monday for the first time since the Congress attack and had "a good conversation", according to a senior administration official.

That signaled that whatever Pence and the dwindling number of White House officials feel, they are committed to keeping the presidency limping along until Jan 20. Still, with a string of cabinet officials quitting the government - most recently the acting head of the Department of Homeland Security Chad Wolf on Monday - it's also clear that Trump's grip on power is tenuous. In an interview yesterday on ABC News, Health Secretary Alex Azar did not dismiss outright the option of removing Trump, saying: "I'm not going to get into or discuss the 25th Amendment here."

Democrats will follow up the 25th Amendment vote with impeachment proceedings in the House today. The single charge of "incitement of insurrection" is all but sure to get majority support. The Republican-controlled Senate, however, is in recess until Jan 19 and its leadership says there is no way to rush through an impeachment trial before Biden takes over the following day.

This means that Trump, who was acquitted in the Senate last year after his first impeachment, would not be forced out of office early. Top Senate Democrat Chuck Schumer has reportedly floated the idea of using a rare parliamentary maneuver to force the chamber back into session under emergency circumstances, giving time for the start of an impeachment trial.

But not even all Democrats are gunning for a trial, worried that this would overshadow Biden's first days in office. The new president will already face the challenges of an out-of-control COVID-19 pandemic, the stumbling vaccination program, a shaky economy, and now the aftermath of violent political opposition from parts of Trump's huge voter base. — AFP

Local

Kuwait logs 494 new COVID cases, one death

Govt urges public not to hesitate to take vaccine

KUWAIT: The Kuwaiti Ministry of Health (MoH) announced yesterday that 494 new infection cases with the novel coronavirus (COVID-19) were registered during the previous 24 hours. MoH official spokesperson Dr Abdullah Al-Sanad said during his daily briefing that the caseload of contaminations with the virus reached 155,335, adding that a single COVID-19 death was also registered during the same period, putting the whole mortality count at 946. Earlier, the ministry had reported that 202 patients have recovered within the same period, raising total recoveries to 149,575.

The number of patients in intensive care units was 47 as of yesterday, Dr Sanad said, adding that the total number of COVID-19 patients in hospitals reached 4,814 as of yesterday as well. Health authorities conducted 10,340 swab tests during the same period, bringing the total number of such tests to 1,347,854 done since the local outbreak of the contagion.

Health Minister Sheikh Dr Basel Al-Sabah explained during the Cabinet's meeting on

Monday the latest developments in the pandemic situation at the global and regional levels and the precautionary measures taken to prevent the entry of the new strain of the virus into the country, after it has spread to more than 30



202 registered recoveries in one day

countries in the world. He also informed the council about the health situation in the country and the ongoing steps to implement the vaccination plan against COVID 19 according to the

discussed plan.

The Council of Ministers called on the public not to hesitate to receive the vaccine due to the seriousness of the health conditions after the rapid spread of the new strain, and to reach a safe return to normal life. The Council also reviewed the recommendations received from the Ministerial Committee for Coronavirus Emergencies and the Cabinet decided the following: Allowing the recruitment of new domestic workers within the framework of the plan while adhering to the controls and requirements as of Sunday, Jan 17, 2021; requiring those coming from all countries of the world to Kuwait to bring a PCR certificate proving the negative result of COVID-19 before arriving to Kuwait within a period of no more than 72 hours from the test's date as of Sunday Jan 17, 2021; charging airline companies with the cost of conducting a PCR examination upon arrival and during the quarantine period for all arrival flights to the country as of Sunday, Jan 17, 2021. —KUNA

494 أصابت جديدة NEW CASES الإجمالي: 155,335	1 حالة وفاة جديدة NEW DEATHS الإجمالي: 946	202 حالة تعافى جديدة NEW RECOVERIES الإجمالي: 149,575
47 المرضى الحرجات في العناية المركزة TOTAL SERIOUS CASES	4,814 المرضى النشيطات TOTAL ACTIVE CASES	10,340 مسحة جديدة NEW TESTS الإجمالي: 1,347,854

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Firemen put out massive tire yard blaze



KUWAIT: Firefighters managed to control a blaze in a tire yard located in Erhayya area, Jahra governorate, Kuwait Fire Force (KFF) said yesterday. The fire, damaging an area of 5,000 square-meters, was put under control, preventing it from further spreading, affirmed a statement by the KFF. The force revealed no casualties were reported due to the incident and an investigation was launched to determine the cause of the fire. — KUNA

News in brief

Police storm brewery in desert

KUWAIT: Police raided a camp in the Subiya desert that was transformed into a liquor brewery, Al-Anbaa Arabic daily reported yesterday. Hundreds of distillation and storage drums were found, along with manufacturing equipment, raw material and cooking gas cylinders. A security source said detectives were informed to arrest the camp owner as the main suspect, as expats involved in the liquor brewing were arrested. The source said camps have an advantage because the liquor-making process releases a very strong odor that can be quickly discovered in residential areas. The raid was held following tips received by top-ranking officials.

300,000 residencies renewed

KUWAIT: Kuwaiti authorities have renewed more than 300,000 residency visas of expats stuck abroad and who have applied for renewal since the start of the COVID-19 pandemic, Al-Qabas Arabic daily reported yesterday, quoting sources. The Public Authority for Manpower (PAM) carried out the renewal process through an online system in cooperation with the Public Authority for Civil Information (PACI) and the Ministry of Interior, the sources explained. The government had earlier halted a rule by which an expat's residency is canceled if they spend more than six months outside of Kuwait. The rule remains on hold until further notice.

Social workers' replacement

KUWAIT: The Civil Service Commission has asked for terminating the contracts of 131 expatriate social workers in the Education Ministry and replacing them with Kuwaiti candidates after the former were exempted from the replacement policy last year due to a shortage, Al-Jarida Arabic daily reported yesterday.

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Forum underlines historic ties between Kuwait and India

CAIRO: The State of Kuwait yesterday affirmed that its relations with India date back to many years ago during which the two countries established fruitful cooperation at the economic and commercial levels. The affirmation of the close ties was made by Counselor Falah Al-Mutairi, addressing the virtual third session of senior officials of the Arab-Indian Cooperation Forum, co-chaired by Egypt and India. More than 1.5 million Indians in Kuwait largely contribute to development enterprises, Counselor Al-Mutairi noted, lauding the cooperation between Kuwait and India in various spheres, namely the combat of the novel coronavirus. Mutairi added that current regional and international conditions should prompt Arab states and India to enhance mutual cooperation, calling for joint stances on issues such as the Middle East, disarmament and combating terrorism. The forum was set up in 2008. —KUNA

Embassy celebrates Republic Day of India

KUWAIT: The Indian Embassy in Kuwait announced that celebrations of the 72nd Republic Day of India will be conducted by the embassy, with complete adherence to COVID-19 related protocol and guidelines. As there will be no physical gathering for the event at the Embassy premises, Indian Diaspora and friends of India in Kuwait are invited to virtually join the celebrations of Republic Day given the prevailing circumstances, the embassy said. Celebrations take place on January 26, 2021 from 09:00 am onwards through live streaming; links for the event will be shared in due course on the embassy's website and social media handles, it explained.

Zain Great Idea witnesses excellent turnout

Tomorrow last day to apply to the biggest tech startup accelerator program

KUWAIT: Zain, the leading digital service provider in Kuwait, announced that tomorrow will be the last day for applying to the sixth edition of the Zain Great Idea (ZGI) tech startup accelerator program, which has seen wide participation from Kuwait-based entrepreneurs to enter their tech startups and ideas into the program.

As of today, ZGI - which comes this year in an all-virtual format to abide by health guidelines imposed due to COVID-19 - has witnessed many submissions by entrepreneurs and idea owners, both who own startups that have just begun their journey or those in the process of establishing them. Submissions particularly centered around startups working in tech and digital transformation areas.

After the registration period ends, ZGI's judging panel will review all applications thoroughly and select the participants who will progress into the next phase: the virtual bootcamp. The bootcamp, which will be completely virtual this year and continues for four weeks, will feature workshops, training sessions, panel discussions, and more, facilitated by world-class experts, academics, and trainers from top international educational institutions such as IE Business School, MIT, Stanford, and more. In addition, one-to-one sessions with top experts in various fields will be offered for every finalist.

ZGI offers a refreshed opportunity for local talents and Kuwait's entrepreneurial community, as it has been one of the most successful initiatives Zain presented to the Kuwaiti market as part of its comprehensive innovation and entrepreneurship strategy. Throughout 10 successful years, ZGI empowered, trained, and invested in hundreds of creative and driven Kuwaiti youth, of which many now own thriving and active Small and Medium-sized Enterprises (SMEs) to this day in local and regional markets.

Zain's program comes in joint collaboration with Brilliant Lab, a startup Accelerator Service from Kuwait, and Mind the Bridge, a global organization based in Silicon Valley that bridges the world through entrepreneurship education for startups, enterprises, and investors to succeed in global markets.

Zain is well aware of the crucial role played by private sector organizations in supporting social and economic sustainability projects. Springing from its growing commitment towards practicing its social responsibility, the company is committed to printing a positive impact through all its activities. This has led Zain to embrace the most influential issues in the community, including the support of youth, entrepreneurship, and innovation.

Terms and conditions

Applying for the Bootcamp and the investment committee is open to persons from all nationalities, aged 21 and above. Noting that priority goes to



A previous visit by ZGI entrepreneurs to Microsoft's headquarters in the US.

Kuwaiti startups.

The applicant must be the founder or co-founder of the startup. Team submissions are acceptable, but only two persons who are nominated by the team may participate in the Zain Great Idea Bootcamp. Startups may be implemented in Kuwait or in any other country, and they may be implemented within the tech and digital transformation industry.

The investment committee consists of members from Rasameel Investment Company, Brilliant Lab, and Zain's management. 10 startups from the ZGI Bootcamp will be selected to advance to Phase 5 - The Zain Media and Business Support. Candidates will be provided with both Arabic and English versions of the Terms and Conditions of the program for their information and acceptance. In case of any ambiguity between the two versions, the Arabic version shall prevail.

How to apply

After agreeing to the terms and conditions, applicants should apply their tech startup idea by filling out the online form at zaingreatidea.com and attach any supporting documents or videos (if available).

Virtual Bootcamp

Eligible applicants will participate in the virtual Bootcamp phase. Throughout four weeks, they will learn the essentials of accelerating their tech startups via workshops, training sessions, and panel discussions featured by world-class facilitators and trainers from top international institutions, including IE Business School, MIT, Stanford, and more.



A ZGI entrepreneur showcases his startup during a previous event.

Zain Co-developing and services

If the startup passes the judging panel, entrepreneurs will have the opportunity to benefit from Zain's leading experiences in areas that are essential to any startup, including marketing, advertising, customer care, public relations, digital partnerships, business/consultancy/legal services, and much more.

Virtual Zain Demo Day event

At the end of the program, all finalists will be hosted at a virtual Zain Demo Day event, through which they will present and pitch their final startups to investors, business partners, and others, giving them the opportunity to transform their ideas and startups into a profitable business.

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KUWAIT: (From left) Salah Dabsha, Sheikha Al-Hajraf and Mona Al-Ansari attend the press conference. —KUNA

Kuwait first worldwide in school order plus safety index: MoE

KUWAIT: The Assistant Undersecretary for the Educational Research and Curriculum at Kuwait's Ministry of Education (MoE) and Director of National Center for Education Development (NCED) Salah Dabsha said that Kuwait ranked first in the world in the indicator of order plus safety in schools, according to a study conducted by Trends in International Mathematics and Science Study (TIMSS) with 77 percent of eighth graders in mathematics. During a press conference held yesterday at MoE headquarters, the preliminary results of the TIMSS 2019 study showed that Kuwait ranked second worldwide in science, with 75 percent of students, he pointed out.

Dabsha referred to Kuwait's participation in international studies to assess the education system, highlighting the high results while commending Kuwait's commitment to the International Association for the Evaluation of Educational Achievement (IEA) study. Kuwait ranked second worldwide on the level of job satisfaction index for science teachers in eighth grade, while it ranked fifth in fourth grade, ranked fifth in eighth grade and seventh in fourth grade mathematics, he mentioned. Dabsha underscored the ministry's interest in all international studies that evaluate the educational system in order to work to develop and improve education in Kuwait, pointing out that Kuwait has been able to advance education.

Participation in these studies is vital for evaluating the educational system and identifying weaknesses that need clarification, he explained, noting that the past years witnessed a study of the possibility of raising Kuwait's capacity and contributing to improving the system, which has already led to making a difference in results.

Another view, Mona Al-Ansari, a science instructor and member of the core team of the TIMSS study, at the conference reviewed Kuwait's high results in science, pointing out that the level of students in fourth grade increased by 55 points to 392 points instead of 337 in the TIMSS 2015 study, while the level of eighth grade students increased to 33, a score of 444 instead of 411 in the 2015 study. Ansari pointed to the link between the learner's admiration for science and academic achievement, explaining that the more the learner enjoys the science subject, the more points one will score in the TIMSS international tests, which recommends the necessity of working to entice the learner in science class.

Meanwhile, Sheikha Al-Hajraf, a technical instructor for mathematics and a member of the main team for the TIMSS study, reviewed the results of mathematics, indicated that Kuwait is among 14 countries that achieved an increase in the average educational attainment in fourth grade after advancing by 30 points, while eighth grade students advanced 11 points. Hajraf pointed to the indicator of the student's sense of belonging to the school and its impact on the rate of achievement in mathematics, saying that the greater the learner's sense of belonging to the school, the greater one's educational attainment, which calls for eagerness to make the school a captivating environment.

She emphasized the importance of making the school environment safe and orderly, pointing out that the study showed Kuwait's class environment is safe and orderly by 82 percent of fourth graders and 77 percent of eighth graders. It is worth noting that TIMSS is an international study that aims to focus on educational policies and systems, study the effectiveness of applied curricula, methods of teaching them, their practical application, evaluate achievement and provide information to improve the teaching, as well as learning of mathematics and science, as this study is a project of IEA, based in the Netherlands. —KUNA



Malaysia declares emergency, suspends parliament over virus

EU gets vaccine boost as WHO dampens hope of herd immunity

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WILMINGTON, United States: President-elect Joe Biden speaks to the press after receiving his second dose of the Pfizer/BioNTech COVID-19 vaccination at ChristianaCare Christiana Hospital on Monday. —AFP

Worries as US Homeland Security chief quits

15,000 troops to be deployed ahead of Biden inauguration next week

WASHINGTON: US Acting Homeland Security Secretary Chad Wolf announced his resignation unexpectedly Monday as worries rose over more violence during President-elect Joe Biden's inauguration next week. Wolf's departure as head of the body in charge of security for the January 20 event came five days after President Donald Trump's supporters stormed the US Capitol, hoping to prevent Biden from replacing him.

The Homeland Security Department oversees several law enforcement bodies including the Secret Service, the point agency for security for the White House and the US president. Wolf, who said he was stepping down for procedural reasons, named Pete Gaynor, the administrator of the Federal Emergency Management Agency, to replace him. But the move did not end questions over whether the US capital city would be adequately secure over the coming week. An internal FBI document warned of the possibility that armed Trump supporters could hold protests in all 50 states between the coming weekend and January 20, according to US media.

The White House issued a statement saying that Trump had "declared that an emergency exists in the District of Columbia

and ordered Federal assistance to supplement the District's response efforts due to the emergency conditions resulting from the 59th Presidential Inauguration from January 11 to January 24, 2021." It said the order gave the Department of Homeland Security the authority to act "to save lives and to protect property and public health and safety, and to lessen or avert the threat of a catastrophe in the District of Columbia."

Meanwhile, federal and city officials continued to point fingers over who was responsible for the debacle at the Capitol last Wednesday, when the Congressional police force was overwhelmed by thousands of Trump supporters who succeeded in shutting down the legislature.

More troops called up

The Pentagon said Monday it had authorized 15,000 National Guard troops to be deployed for Biden's inauguration. Already 6,200 troops are on the ground in Washington, and a total of 10,000 are planned by the coming weekend, said General Daniel Hokanson, chief of the Defense Department's National Guard Bureau.

Another 5,000 could be deployed by the day of the inauguration, he said. They will

come equipped with riot gear and weapons, but so far they have not been authorized to arm themselves while on the streets of the US capital, he said. Before he announced his departure, Wolf also ordered an acceleration of preparations by the Secret Service, citing "events of the past week and the evolving security landscape." Preparations for the event were moving quickly. A security fence has been built around the entire grounds of the Capitol, where Biden will take the oath of office as Trump's successor.

'Don't come'

Still angry about last Wednesday's violence, in which five people died, including a protester shot dead by police and a police officer who was attacked and died from his injuries, Washington mayor Muriel Bowser appealed to Biden backers to stay away from the capital on inauguration day. Normally, hundreds of thousands of Americans—sometimes more than a million—flock to Washington for the quadrennial event.

"We are asking Americans not to come to Washington DC for the 59th presidential inauguration on January 20 and to instead participate virtually," Bowser said.

Organizers said the Democratic president-elect would use the occasion to foster national unity, faced by a country deeply divided over politics and hobbled by the coronavirus pandemic.

He will be sworn in at the Capitol in front of the National Mall filled with flags rather than the usual hundreds of thousands of spectators. Afterwards, he and three former US presidents—Trump won't attend—will travel to Arlington National Cemetery, where thousands of US military war dead for veterans are buried, to lay a wreath.

But the preparations come as Democrats, accusing Trump of fomenting and applauding what they branded an "insurrection" and "coup" attempt last week, seek to force Trump from office prematurely.

That could further spark violence by Trump supporters, the FBI warned in a new internal advisory. According to US media, the document says that far-right groups like the violent Boogaloo Boys are planning protests around the country timed to the inauguration. One group, the FBI said, "warned that if Congress attempts to remove POTUS (Trump) via the 25th Amendment a huge uprising will occur," ABC News reported. —AFP

US rebrands Cuba state sponsor of terror

WASHINGTON: President Donald Trump's outgoing administration on Monday returned Cuba to the US blacklist of state sponsors of terrorism, the latest in a slew of last-minute actions to hinder President-elect Joe Biden's diplomacy. The terror designation severely hampers foreign investment and can only be removed after a formal review by the Biden administration, meaning it may remain in force for months and slow efforts to ease tensions. With nine days left in office, Secretary of State Mike Pompeo cited Cuba's ties with Colombian rebels, alliance with leftist Venezuela and sanctuary to several US fugitives in justifying the blacklisting.

"With this action, we will once again hold Cuba's government accountable and send a clear message: the Castro regime must end its support for international terrorism and subversion of US justice," Pompeo said in a statement, referring to former leaders Fidel and Raul Castro. "The United States will continue to support the Cuban people in their desire for a democratic government and respect for human rights, including freedom of religion, expression and association," he said. It is the latest in a blitz of decisions by Pompeo in his final days in office, with most of Washington focused on whether to remove Trump for inciting a deadly riot at the US Capitol by supporters who sought to stop the ceremonial certification of Biden's victory. Since Saturday, Pompeo has also designated Yemen's Huthi rebels as a terrorist group, defying warnings from aid groups, and relaxed rules on US engagement with Taiwan. Then-president Barack Obama in 2015 delisted Cuba as a state sponsor of terrorism as he moved to normalize relations and declared the half-century US effort to isolate the communist island to be a failure. Trump has reversed many of Obama's overtures to Cuba and also imposed sanctions on Venezuela, winning him support among immigrant communities in Florida, a crucial state in US elections. Biden has indicated he wants to return at least to some engagement started under Obama and blocked by Trump, including allowing Cuban-Americans to visit family and send money.

Warnings from Democrats

"The hypocrisy from President Trump and Secretary Pompeo is stunning but not surprising," said Representative Gregory Meeks, a member of Biden's Democratic Party who heads the House Foreign Affairs Committee. "Donald Trump—who as a businessman registered the Trump Organization's trademark on the island in 2008 — has always seen Cuba as a political football with zero regard for the long-suffering Cuban people," Meeks said. To remove Cuba from the terror list, Antony Blinken-Biden's nominee for secretary of state—would need to initiate a review that shows that Havana did not engage in terrorism over the previous six months. Cuban Foreign Minister Bruno Rodriguez called the designation "cynical and hypocritical." "The political opportunism of this action is recognized by everyone honestly concerned about the scourge of terrorism and its victims," he wrote on Twitter.

Chilling effect on business

John S Kavulich, president of the US-Cuba Trade and Economic Council that looks at commercial ties between the countries, said the immediate effects of Pompeo's move would include discouraging financial institutions from dealing with Cuba. Insurance companies could also suspend coverage or jack up rates for operators of ships and aircrafts to Cuba, he said. "Transactions with the Republic of Cuba would have an increase in scrutiny, resulting in fewer governments and companies wanting to engage with it," he said. But he doubted the move would ultimately change Cuba's policies, including its staunch support for Venezuelan President Nicolas Maduro, whom the Trump administration has sought to topple. —AFP



Antonio Guterres

Guterres to run for second term as UN chief

UNITED NATIONS: UN Secretary General Antonio Guterres will run for a second five-year term as the organization's chief, his spokesman said Monday. Guterres informed the president of the General Assembly and Security Council that "he is available to serve a second term as secretary general of the United Nations," which would run from 2022 to 2026, spokesman Stephane Dujarric told a daily press briefing. Diplomatic officials said Guterres, 71, told the UN Security Council's permanent members on Friday that he planned to seek a second term.

A diplomat told AFP that during the meeting with representatives from China, the United States, France, Britain and Russia, Guterres described the many threats the world faces. He underscored the need to reconcile "humanity and nature" and the importance of improved international cooperation on other challenges such as cybersecurity and terrorism, the diplomat added. Other diplomats said Guterres' hope to serve a second term has so far not been met with any resistance from the permanent Security Council members.

It is traditional for a UN secretary general to serve the maximum two terms, though before November's US election, diplomats said Guterres was not planning to seek a second term if President Donald Trump were reelected. The outgoing US leader scorned multilateralism in many instances and assailed UN bodies such as the World Health Organization. British Prime Minister Boris Johnson said he "warmly welcomed" Guterres' decision to run for a second term and congratulated him on "doing a fantastic job." —AFP

Two US lawmakers test positive for COVID after riot

WASHINGTON: Two members of the US Congress have tested positive for the coronavirus, with one yesterday accusing Republicans of refusing to wear masks and mocking those who did during a riot at the legislature last week. In a tweet, Democratic Congresswoman Pramila Jayapal said she had taken a test after being trapped in a secure room with fellow lawmakers, and that she had tested positive. "Many Republicans still refused to take the bare minimum COVID-19 precaution and simply wear a damn mask in a crowded room during a pandemic - creating a superspreader event on top of a domestic terrorist attack," Jayapal, who is now self-isolating, she said. "The duration in the room was multiple hours and several Republicans not only cruelly refused to wear a mask but mocked colleagues and staff who offered them one."

Hours earlier, fellow Democratic congresswoman Bonnie Watson Coleman said she too had contracted the virus and that she believed she had been exposed to it during last week's violence. "She believes she was exposed during protective isolation in the US Capitol building as a result of insurrectionist riots," her office said in a statement. Top Congressional doctor Brian Monahan warned lawmakers over the weekend that

Afghan forces foil IS plan to murder top US envoy

KABUL: Afghan authorities said yesterday they had foiled a plan by the jihadist Islamic State group to assassinate the top US envoy in Kabul, as a wave of targeted killings continue to rock the country. Intelligence officers dismantled a four-member IS cell in the eastern province of Nangarhar that had planned to murder Ross Wilson as well as Afghan officials, the National Directorate of Security said. Wilson, the US Charge d'Affaires in Kabul, has steadfastly condemned a series of assassinations in the capital and other cities of prominent Afghans including journalists, activists and politicians in recent months.

"The main assassin and facilitator of the cell, Abdul Wahed, had planned to assassinate the US ambassador in



WASHINGTON: In this file photo Democratic Representative Pramila Jayapal votes during the House Judiciary Committee's vote. —AFP

they could have been exposed to the virus after taking shelter in an isolation room last Wednesday.

Just hours after pro-Trump protestors stormed the US Capitol to demand Congress overturn the November 3 election victory of President-elect Joe Biden, Congressman Jake LaTurner tested positive for the virus. The US is the world's hardest-hit country and some 375,000 people have died from the coronavirus—with about 3,000 more dying every day. In her statement following her positive diagnosis, Congresswoman Jayapal said colleagues that refused to wear masks were guilty of "selfish idiocy" and should not be allowed to take their seats in the chamber. —AFP

Afghanistan as well as some high ranking Afghan officials," the NDS said in a statement. "Their plan was foiled with their arrest." The NDS did not offer further details and the US embassy in Kabul did not respond to requests for comment. In recent months, deadly violence has rocked Afghanistan, including a new trend of targeted killing of prominent Afghans which has sowed fear and chaos despite the Taliban and government engaging in peace talks.

Last week the US military blamed the terror group for these largely unclaimed targeted killings, although some of them have been claimed by IS. Over the years IS has claimed several deadly attacks in Nangarhar, once the bastion of the jihadist group in the country. In a separate incident yesterday, three Afghan women soldiers were shot dead in the northern city of Mazar-i-Sharif. Two gunmen opened fire on a vehicle carrying the troops to work, army spokesman Hanif Rezayee said. Two soldiers died at the scene and one died later in hospital, he said, adding that another military servicewoman and the male driver were wounded in the attack. No group has so far claimed responsibility. —AFP

International

EU gets vaccine boost as WHO dampens hope of herd immunity

Under fire EU promises an 'accelerated time'

THE HAGUE: The European Union started the approval process for its third vaccine yesterday after WHO scientists warned that herd immunity from coronavirus was unlikely this year even with mass inoculation schemes. The 27-nation EU-under fire for lengthy approval processes and slow national rollouts of drugs-promised an "accelerated timeline" after confirming drug company AstraZeneca had applied for approval for the jab it developed with Oxford University.

The EU's medicines agency said a decision would still not come before January 29, even though the drug is already being used in countries including Britain. And even with mass vaccinations, World Health Organization scientists warned that coverage would still not be wide enough for population-level immunity this year.

"We are not going to achieve any levels of population immunity or herd immunity in 2021," said WHO's chief scientist Soumya Swaminathan of a disease that has already infected more than 90 million people worldwide and killed almost two million. The United States remains the worst affected country, posting daily death tolls in multiple thousands, but European hospitals are increasingly warning of stretched resources and Asian countries are also facing upsurges.

Malaysia declared a state of emergency on Tuesday as fears grow that its health system is close to being overwhelmed, after China and Japan took measures against localized clusters.



European Commission President Ursula Von Der Leyen gives a presser on vaccine strategy in Brussels.

China added a city of five million to a growing lockdown area near Beijing yesterday, as WHO experts arrive in the central city of Wuhan to probe the origins of the disease.

'Superspreader event'

With recriminations already flying over America's longer-term handling of the virus, lawmakers voiced fury yesterday over the actions of some of their peers during last week's ructions in Washington DC. Congress members were forced to hunker down in secure rooms as supporters of President Donald Trump marauded through the corridors of the Capitol building, and some have



TURIN: Military medical workers collect swab samples yesterday at a drive-in testing center for COVID-19 set up by the Italian Army on the parking lot of the Juventus stadium in Turin, during the pandemic caused by the novel coronavirus. — AFP photos

now tested positive for coronavirus and squarely blamed their colleagues.

"Many Republicans still refused to take the bare minimum COVID-19 precaution and simply wear a damn mask in a crowded room during a pandemic-creating a superspreader event on top of a domestic terrorist attack," said Democratic Congresswoman Pramila Jayapal, who has since tested positive. US President-elect Joe Biden, who has pledged to

devote all available resources to fight the pandemic, received his second vaccine dose on Monday of the Pfizer-BioNTech jab-the first to be approved in Western countries.

German firm BioNTech said it could produce millions more doses than originally expected this year, but warned that Covid-19 was likely become an endemic disease and vaccines would be needed to fight new variants. —AFP

News in brief

Portuguese president tests positive

LISBON: Portugal's President Marcelo Rebelo de Sousa has tested positive for coronavirus and cancelled all public engagements, his office announced late Monday just two weeks before a presidential election he is expected to win. The 72-year-old head of state was "asymptomatic" and isolating in the presidential palace in Lisbon, his office said in a statement. Last Wednesday, he had spent a few hours in "administrative isolation" after a member of his entourage tested positive, but the president then tested negative and had not been placed in quarantine because his contact with the person concerned had been considered "low risk". —AFP

Quake hits Mongolia-Russia border

MONGOLIA: A 6.8-magnitude earthquake struck early yesterday in northern Mongolia not far from the border with Russia, the US Geological Survey said. The epicenter of the quake, which struck at a relatively shallow depth of 10 kilometers (six miles), was located 33 kilometers south-southwest of Turt, US seismologists said. The epicenter appeared to be located under Lake Khovsgol, the largest fresh water lake in Mongolia by volume. It was located about 200 kilometers west of the southern tip of Lake Baikal. USGS said there was a "low likelihood of casualties and damage" as a result of the quake. —AFP

Cuba slams 'opportunism'

HAVANA: Cuba's foreign affairs minister Bruno Rodriguez on Monday slammed the administration of US President Donald Trump for "political opportunism" for placing the country back on a blacklist of state sponsors of terrorism. "We condemn the US announced hypocritical and cynical designation of Cuba as a State sponsoring terrorism," Rodriguez wrote on Twitter. —AFP

25 missing in Congo River

KISANGANI, DR Congo: Up to 25 people are feared to have died when a barge sank on the Congo River, authorities in DR Congo's northeastern province of Tshopo said yesterday. "A barge which was leaving Kisangani for Basoko sank on Friday evening. The toll today is six bodies which have been recovered, 237 survivors and 19 missing," Tshopo's vice governor, Maurice Abibu Sakapela, told AFP. "The public prosecutor has opened an inquiry. Some people have already been arrested," he said, blaming "overloading and the poor state of the vessel" for the accident. Rivers and waterways are widely used for travel in the Democratic Republic of Congo in the absence of paved roads and railways. —AFP

Pakistan policeman killed

ISLAMABAD: A police officer was shot dead in northwestern Pakistan yesterday when a polio vaccination team he was escorting was attacked in a drive-by shooting. The attack in Karak, a town in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa province, marked the second day of a five-day national immunization drive. The United Nations says endemic polio has been eliminated in every country of the world apart from Pakistan and neighboring Afghanistan, where vaccination teams are viewed with suspicion. Islamist opposition to vaccines grew after the CIA organized a fake inoculation drive that helped them track down Al-Qaeda founder Osama Bin Laden in the Pakistani city of Abbottabad. —AFP

Lebanon tightens COVID-19 curbs as infections skyrocket

BEIRUT: Lebanon tightened novel coronavirus measures by imposing a total lockdown for an 11-day period and introducing new travel restrictions to stem an unprecedented spike in infections.

The latest measures came as officials and health professionals warned that hospitals were quickly running out of beds, leaving many scrambling for treatment, even though a lockdown has been in place since January 7. "It is forbidden to go out on streets and roads from 5:00 am on Thursday January 14 until 5:00 am on Monday January 25," said a statement, released after a meeting of the Higher Defence Council, the country's top security body. All residents are to remain at home at all times with few exceptions, including health professionals, journalists, those working in the food sector and other essential workers, the statement added.

Land and maritime borders will be closed to all travellers except those carrying a valid transit visa.

Travellers arriving from Addis Ababa, Baghdad, Cairo and Istanbul will need to quarantine in a hotel for seven days at their own expense.

A total lockdown set to start this week will exacerbate the suffering of vulnerable Lebanese families struggling to make ends meet unless the government offers assistance, a charity has warned.

Uganda to vote after violent crackdown

KAMPALA: Ugandans vote tomorrow in a highly-charged election after one of the bloodiest campaigns in years, as veteran leader Yoweri Museveni seeks a sixth term against a singer-turned-lawmaker half his age. Bobi Wine, the 38-year-old popularly known as the "ghetto president" who hung up the mike to enter politics, leads the opposition field trying to unseat Museveni, a 76-year-old former rebel leader who has ruled since 1986.

Some 18 million voters are registered for the presidential and parliamentary ballot, which follows a pre-election crackdown more severe than any seen in recent times, and growing signs the race has been tilted against Museveni's rivals. His opponents-most visibly Wine, who spent much of the campaign in a bulletproof vest and combat helmet-

Stay granted to first woman to be executed by US in decades

WASHINGTON: A judge has granted a stay of execution to Lisa Montgomery, who was set yesterday to be the first female inmate executed by the US federal government in 70 years. Montgomery, 52, has been imprisoned for 16 years after she killed a pregnant woman in order to steal her fetus.

She was scheduled to receive a lethal injection yesterday evening at a federal penitentiary in Terre-Haute, Indiana. But Judge James Hanlon of the Southern District of Indiana granted her an eleventh-hour stay of execution Monday. Montgomery's lawyers had argued she was too mentally incompetent to be executed, and said she had been born brain-damaged and endured a life of extreme abuse before committing her crime.

"The record before the Court contains ample evidence that Ms. Montgomery's current mental state is so divorced from reality that she cannot



BEIRUT: People shop at a supermarket in Beirut as they stock up on provisions two days before a full lockdown due to the spread of the COVID-19 pandemic yesterday. — AFP

"We recognize the importance of taking thorough measures... but we are very concerned that vulnerable families and their children will be left to deal with a catastrophe on their own," Jennifer Moorehead, Save the Children's Lebanon director, said late Monday.

Lebanon, a country of more than six million, is grappling with its worst economic downturn since the 1975-1990 war. A spiralling coronavirus outbreak has compounded the crisis, forcing businesses shut and denying daily wage earners an income

in a country where more than half the population lives in poverty.

They must take a PCR test upon landing in Lebanon, and then again six days later. Private hospitals will be obliged to expand intensive care units dedicated to coronavirus patients to help a strained public sector, the statement said. Supermarkets will remain open, but only for delivery. Rumors they would be forced to shut completely sparked panic buying across the country on Monday, with crowds clearing supermarket stocks. —AFP

have been arrested, denied permission to rally, and seen their meetings dispersed with tear gas and supporters shot in the streets.

Journalists covering opposition rallies meanwhile have been attacked, government critics locked up, and election monitors prosecuted, raising concerns over the transparency of the electoral process.

The bloodshed, particularly the deaths of 54 people over two days of protests in November, was condemned abroad and has intensified international pressure on Museveni to ensure a free and fair vote. Greeting voters in his folksy broad-brimmed hat, cutting ribbons on tarmacked highways and unveiling new airliners, Museveni has been counting down the days to victory in upbeat campaign posters in the signature bright yellow of his National Resistance Movement (NRM).

He has never lost an election, and most observers expect this week to be no different. In his 35-year rule Museveni has fused state and party so effectively, and crushed political opposition so totally, that any serious challenge to either him or the NRM at the ballot box is seen as next-to-impossible.

"The ground simply does not make it possible to

rationaly understand the government's rationale for her execution," Judge Hanlon wrote in his ruling. "Both the (government) and the victims of crime have an important interest in the timely enforcement of a sentence," he said, citing precedent.

But "it is also in the public interest to ensure that the government does not execute a prisoner who due to her mental condition 'cannot appreciate the meaning of a community's judgment.'"

Hanlon said the court will set a time and date for a competency hearing for Montgomery.

In 2004, unable to have a child, Montgomery carefully identified her pregnant victim — 23-year-old dog breeder Bobbie Jo Stinnett-online. Under the guise of buying a puppy, Montgomery went to Stinnett's home, where she strangled her to death and cut the baby from her body. She left Stinnett dead in a pool of blood.



Lisa Montgomery



This combination of pictures shows Uganda's President Yoweri Museveni (left) waiting to welcome President of Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) Felix Tshisekedi prior to his arrival at the state house in Entebbe, Uganda. — AFP

win any election against Mr Museveni. It does not really matter who the challenger is," Bernard Sabiti, a Kampala-based political analyst, said. —AFP

In 2007, she was convicted of kidnapping resulting in death and handed a death sentence. She would have been the first woman executed by the federal justice system since 1953. Without denying the seriousness of her crime, Montgomery's lawyers last week sought clemency from US President Donald Trump.

But Trump, an outspoken supporter of the death penalty, has so far failed to act on their request.

Despite the decline of capital punishment in the US and around the world, Trump's administration resumed federal executions in July after a 17-year hiatus and has been carrying them out at an unprecedented rate ever since. Since the summer, 10 Americans have died by lethal injection at Terre-Haute. In addition to Montgomery, two men are scheduled for federal execution this week.

Montgomery may escape the death penalty entirely, as President-elect Joe Biden-due to be sworn into office on January 20 — opposes capital punishment. The Democrat has promised to work with Congress to try and abolish the death penalty altogether. Montgomery's execution has been postponed once before: after her lawyers tested positive for Covid-19 in November, a court postponed her execution until at least December 31. —AFP

International

Malaysia declares emergency, suspends parliament over virus

Govt warns health system 'at breaking point' amid opposition criticism

KUALA LUMPUR: Malaysia's king declared a nationwide state of emergency yesterday to fight a coronavirus surge and parliament was suspended, with critics charging it was a bid by the unstable government to cling to power. The surprise move came a day after the prime minister announced sweeping new curbs across much of the Southeast Asian nation, including the closure of most businesses, and warned the health system was "at breaking point".

Sultan Abdullah Sultan Ahmad Shah agreed to declare an emergency until August 1 following a request from Prime Minister Muhyiddin Yassin, the national palace said in a statement.

It is the first time Malaysia has declared a national state of emergency in over half a century and Muhyiddin, in a televised address, confirmed parliament would be suspended and elections would not take place for the time being. But the leader, whose 10-month-old administration is showing signs of falling apart, insisted that "the civilian government will continue to function".

"The emergency declaration... is not a military coup and a curfew will not be enforced," he said. He insisted he was committed to holding a general election once the country's outbreak is brought under control. The announcement came after Muhyiddin's key coalition allies started withdrawing support, which could have led to the collapse of the government and snap national polls that some feared could worsen the outbreak.

Muhyiddin has narrowly survived a series of challenges in parliament since taking office but is now thought to have lost his majority. Malaysia kept the virus in check for much of last year with a tough

lockdown but, once curbs were eased, cases accelerated and have repeatedly hit fresh records in recent days.

As well as suspending political life, the declaration gives the government powers to take over private hospitals as government facilities become overwhelmed, and get extra help from the military and police, Muhyiddin said. The emergency could be lifted earlier if the rate of infection slows. The country has reported more than 138,000 virus cases and 555 deaths.

Parliament's role 'critical'

An election in the state of Sabah last year has been blamed for triggering a new wave of infections that spread nationwide. But opposition lawmakers lashed out at the move, saying the partial lockdown announced earlier this week was enough to tackle the virus.

The emergency declaration "is to extend Prime Minister Muhyiddin Yassin's political life given that he has lost his parliamentary majority," said Charles Santiago, a lawmaker from the Democratic Action Party. "The role of parliament is critical at this time in order to ensure transparency, human rights, and democracy in the affairs of the state."

The Kuala Lumpur stock market slid 0.45 percent after the state of emergency was announced.

Muhyiddin first tried to persuade the king to declare an emergency in October but was rebuffed. The last time an emergency was declared nationally was in 1969, in response to deadly racial riots. Malaysia has been in political turmoil since March last year when Muhyiddin came to power without an election following then



KUALA LUMPUR: A medical personnel wearing a protective suit waits at the COVID-19 coronavirus drive-thru test centre outside the Ajwa Private Clinic in Shah Alam on the outskirts of Kuala Lumpur yesterday as Malaysia's King declared a nationwide state of emergency to fight a coronavirus surge. — AFP

prime minister Mahathir Mohamad's resignation and the collapse of his reformist administration. Mahathir, 95, led an opposition alliance to a his-

toric victory at landmark polls in 2018 and toppled a corruption-riddled coalition that had governed the country for six decades. — AFP

Indonesia recovers first black box from crashed plane

JAKARTA: A black box from the crashed Indonesian passenger jet has been recovered, officials said yesterday, a discovery that could offer critical clues to explaining why the plane with 62 people aboard slammed into the sea. Divers just off the coast of the capital Jakarta hauled the jet's flight data recorder to the surface, as the hunt continues for its cockpit voice recorder.

Indonesian transport minister Budi Karya Sumadi told a live television briefing that the box had been found after the Sriwijaya Air Boeing 737-500 plunged about 10,000 feet (3,000 meters) in less than a minute before slamming into the Java Sea Saturday. An AFP reporter on a navy ship said investigators started picking up strong signals from an area where they were searching, with divers able to retrieve the box in about an hour from the wreckage-littered seabed.

So far authorities have been unable to explain why the 26-year-old plane crashed just four minutes after takeoff. Black box data—which record information about the speed, altitude and direction of the plane as well as flight crew conversations—helps explain nearly 90 percent of all crashes,

according to aviation experts.

Sumadi added officials believe the cockpit voice recorder is nearby that of flight data recorder.

"We strongly believe it'll be found soon," he said. Some 3,600 personnel are taking part in the recovery effort, assisted by dozens of boats and helicopters flying over small islands off the capital's coast. The agency deployed a remotely operated vehicle to assist the divers.

'Hoping for a miracle'

Scores of body bags filled with human remains were being taken to a police morgue where forensic investigators hope to identify victims by matching fingerprints or DNA with distraught relatives—some held out hope of survivors. "We haven't accepted it yet," Inda Gunawan said of his brother Didik Gunardi who was on the doomed Saturday flight.

"Our family is still hoping for a miracle that he is still alive." Authorities have identified flight attendant Okky Bisma, 29, as the first confirmed victim after matching fingerprints from a retrieved hand to those in a government identity database. "Rest in peace up there darling and wait for me... in



JAKARTA: The team of navy divers who recovered the flight data recorder, get back to the ship from the crash site off the coast of Jakarta yesterday in the search for Sriwijaya flight SJ182 which crashed after takeoff from Jakarta. — AFP

heaven," Okky Bisma's wife Aldha Refa wrote on Instagram.

There were 10 children among the passengers on the half-full plane, which had experienced pilots at the controls as it left Jakarta bound for Pontianak city on Borneo island on a 90-minute flight. A transport safety agency investigator has said the crew did not declare an emergency or report technical problems with the plane before its dive, and that the 737 was likely intact when it hit the water.

Search-and-rescue agency chief Soerjanto Tjahjono echoed that view earlier yesterday, pointing to the rela-

tively small area where debris was scattered in about 23 meters (75 feet) of water. "The size is consistent with the assumption that the plane didn't explode before hitting the water," he added.

"The damage seen on the retrieved fan blade also shows that the engine was still working" at the time of the crash. The crash probe was likely to take months, but a preliminary report was expected in 30 days. Aviation analysts said flight-tracking data showed the plane sharply deviated from its intended course before it went into a steep dive. — AFP

Crash victim families give blood for DNA matching

JAKARTA: Relatives of Indonesia's plane crash victims formed a grim procession at a Jakarta morgue yesterday, to give blood so investigators can try to match their DNA to body parts plucked from the murky depths of the Java Sea. Scores of bags filled with human remains are arriving by the day in the aftermath of Saturday's crash. The Sriwijaya Air flight slammed into the sea just four minutes after takeoff, after plunging about 3,000 meters in less than a minute. It is an agonizing wait for some families, who still hold out hope for survivors amongst the 62 people who were onboard, including 10 children. "We haven't accepted it yet," Inda Gunawan said of his married brother Didik Gunardi, who was on the Boeing 737-500. "Our family is hoping for a miracle that he is still alive."

But Gunawan, like dozens of others, gave a blood sample at a makeshift tent outside the Jakarta morgue, the bleakly-named Post-mortem Command Post. "At first I didn't believe the news about the crash," Gunawan continued. "But then I saw the passenger manifest. We were in shock." Emma Yusja, 54, whose hairstylist daughter Syifa Kamila was in Jakarta to pick up supplies for her salon, was also praying against all odds. But she too gave blood at a hospital in Pontianak on Borneo island, the flight's intended destination. "We've given samples," she told AFP. "I still hope for a miracle that my daughter is alive, but I'll accept whatever Allah decides for us."

'Perfect husband'

Funeral traditions in Indonesia, the world's biggest Muslim-majority nation, call for a quick burial of the dead. But the process of identification could take weeks or more. Some 300 forensic examiners and other trained staff are sorting through remains, collecting blood samples as well as



JAKARTA: Family members of one of the 62 people onboard Sriwijaya Air flight SJ182, react as they provide a DNA test at a police hospital in Jakarta yesterday. — AFP

anything else that could help match them with passengers onboard. Late Monday, flight attendant Okky Bisma, 29, became the first confirmed victim after investigators matched fingerprints from a retrieved hand to those in a government identity database. "Rest in peace up there darling and wait for me... in heaven," Bisma's wife Aldha Refa wrote on Instagram. "Thank you for being the perfect husband when you were on earth." Rapin Akbar, who gave blood at the Jakarta morgue, had five relatives on board. They included his older sister, as well as his nephew, his nephew's wife and their seven-month-old baby.

"Hopefully they'll find the bodies quickly so we can bring them back...for burial," the still-shocked Akbar said. "My nephew had planned to go back to Pontianak on Sunday but changed his mind and decided to fly on Saturday instead. He called me to say the flight was delayed and sent me a picture of their baby. It was (their) first." Amongst the other passengers onboard were a pair of newlyweds, who were headed back to Pontianak for a family wedding celebration. While relatives may want answers quickly, investigators said they would stick to getting it right. "Accuracy over speed is the priority," said Ahmad Fauzi, deputy head of the crash disaster identification team. "It's better to be slow and correct than fast but wrong." — AFP

C African rebels try to sever capital's vital artery

CAMEROON: The armored vehicle stood at Cameroon's Garoua-Boulai border crossing, the barrel of its machine gun pointing unmistakably towards the Central African Republic. Here, police say they are on maximum alert after rebels attacked a crucial highway in the CAR, blocking hundreds of trucks and prompting an exodus of terrified people into Cameroon. An alliance of armed groups tried to advance on the CAR capital Bangui ahead of presidential elections on December 27. The gunmen were swiftly thwarted by UN peacekeepers, the CAR army and Rwandan and Russian reinforcements.

But they then switched tactics, trying to strangle Bangui by launching hit-and-run raids on the RN1 highway, the lifeline linking the city to Cameroon. Garoua-Boulai, 725 kilometers (450 miles) west of Bangui, is a border town of 80,000 people where before the crisis around 200 trucks rolled across each day, laden with essentials for the landlocked CAR's capital. The border point has now become a parking lot—more than 400 trucks are stacked up, waiting to cross. A couple of weeks ago, some truckers ventured over, but swiftly turned back because of the poor security. "The border is now closed," a senior police official told AFP, speaking on condition of anonymity.

Soldiers from the elite Rapid Intervention Brigade have taken up position at the edge of the border perimeter to tackle any rebel incursion. In the town, police have stepped up patrols and identity checks in the street, even in hotels and bars, and take away people who are unable to produce an ID. The attacks on CAR's supply backbone are the latest crisis to roil a country that ranks second poorest in the world and has seen little but bloodshed and misery since a coup seven years ago. — AFP

News in brief

Russia extends UK flight ban

MOSCOW: Moscow yesterday extended its suspension of flights with Britain, after officials said they had detected the new UK strain of the coronavirus in Russia. The halt on air traffic between Russia and the UK was first implemented in late December and was extended yesterday until February 1. The government said the move was taken to "prevent the import and spread of the new coronavirus infection". The B117 coronavirus strain is thought to have first emerged in southeastern England late last year and has since been detected in dozens of countries around the world. The head of Russia's consumer watchdog Anna Popova announced last week that one case of the new strain had been detected last month. — AFP

Japan working to isolate new virus

TOKYO: Japan is working to isolate and analyze a new variant of the coronavirus detected in four people who arrived from Brazil, a health ministry official said yesterday. Japan announced the detection of the new variant on Sunday, but officials have been at pains to emphasize there is no evidence yet that it is any more transmissible or dangerous than others. "In order to further analyze the variant, we need to isolate it first," a health ministry official told AFP. "It's hard to say right now when we can release the details," he said, adding the process could take weeks or months. — AFP

3,300 to rewrite Chile constitution

CHILE: More than 3,300 hopefuls have applied for selection to the commission that will rewrite Chile's dictatorship-era constitution, the top electoral body said Monday. Applicants had until midnight to register their interest, after which the Electoral Service will publish the official list. The 14 million eligible voters will then elect on April 11 the 155 members of the Constituent Assembly, who will rewrite the constitution, which dates from the rule of military dictator Augusto Pinochet (1973-90). The Electoral Service said that as of 5:00 pm, 2,226 independent candidates had registered, 185 from indigenous communities—who are competing for 17 reserved seats—and more than 900 representatives of political parties, bringing the total to 3,311. — AFP

Ten dead in armed clashes

MEXICO: Clashes between gunmen and security forces left 10 people dead on Monday in a region of Mexico wracked by cartel-related violence, authorities said. A police officer was among those killed after gunmen in several vehicles opened fire on security forces in the central state of Guanajuato, according to an official statement. Eight alleged assailants were reported dead after police fought off the attack, along with one person described as a civilian. Guanajuato has been shaken by a deadly turf war between rival cartels Jalisco New Generation and Santa Rosa de Lima. The state's network of energy pipelines and its refinery have attracted gangs battling for control of trade in stolen fuel. — AFP

Business

WEDNESDAY, JANUARY 13, 2021

Corporate America looks to penalize Trump, Republicans

Companies may be taking only a time out from political finance

NEW YORK: In his final days in office, the biggest names in American business are dumping President Donald Trump over accusations that he incited the deadly mob attack last week on the US Capitol.

Twitter has thrown the president off the platform he relied on to promote himself, Shopify shut down e-commerce pages selling his items and payment platform Stripe says it will no longer handle transactions from Trump's campaign.

Others have turned their attention to the United States' acrimonious two-party politics, with Microsoft, Facebook and Google all announcing pauses in donations to both Republican and Democratic candidates. But there are no guarantees this sudden cooling in Corporate America's relationship with Washington will last, particularly with Joe Biden looking to undo many of Trump's business-friendly policies when he comes into office next week. "This is a real moment of truth. Do they change their behavior? Or do they revert back after a certain period of time?" Bruce F Freed, president of the Center for Political Accountability, told AFP.

Both sides suspended

The attack on Congress last week shook the core of American democracy and drew international condemnation. It has also ignited a new effort to remove Trump, who is accused of whipping up the mob into storming the chambers where lawmakers were certifying Biden's November 3 win. Major industry groups and trade unions came out to condemn Trump even as the fracas was underway. The National Association of Manufacturers, which had

previously been supportive of Trump's agenda, called on Vice President Mike Pence to "seriously consider" evoking the constitution's 25th Amendment that would allow him to temporarily become president after Trump is deemed incapacitated.

Social media companies, alarmed at the use of their platforms by Trump and his supporters to promote and organize the attack, acted next, with Twitter, Facebook, Instagram and Snapchat banning the president and Amazon's web division forcing conservative social network Parler offline.

However when it comes to political donations, which are often funneled through political action committees (PAC), companies have been more circumspect. Hotel giant Marriott, health insurer Blue Cross Blue Shield and financial services company American Express said they would stop making donations to Republican lawmakers who tried to halt certification of Biden's election victory.

That failing effort by Trump's allies was ongoing when protesters, many of whom believed the election was rigged, stormed the Capitol. But JPMorgan Chase said it was halting donations to candidates from both parties, as was Facebook, Microsoft and Google-meaning Democrats who are set to narrowly control both houses of Congress won't necessarily see an advantage from the pause. "Suspending political contributions to lawmakers who voted against Joe Biden's certification last week is justified," said Daniel G. Newman, president of MapLight, which tracks the influence of money on US politics.

However, he said more needs to be done to cut down on corporations' influence, pointing to a bill



WASHINGTON: Social media companies, alarmed at the use of their platforms by Trump and his supporters to promote and organize the attack, acted next, with Twitter, Facebook, Instagram and Snapchat banning the president and Amazon's web division forcing conservative social network Parler offline. — AFP

aimed at doing that introduced by Democrats controlling the House of Representatives just days before the attack on the Capitol. Several companies made it plain they were taking only a time out from the world of political finance. Google said its con-

tributions were frozen, "while we review and reassess its policies following last week's deeply troubling events," and Microsoft noted that it "regularly pauses its donations in the first quarter of a new Congress." — AFP

Pandemic's robot 'heroes' highlight value at tech show

WASHINGTON: Robots that helped people survive and stay safe over the past year are touting their value at the tech industry's annual extravaganza amid a pandemic which has given fresh momentum to the robotics sector.

The Consumer Electronics Show, which is being held online this year due to the global crisis, includes robots that have become "heroes" for many during the coronavirus pandemic. Among those taking the virtual stage at CES are robot companions, concierges, cooks, delivery drones, medical assistants and those handling the perilous tasks of sanitizing workplaces and medical facilities.

Robot companions saw surging demand in recent months as pandemic lockdowns intensified problems of isolation, especially for people in senior living homes. Amid a strict virus lockdown in France, the companion robot Cutii became a star in senior facilities. "The pandemic completely changed our business model," said Antoine Bataille, chief executive of Cutii.

"We had envisioned Cutii at people's homes. But today we are dealing with isolation on a collective level." The startup based in the northern French city Roubaix delivered 30 robots for free to senior facilities during the lockdowns and used the experience to improve the technology and train its teams.

"Everything worked well. Every two weeks we would deliver software updates, which had to be done remotely. It's like what Tesla does." Cutii, which combines elements of a telepresence robot with a smart digital assistant, will be part of the



In this undated image courtesy of CareClever SAS, a group of elderly French people learns about the Cutii robot for use in their homes. — AFP

show this year following its commercial launch in France and a marketing push in the United States.

Cutii's head of US operations, Richard Marshall, said the crisis has shown people need more than a smart assistant such as Google or Amazon Alexa. The French-made robot was designed to allow family members to check in, and also help people find activities such as yoga or tai chi classes, either in person or online. "The point of Cutii is to connect individuals to other people," Marshall said. It is not an Alexa on wheels.

Wendy Moyle, a professor at Australia's Griffith University who specializes in research on the elderly, said studies have shown people may develop "a strong relationship" to companion robots "much like older people do with having a pet dog for company."

But Moyle said current technology for most

robots "is just not sophisticated enough" and that many people are disappointed after a while.

'Friendly' robots

Robots have taken on a new role in the workplace and in medical facilities in the era of social distancing. Misty Robotics, which produces a robot platform open to outside developers, last year launched its own temperature screening app for workplaces and medical facilities, while also working with partners which can make the robot a companion or digital assistant. The pandemic has made it easier for people to view robots as non-threatening and as friends, said Misty Robotics chief executive Tim Enwall. "The elderly don't have contact and the elderly are certainly very afraid of viruses that can come from contact and there's loneliness and isolation," Enwall told AFP. — AFP

EU 'regrets' new US tariffs, looks to Biden

BRUSSELS: The EU regretted a new wave of US tariffs on French and German products that came into force yesterday and said it would seek a trade truce with the incoming Biden administration. The tariffs are yet another chapter in a 16-year spat over subsidies for aircraft manufacturers Airbus and Boeing that turned increasingly sour under US President Donald Trump.

French exporters were hit with hiked tariffs on wine and cognac, while Germany saw new levies on aeronautic parts. "The Commission takes note of today's entry into force of US tariffs arising from the WTO Airbus case on aircraft subsidies," a statement said. The EU executive handles trade matters for the bloc's 27 member states.

"As we have made clear before, we regret that the United States chose to

add further EU products to its retaliation list," it said. The EU is "looking forward to engage constructively with the new US administration to resolve this long lasting dispute as part of a renewed transatlantic agenda", it added.

French wine and spirits exporters believe the new tariffs will cost the sector one billion euros in sales, with the cognac business especially punished. In its last days in office, the Trump administration is blowing hot and cold on trade issues with the Europeans. Washington last week suspended a plan to impose new tariffs on \$1.3 billion in French products in a dispute over a digital services tax.

Meanwhile, outgoing US President Donald Trump's trade chief on Monday urged President-elect Joe Biden to maintain tariffs imposed on China, arguing that they have shifted the balance of power in Washington's favor. In an interview with The Wall Street Journal, US Trade Representative (USTR) Robert Lighthizer defended the Trump administration's tactics of slapping tariffs on hundreds of billions of dollars in Chinese goods starting in 2018.



Baskets of sorted shellfish are seen as the crew of the trawler 'Good Fellowship' process the day's catch after berthing in Eyemouth Harbour in the Scottish Borders. — AFP

"We changed the way people think about China," said Lighthizer, architect of the tariff policy that he argues benefited American workers, even though some economists disagree. "We transformed the way people think about trade, and we

transformed the way the models are... My hope is that that will continue," he said. Lighthizer warned against a return in Washington to the policies of the 1990s, which he said focused too much on dialogue with Beijing that "did nothing." — AFP

Trump tariffs on cognac hit a French success story

PARIS: For the last decade, owners of cognac distilleries have seen their sales more than double to the United States, making their spirit one of France's fastest-growing major exports. Then Donald Trump came along. While the French are small-time drinkers of cognac, Americans consume almost one in two bottles produced in the vineyards north of Bordeaux thanks in part to the alcohol being promoted by US rappers as a symbol of wealth and luxury.

And while millionaires like Snoop Dogg and Jay-Z will still be able to afford their beloved "yak", many other Americans might find it out of reach after US import tariffs of 25 percent come into force on Tuesday.

The US "is a fast-developing and priority market for our industry, which is even showing growth this year despite the impact of Covid-19," the director general of the BNIC cognac industry body, Raphael Delpuch, told AFP. The tariffs were confirmed by the Trump administration on New Year's Eve, marking the latest trade salvo from the outgoing US president and a further escalation of a long-running transatlantic feud.

Cognac, which is to be taxed along with other grape-based spirits from France and Germany, is a collateral victim of a dispute between Washington and Europe over subsidies given to their commercial plane makers, Boeing and Airbus. European wines, cheeses and olive oils have been subjected to 25-percent import duties in the US since October 2019, while Europe has hit products from American orange juice to ketchup with its own measures.

"All French wines and spirits, not only cognac, are now being affected by diplomatic tensions that have nothing to do with us," Delpuch lamented. FEVS, a French exporters' association, has estimated that the wine and spirit sector could lose more than 1 billion euros (\$1.2 billion) a year in US sales due to the tariffs unless incoming president Joe Biden reverses them.

The trade spat has exposed the extent to which the centuries-old cognac houses of the Charente region have become dependent on American thirst for their products, some of which retail for hundreds of dollars. The prospect of long-term tariffs has revived memories of the only major downturn the industry has known in the last 20 years during the 2008-2009 global financial crisis.

Explosive growth since then—exports to the US have doubled to over 100 million bottles a year—has been fuelled by the unlikely marriage of conservative cognac dynasties in their turreted chateaus to the flashy world of US hip hop. Cigar-puffing Jay Z rapped about "sipping Remy on the rocks with my crew" in his 1996 hit "Can't Knock The Hustle", while Busta Rhymes released "Pass The Courvoisier II" in 2001, a landmark moment for the industry. — AFP

Business

Conservative social network Parler sues Amazon over web shutdown

Twitter suspends 'more than 70,000' accounts linked to QAnon conspiracy theory

NEW YORK: The social platform Parler sued Amazon on Monday after the tech giant's web division forced the conservative-favored network offline for failing to rein in incitements to violence.

Nevada-based Parler asked a federal court for a restraining order to block Amazon Web Services from cutting off access to internet servers. The suit comes amid a wave of action by online giants blocking access to President Donald Trump's supporters in the wake of last week's US Capitol invasion and purported plans for new violent demonstrations, especially on the day President-elect Joe Biden is due to take office.

Twitter announced Monday that it had suspended "more than 70,000" accounts linked to the QAnon conspiracy theory in light of last Wednesday's attack, in which five people died. The lawsuit said Parler was due to go dark late Monday, but web trackers said it already was offline early in the day and had failed to find a new hosting service.

Shutting down the servers would be "the equivalent of pulling the plug on a hospital patient on life support," the lawsuit said. "It will kill Parler's business—at the very time it is set to skyrocket."

Parler alleged Amazon was violating antitrust laws and acting to help social rival Twitter, which also has banned Trump for language that could incite violence. "AWS's decision to effectively terminate Parler's account is apparently motivated by

political animus. It is also apparently designed to reduce competition in the microblogging services market to the benefit of Twitter," the complaint said. Amazon said there was "no merit" to the lawsuit. "We respect Parler's right to determine for itself what content it will allow," an AWS spokesperson said.

"However, it is clear that there is significant content on Parler that encourages and incites violence against others, and that Parler is unable or unwilling to promptly identify and remove this content, which is a violation of our terms of service," Amazon said it had been in contact with Parler "over a number of weeks" and that during that time "we saw a significant increase in this type of dangerous content, not a decrease, which led to our suspension of their services Sunday evening."

'War' on speech

In a series of posts on Parler before the site went down, CEO John Matze accused the tech giants of a "war on free speech." Matze also denied allegations that it enables violent content.

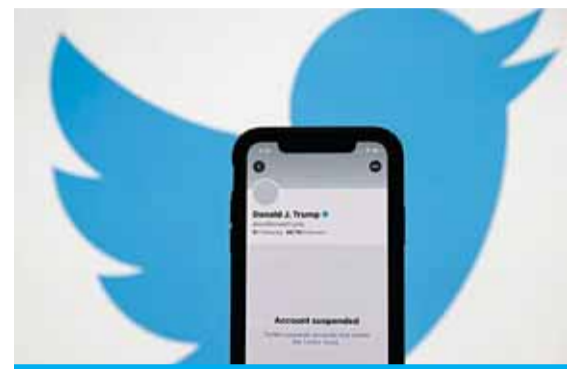
"Our team worked hard to produce a strong set of community guidelines, which expressly forbids content which incites or threatens violence, or other activity which breaks the law," he said in a statement. But he also maintained that it is problematic to police all content because "Parler is not a surveillance app, so we can't just write a few

algorithms that will quickly locate 100 percent of objectionable content."

The lawsuit is the latest twist in a tussle between online operators and supporters of the president that hit a new phase after the siege of the US Capitol last week. Twitter and Facebook each suspended Trump's account, while online payment service Stripe said it would stop handling transactions on Trump's website following last week's assault.

Twitter also said that it had begun purging QAnon-linked accounts Friday, permanently suspending "more than 70,000 accounts... with many instances of a single individual operating numerous accounts." These accounts were engaged in sharing harmful QAnon-associated content at scale and were primarily dedicated to the propagation of this conspiracy theory across the service," Twitter said in a blog post. The far-right QAnon conspiracy theory claims Trump is waging a secret war against a global liberal cult of Satan-worshipping pedophiles. Twitter said its decision to suspend Trump's account and others also factored in that plans for more armed protests have been proliferating on and off the service, including a proposed second attack on the US Capitol and state capitol buildings on January 17.

Parler, which launched in 2018, operates much like Twitter, with profiles to follow and "parleys" instead of tweets. In its early days, the platform



SAN ANSELMO, California: The suspended Twitter account of US President Donald Trump appears on an iPhone screen in San Anselmo, California. —AFP

attracted a crowd of ultraconservative and even extreme-right users. But more recently, it has signed up many more traditional Republican voices.

Trump supporters expressed outrage at the news the platform was being taken down. Ahead of the shutdown, the president's son, Donald Trump Jr., complained that "big tech has totally eliminated the notion of free speech in America." The platform drew fierce criticism in 2018 when investigators found that the shooter who killed 11 people in an attack on a Pittsburgh synagogue had earlier posted anti-Semitic messages on the site. —AFP

Sri Lanka pleads for debt rollover as economy falters

COLOMBO: Recession-hit Sri Lanka appealed yesterday for international investors to roll over bonds maturing this year, a further indication of the island nation's dire financial situation.

The South Asian nation's tourism- and trade-dependent economy is reeling from the twin impacts of the deadly 2019 Easter bombings and the fallout from the coronavirus pandemic.

International rating agencies have already slashed Sri Lanka's creditworthiness after raising fears over the island's ability to repay its debt. Government spokesman Udaya Gammanpila said capital and interest repayments on foreign debt this year was \$6.86 billion.

"We encourage investors to roll over (bonds) and if they do that, it would be a great help for our country," Gammanpila told reporters at the weekly cabinet briefing. Gammanpila stressed that the country had honored its debt commitments last year.

China owns about 10 percent of Sri Lanka's for-



COLOMBO: Workers unload vehicles imported illegally into Sri Lanka at a warehouse as a ban on non-essential imports remains in place, in Colombo yesterday. —AFP

ign debt, according to official figures from August. The government did not say how much of the maturing debt was Chinese. Sri Lanka's economy contracted by 3.9 percent last year, its worst-ever slump. The country has imposed restrictions on for-

ign exchange and banned non-essential imports, including most vehicles. The island is battling a new wave of coronavirus infections with the number of cases nearing 50,000 from 3,300 in October, with 240 deaths. —AFP

Stocks and dollar mixed as bitcoin steadies

LONDON: Stock markets fluctuated yesterday as hopes for the roll-out of coronavirus vaccines and more huge stimulus out of Washington competed with fears over surging infections, tougher lockdowns and brewing political and social unrest in the United States, traders said.

The dollar traded mixed, while oil prices gained more than one percent.

The pound was up around half-a-percent versus the dollar, which weighed on the London stock market featuring numerous multinationals that earn substantial amounts in the US currency. Bitcoin was much steadier after swings of 20 percent in recent days to trade up a much more modest 4.4 percent at \$35,343.

"The fact that vaccines are being

rolled out will be comforting for investors but the first quarter is shaping up to be far more painful than anticipated," said Craig Erlam, analyst at Oanda trading group.

"This may dampen sentiment in the coming weeks, especially if corporate America raises concerns during fourth quarter earnings season, which kicks off later this week." Another focus of attention for traders is Washington, where Democrats are seeking a historic second impeachment of Donald Trump, who they accuse of inciting an attack on the Capitol Building that delayed certification of Joe Biden's presidential election. There is a worry that the move could distract from the Democrats' plans for a bigger stimulus bill to stem the virus' impact, with some warning the row could overshadow Biden's first few months in office.

He has called for a huge package including \$2,000 cash handouts, though analysts said that while markets would welcome a spending splurge, there were concerns about the fiscal implications. Bets on another rescue deal have ramped



In this file photo a person walks past the New York Stock Exchange (NYSE) at Wall Street in New York City. —AFP

up inflation expectations, with 10-year Treasury yields above one percent for the first time since March and talk swirling that the US Federal Reserve could begin to consider winding down its vast bond-buying scheme.

"Ultimately it goes back to the 10-year," Lynx Equity Strategies

said in a client note. A higher yield "points to higher inflation down the road—which is negative for stocks. We are not there yet, but as the 10-year inches higher—the closer we get", it added. Wall Street's three main indices fell Monday, having ended last week at record highs. —AFP

Dutch customs seize sandwiches from UK passengers

THE HAGUE: Dutch customs officials have been filmed confiscating sandwiches and other food from passengers on a ferry from Britain, blaming new post-Brexit trade rules.

Officers in high-visibility jackets and face masks are seen stopping car and lorry drivers at the Hook of Holland port, in the footage filmed last week by the Avrotros public broadcaster. "Welcome to the Brexit, sir... I'm sorry," says one official as he seizes the foil-wrapped sandwiches of one stunned driver, who is said by the broadcaster to be Polish.

The driver plaintively asks the Dutch customs officer if he can "take off the meat and you leave me the bread?" But the Dutch official replies: "No, everything will be confiscated."

Another driver is seen having fish products seized. Drivers cannot say they were not warned: the British government in December gave the example of ham and cheese sandwiches of a food that could not cross to the continent after Britain formally abandoned EU trade rules on January 1.

The new post-Brexit rules say that bringing foods that contain meat or dairy into the EU, even for personal use, is forbidden. The rule is intended to prevent the entry of foods that could spread diseases. The new Brexit rules have also hit grocery retailer Marks and Spencer, which wasn't able to stock its popular sandwiches and meals in France after Britain's official exit from the EU on January 1. —AFP



Goods laid out as Dutch customs officer check vehicles coming off the ferry from the United Kingdom in Hoek van Holland, as new import and export rules apply following the Brexit deal. —AFP

UN seeks \$35m in emergency aid for Madagascar

ANTANANARIVO, Madagascar: The UN's World Food Programme (WFP) appealed yesterday for emergency aid of \$35 million to fight hunger in southern Madagascar, hit by the coronavirus pandemic and a third consecutive year of drought. "Some 1.35 million people are projected to be food insecure — 35 percent of the region's population," the WFP said in a statement.

"With severe malnutrition rates continuing to spiral and many children forced to beg in order to help their families eat, urgent action is required to prevent a humanitarian crisis."

The economic impact of the COVID-19 pandemic has amplified the hit from a long-term drought, it said. Seasonal employment has dried up, affecting rural families who saved this income to help them through the lean season, which peaks between January and April. "To survive, families are eating tamarind fruit mixed with clay," the statement quoted Moumini Ouedraogo, WFP's Madagascar representative, as saying.

"We can't face another year like this. With no rain and a poor harvest, people will face starvation. No one should have to live like this." The WFP currently provides food aid for almost half a million people in the nine hardest-hit districts in the south of the island, and intends to ramp this up to nearly 900,000 by June.

It is seeking \$35 million (29 million euros) for emergency food and malnutrition programmes, including an initiative to feed schoolchildren so that they can stay in class rather than leave to seek work or beg. —AFP

Ford, Toyota face US production slowdown

NEW YORK: Toyota and Ford said on Monday they will slow down or even stop production at US factories as the auto industry grapples with a shortage of vital computer chips. The shortage is caused by an increase in demand for consumer electronics during the coronavirus pandemic, which has left semiconductor producers struggling to keep up.

Ford spokeswoman Kelli Felker said the automaker will this week close its plant in Louisville, Kentucky, which employs about 4,100 people making the Ford Escape and Lincoln Corsair models. The company already planned to idle the plant temporarily, but moved up the timeframe due to the shortage.

"The global semiconductor shortage is presenting challenges and production disruptions for the global auto industry, including Ford, which could have a significant knock-on effect on jobs and the economy given the importance of auto manufacturing," the auto giant said. Toyota said production of its Tundra pickup truck at a factory in San Antonio, Texas also has been affected by the shortage.

"At this point we are assessing the longer term impact, but for the month of January, we anticipate reducing Tundra production by as much as 40 percent," a company spokesperson said.

The Wall Street Journal reported Fiat Chrysler will stop Jeep production at a plant in Mexico and production of other models at a factory in Canada due to the shortage. —AFP

Business

Gulf Bank's virtual draw event to kick off tomorrow at 7pm on Al-Rai TV

Al-Danah's grand prize winner of KD 1.5 million to be announced in virtual event

KUWAIT: With the New Year upon us, Gulf Bank is preparing to announce the lucky winner of the Al-Danah account's grand draw prize of KD 1.5 million. In compliance with national health requirements, Gulf Bank will be conducting the draw as part of the Bank's first virtual draw event. Viewers can tune in to the event tomorrow, January 14 at 7 pm on Al-Rai TV, in addition to the radio station Kuwait Pulse FM 88.8 and the Bank's various social media channels. The draw will be held live in the presence of a representative from the Ministry of Commerce and from Ernst & Young.

Two millionaires in 2021

The Al-Danah account's newest slogan is "Al-Danah Enriches You", which represents the bank's updated draw prize scheme for 2021. The bank has updated its draw prizes with a remarkable increase in the semiannual draw prize, now KD 1 million, making it the second largest prize following the annual grand draw prize of KD 1.5 million. The new draw prize scheme makes Gulf Bank's Al-Danah account one of the most rewarding savings accounts of the year, granting two people the opportunities of a lifetime: to become millionaires in 2021!

Two annual millionaires moving forward

Gulf Bank's General Manager of Consumer Banking, Mohammed Al-Qattan, said: "Every year at Gulf Bank, it gives us great pride to have the opportunity to celebrate an Al-Danah millionaire, and this year, we have the incredible opportunity to celebrate not one, but two, millionaires! As one of Gulf Bank's most long-standing and established savings accounts, the Al-Danah savings account is designed to encourage a culture of saving in Kuwait, and to

reward savers for committing to saving on a habitual basis. We are always especially excited to announce the Al-Danah winners as part of our periodic draws to reward them for saving. We invite everyone to take a more active approach to saving, including by setting aside an allocated savings amount when managing their financial affairs monthly."

Al-Qattan added, "At Gulf Bank, we are constantly striving to provide our clients with the highest levels of customer satisfaction through a multitude of creative solutions, products, and services. With this in mind, we are always evaluating and updating our products in keeping with our clients' requirements, which is why we recently launched the Al-Danah savings account's new draw structure. In the interest of everyone's safety, and in compliance with national health requirements, Gulf Bank will be holding this year's annual draw event virtually, as part of the Bank's first virtual draw event. We hope everyone has the chance to tune in this Thursday on Al-Rai TV, enjoy the many segments we have planned for the event, and join us as we announce and celebrate our newest millionaire. In the meantime, we are wishing everyone the best of luck in the draw!"

Exclusive loyalty program increases your chances of winning!

As part of Gulf Bank's commitment to reward cus-



Mohammed Al-Qattan

tomers for their loyalty, the Al-Danah account provides account holders with loyalty chances. Loyalty chances are the total chances gained in the previous year, which are then transferred to the current year to reward customers for their loyalty to the Bank. Accordingly, all chances gained by existing Al-Danah customers in 2020 have been transferred to the 2021 draws, and this will be repeated in 2022 onwards. Terms and conditions apply.

Gulf Bank encourages Al-Danah account holders to increase their chances of winning by increasing the amounts deposited into their accounts. With Gulf Bank, depositing into an Al-Danah account is now easier than ever, as clients can deposit into their accounts using the ePay service, available through the Bank's Online/Mobile Banking services.

The Al-Danah account provides a multitude of valuable services to its customers, including access to an exclusive Al-Danah ATM card, ideal for depositing money into their accounts at any time. Account holders can now also calculate their chances of winning the monthly, quarterly and annual draws using the Al-Danah Calculator, available on Gulf Bank's Online and Mobile Banking App.

Will you be the next Al-Danah millionaire?

Gulf Bank's Al-Danah account is open to both Kuwaiti and non-Kuwaiti residents of Kuwait. A minimum of KD 200 is required to open an account and the same amount must be maintained for customers to be eligible for the upcoming Al-Danah draws. If the customer's account balance falls below KD 200 at any given time, a KD 2 fee will be charged to the account monthly until the minimum balance is met. Customers who open an account and/or deposit more will enter the daily draw within two days. To

As of January, Gulf Bank's Al-Danah draws will take place according to the following schedule:

Draw	Winners	Draw Prize
Monthly	10 Winners	KD One Thousand per winner (KD 1,000 per winner)
First Quarterly Draw	One Winner	KD One Hundred Thousand (KD 100,000)
Second Quarterly Draw	One Winner	KD One Million (KD 1,000,000)
Third Quarterly Draw	One Winner	KD One Hundred Thousand (KD 100,000)
Annual Grand Prize	One Winner	KD One Million and Five Hundred Thousand (KD 1,500,000)

participate in this year's upcoming quarterly and annual Al-Danah draws, customers must maintain the required balance.

To deposit into an Al-Danah account, customers can visit one of Gulf Bank's branches, or transfer directly through Gulf Bank's Online/Mobile Banking services. Customers can also direct their queries via WhatsApp on 1805805 for round-the-clock assistance from Gulf Bank representatives, or call the Customer Contact Center on the same number. In addition, customers can visit the dedicated Al-Danah account website to learn more about the account and its winners.

Facebook exec says 'no plans' to end Trump ban

NEW YORK: Facebook does not intend to lift the suspension on outgoing President Donald Trump, the platform's second in command Sheryl Sandberg said Monday. "Our ban is indefinite. We have said at least through the transition. But we have no plans to lift it," Facebook's chief operating officer said at an online forum organized by Reuters. The social network last week suspended Trump's Facebook and Instagram accounts in the aftermath the violent invasion of the US Capitol by a mob of his supporters, which disrupted the certification of President-elect Joe Biden's election victory.

Twitter went a step further on Friday by deleting Trump's account, depriving him of his favorite megaphone. Trump also was hit with suspensions from services like Snapchat and Twitch.

"Our policies are applied to everyone," Sandberg said, noting that the platform has removed posts by the president's son and "other world leaders."

"This shows that even a president is not above the policies we have." In announcing the suspension last week, Facebook chief Mark Zuckerberg said Trump used the platform to incite violence and was concerned he would continue to do so. Zuckerberg in late October warned about the potential for social unrest after the election.

Sandberg admitted that the platform faced some hiccups in the 2016 US presidential election, failing to do enough against manipulative campaigns orchestrated from Russia, but she said Facebook had learned from its errors. Before the November 3 presidential election, the social network stepped up efforts to combat disinformation campaigns and suspended many accounts, groups and pages with violent or hate-filled content.



This combination of file pictures show US President Donald Trump (left) and Facebook Chairman and CEO Mark Zuckerberg in Washington, DC. — AFP

Facebook said Monday that it is taking similar precautions leading up to the inauguration of Biden as president on Jan 20, using the same teams to battle misinformation and content that could incite violence. Content containing the phrase "stop the steal" will be removed from Facebook and Instagram, according to executives Monika Bickert and Guy Rosen.

A group by that name was removed from the social network late last year, Facebook said. "We've been allowing robust conversations related to the election outcome and that will continue," Bickert and Rosen said in a post. "But, with continued attempts to organize events against the outcome of the US presidential election that can lead to violence, and use of the term by those involved in Wednesday's violence in DC, we're taking this additional step in the lead up to the inauguration."

Facebook is also keeping in place a pause on all ads in the US about politics or elections, meaning no ads from politicians including Trump, according to Bickert and Rosen. Asked about criticism the social media titans exert outsized power, Sandberg said she was in favor of more regulation and said she hoped to work with the Biden administration, which will take office on January 20.

"We are a private company and we have a service we provide and it is our responsibility to make sure that service is not used for things it shouldn't be used for, like what happened last Wednesday," she said. — AFP

Security concerns block Chinese bid for Australian builder

SYDNEY: A Chinese company's bid for an Australia-based building contractor has been abandoned after the Australian government signalled it would block the purchase over national security concerns.

A "major international" firm—reported to be China State Construction Engineering Corporation—walked away from its proposed purchase of Probuild after it was told the government would block the deal, according to the builder's South African parent company Wilson Bayly Holmes-Ovcon (WBHO). The potential buyer was told the purchase of WBHO's majority stake, reportedly worth Aus\$300 million (US\$232 million), "would be rejected by the Federal Government on the grounds of national security", the company said in an announcement to the South African stock exchange on Monday.

Relations between Canberra and Beijing were in free-fall throughout last year, with China hitting out at a list of issues including Australia's call for an inquiry into the origins of Covid-19 and a ban on Huawei's participation in the nation's 5G network. The row has seen more than a dozen Australian sectors hit with import levies, with the barley and wine industries particularly badly hit. Exporters stand to lose as much as US\$2-4 billion worth of sales. In 2020, the Australian government tightened rules covering foreign investment in the country, with temporary measures allowing increased oversight on takeovers of local firms during the pandemic. Probuild boasts a long list of major projects in Australia, including the construction of headquarters for the biotechnology giant CSL—which will produce local COVID-19 vaccines in the country. Australian media reported that the advice on the proposed sale had come from Treasurer Josh Frydenberg, who also stepped in last year to stop the sale of a major dairy producer to a Chinese firm. Frydenberg declined to comment on the reports. — AFP

Ford to close all its factories in Brazil

SAO PAULO: Carmaker Ford said Monday losses exacerbated by the coronavirus epidemic would see it close its three factories in Brazil, where it has operated for a century, terminating some 5,000 jobs. Losses continued despite progress made in phasing out unprofitable products, which included exiting the heavy truck business, cutting costs and launching new products, a company statement said. A "sustained unfavorable economic environment and the additional burden of the pandemic made it clear that much more was necessary to create a sustainable and profitable future," added Ford's South America head Lyle Watters. The COVID-10 pandemic, said the company, "amplifies persistent industry idle capacity and slow sales that have resulted in years of significant losses." Ford said production will cease at its Camacari and Taubate plants immediately, with only manufacturing of some parts continuing for a few months.

The Troller plant in Horizonte will operate until the fourth quarter. Ford said it would end sales of EcoSport, Ka and T4 once inventories are sold.

"With more than a century in South America and Brazil, we know these are very difficult, but necessary, actions to create a healthy and sustainable business," said Jim Farley, Ford president and CEO. By closing its Brazil factories, the company was moving to a "lean, asset-light business model," he added.

Car sales down

Ford would continue serving South America with cars sourced from Argentina, Uruguay, and other markets, it said. New vehicle sales in Brazil retreated by



In this file photo taken on January 17, 1999 a padlock seals the gates of the Ford Brazil auto plant as security guards stand inside the gates during a protest of the employees in Sao Bernardo do Campo, Sao Paulo, Brazil. US automaker Ford announced the ending of vehicle production in Brazil. — AFP

more than 26 percent in 2020 due to the health crisis, the Fenabrave automotive federation said last week.

Car sales dropped 28.57 percent and that of buses by 33 percent. The closures will incur one-off charges of about \$4.1 billion, said Ford. The news came as a bombshell in recession-hit Brazil, which is battling record unemployment, and elicited criticism of the inability of Jair Bolsonaro's government to create a favorable business environment. Ford opened its first factory in Brazil in 1921, in Sao Paulo, to produce 4,700 automobiles and 360 tractors per year.

In 2019, the company closed its factory in Sao Bernardo do Campo after 52 years in operation, affecting some 2,800 workers. In November, Ford announced its return to neighboring Uruguay after a three-decade absence, to assemble transport vehicles

for the South American market, and creating 200 jobs.

'A madhouse'

"This is not good news. Ford made a lot of money in Brazil... I think it could have delayed the decision and waited because our consumer market is bigger than others," Brazil's vice president Hamilton Mourao told CNN Brazil. Rodrigo Maia, the opposition speaker of Brazil's lower house of parliament, said the closures were a "demonstration of the lack of credibility of the Brazilian government, clear rules, legal certainty and a rational tax system". "Our system has become a madhouse in recent years, with a direct impact on business productivity," he said. Karl Brauer, an analyst with CarExpert.com, said there has been much consolidation in the auto sector in recent years. — AFP

News in brief

SoftBank sells Uber shares worth \$2bn

TOKYO: Japan's SoftBank Group has sold \$2 billion-worth of shares in Uber, according to a document released yesterday, as it took advantage of a surge in the US ride-hailing giant's value. An affiliate of SoftBank's Vision Fund sold 38 million shares for \$53.46 apiece, according to a US stock filing on Uber's website, though it still remains the firm's main shareholder, with a 10 percent stake worth about \$10 billion. The Japanese conglomerate SoftBank has invested heavily in ride-hailing platforms worldwide in recent years, from California-based Uber to Didi Chuxing in China, Singapore's Grab and India's Ola. Its decision to buy heavily into Uber appeared to have backfired when its price plunged following a disappointing 2019 initial public offering, before being slammed by the impact of coronavirus lockdowns devastated demand for hired transport. — AFP

Renault 2020 sales slump on virus

PARIS: French auto giant Renault reported yesterday that sales by volume slumped 21.3 percent last year to 2.9 million vehicles in a market down 14.2 percent due to the coronavirus pandemic. The fall was "principally due to the company's large exposure to countries which imposed strict lockdowns... in the second quarter, plus a another slowdown in the fourth quarter, especially in France," Renault said in a statement. For Europe as a whole, sales fell 25.8 percent to 1.4 million units. Hybrid and electric vehicles held up better than traditional cars in the second quarter and in the last three months of the year, orders in this segment were up 14 percent from a year earlier in Europe, Renault said. — AFP

IMF OKs \$487.5m aid to Angola

WASHINGTON: The International Monetary Fund's executive board announced Monday it had approved the disbursement of \$487.5 million to Angola, which is suffering from low oil prices due to the coronavirus pandemic. The financial aid is part of a three-year agreement for about \$3.7 billion (the value at the time) that was approved on December 7, 2018 under the IMF's Extended Fund Facility (EFF). The EFF provides for longer IMF support for a program, as well as longer repayment terms for loans. Monday's disbursement brings the IMF to a total of nearly \$3 billion granted in aid to the southwestern African country, which has significant oil and mineral wealth, but a large part of its population lives in poverty. — AFP

Costa Rica, IMF in talks to cut debt

SAN JOSE, Costa Rica: Costa Rica embarked on two weeks of negotiations with the International Monetary Fund on Monday, seeking a "viable" solution to its mounting fiscal debt, worsened by the coronavirus epidemic. President Carlos Alvarado called off the talks last October after a wave of protests fuelled by criticism that the government was looking to find a solution in taxes instead of public spending cuts. The negotiations opened Monday via videoconference, with the government preparing to unveil its plan for reducing the deficit, projected to reach 9.2 percent of GDP for 2020, up from six percent in 2019. The country is hoping for a loan of \$1.75 billion. — AFP

Classifieds

Wednesday, January 13, 2021

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Expected Weather for the Next 24 Hours

BY DAY: Fair with light to moderate north westerly wind with speed of 15 - 35 km/h and some high clouds will appear.

BY NIGHT: Cold with light to moderate north westerly wind to light variable wind with speed of 08 - 30 km/h.

WEATHER WARNING			No Current Warnings		
STATION	MAX. EXP.	MIN. REC.	SFC. CHART 11/01/2021 1200 UTC		
KUWAIT CITY	19 °C	12 °C			
KUWAIT AIRPORT	20 °C	05 °C			
ABDALY	21 °C	04 °C			
BUBYAN	19 °C	07 °C			
JAHRA	20 °C	08 °C			
FAILAKA ISLAND	- °C	- °C			
SALMIYAH	19 °C	13 °C			
AHMADI	- °C	- °C			
NUWAISIB	21 °C	08 °C			
WAFRA	20 °C	09 °C			
SALMY	18 °C	04 °C			

4 DAYS FORECAST						
DAY	DATE	WEATHER	Temperatures		Wind Direction	Wind Speed
			MAX.	MIN.		
Wednesday	01/13	Fair	21 °C	06 °C	NW-VRB	10 - 32 km/h
Thursday	01/14	Fair and Partly cloudy to cloudy	22 °C	08 °C	VRB-SE	08 - 35 km/h
Friday	01/15	Fair and Cloudy to partly cloudy with a chance for fog forming at night	22 °C	10 °C	SE-VRB	06 - 28 km/h
Saturday	01/16	Fair and Partly cloudy with a chance for scattered rain	20 °C	10 °C	VRB-NE	08 - 30 km/h

PRAYER TIMES	
Fajr	05:20
Sunrise	06:44
Zuhr	11:56
Asr	14:50
Sunset	17:09
Isha	18:30

RECORDED YESTERDAY AT KUWAIT AIRPORT	
MAX. Temp.	19 °C
MIN. Temp.	07 °C
MAX. RH	80 %
MIN. RH	24 %
MAX. Wind	NW 39 km/h
TOTAL RAINFALL IN 24 HR.	0 mm

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

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

CHANGE OF NAME

I, Abdul Salam Abdul Gafoor Hassan holder of Indian Passport No. Z1959357 resident of Mehsala, District Rigad, Maharashtra, has changed my name to Abdul Salam Abdul Gafoor Gantare for all purpose. (C 0207) 13-1-2021

I, Muzzammil Khan holder of Indian Passport No. R8108878 & Civil ID No. 278081006338 has changed my name from Muzzammil Khan to Sohrab Khan as Sohrab (Given Name) and Khan (Surname) hereinafter in all my dealings and documents, I will be known by name of Sohrab Khan. (C 0206) 12-1-2021



Airlines

Kuwait Airways	171
Jazeera Airways	177
Turkish Airlines	1884918
FlyDubai	22414400
Qatar Airways	22423888
KLM	22425747
Royal Jordanian	22418064/5/6
British Airways	22425635
Air France	22430224
Emirates	22921555
Air India	22456700
Air India EXPRESS	22438185/4
Sri Lanka Airlines	22424444
Egypt Air	22421578
Swiss Air	22421516
Saudia	22426306
Middle East Airlines	22423073
Lufthansa	22422493
PIA	22421044
Bangladesh Airlines	22452977/8
Oman Air	22958787
Turkish Airlines	22453820/1

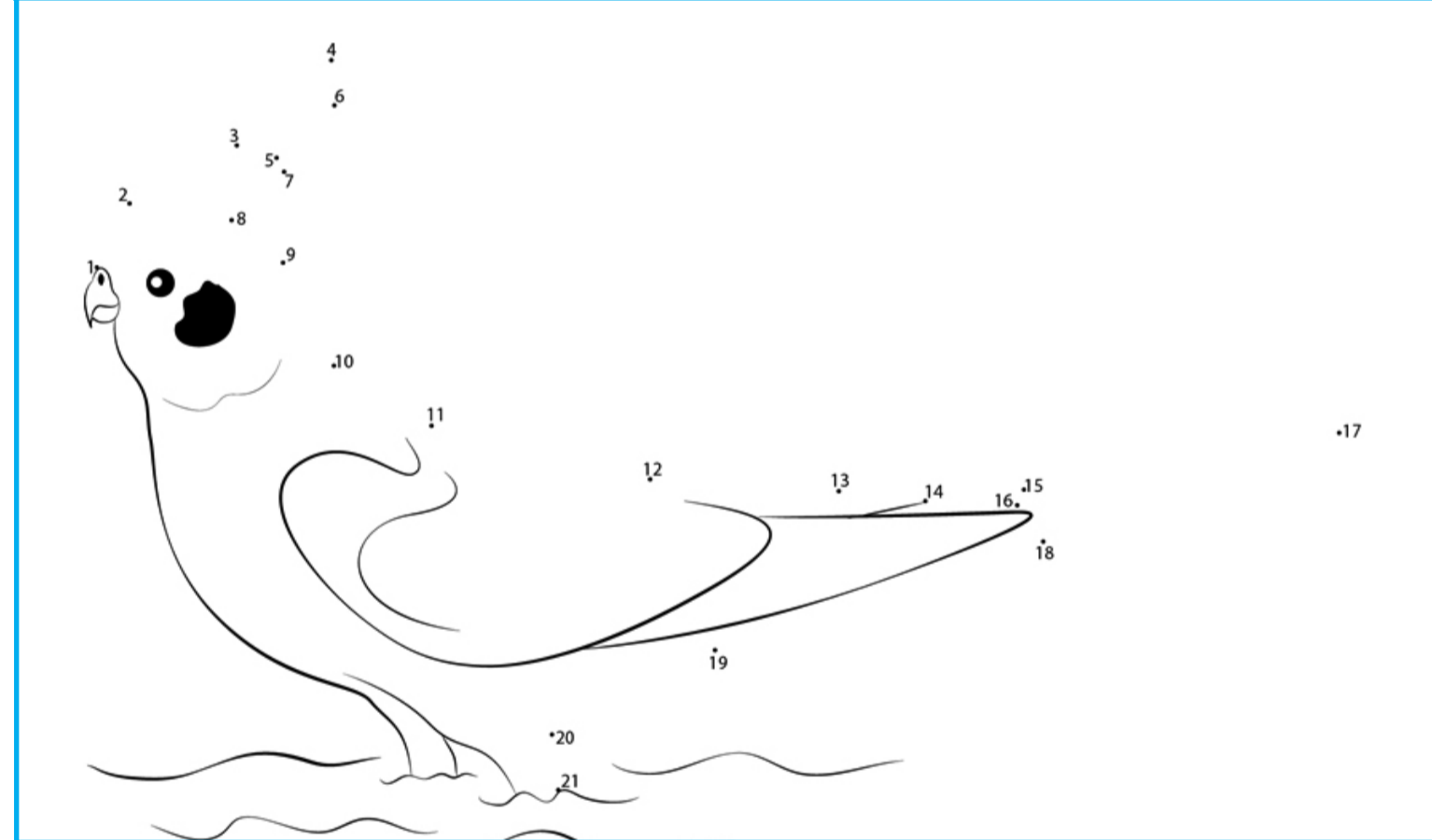
Word Search

Car Makers

Find the names of the car manufacturers in the grid. The names may be vertically, horizontally or diagonally placed and may also be backwards. Which is your favorite car?

ACURA	AUDI	BMW	BUICK	CADILLAC	CHEVROLET	CHRYSLER	CITROEN	DAEWOO	DODGE	EAGLE	FERRARI	FORD	GMC	HONDA	HUMMER	HYUNDAI	INFINITI	ISUZU	JAGUAR	JEEP	KIA	LAMBORGHINI	LAND ROVER	LEXUS	LINCOLN	LOTUS	MASERATI	MAZDA	MERCEDES BENZ	MERCURY	MITSUBISHI	NISSAN	OLDSMOBILE	PEUGEOT	PONTIAC	PORSCHE	RENAULT	SAAB	SATURN	SUBARU	SUZUKI	TOYOTA	VOLKSWAGEN	VOLVO
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Join the Dots



STAR TRACK

<p>Aries (March 21-April 19) You could be expecting an important letter, call, or email today, Aries, and sit on the edge of your chair waiting for it. This might be from a friend or lover. It could be delayed, and this might get you flustered. Distract yourself and do something else while you wait. If you make good use of the hours, the time will fly by.</p>	<p>Cancer (June 21-July 22) Worries about health and work might be on your mind today, Cancer. You could be stressed out over whatever you're doing, and this might have you feeling less energetic than usual. It's a good idea to work a little to lessen the stress in your life. This feeling is going to pass whatever you do. Try to rest a little and have some fun in spite of the stress.</p>	<p>Libra (September 23-October 22) Libra, making or receiving an important letter or call regarding money might be on your agenda today, but circumstances beyond your control could delay it. This could prove frustrating. Take care of whatever you have to do. Distract yourself if you have to sit and wait. Nothing is worth stressing over. The call will come in time, so just relax.</p>	<p>Capricorn (December 22-January 19) Artistic or spiritual inspiration could come your way today, Capricorn, although it might be muddled and you could be perplexed about how to deal with it. Don't try to force the issue. Write down your ideas and return to them later. Someone close might feel unwell, and you may want to spend some time with him or her. This might take some effort, but it won't go unappreciated.</p>
<p>Taurus (April 20-May 20) Unfounded worries about money could plague you today, Taurus. Someone close may have given you some incorrect information, perhaps about your financial situation, but more likely regarding trends in the economy that could affect your finances. Don't waste time worrying. Check out the facts before driving yourself crazy. You will probably find that you've been misinformed.</p>	<p>Leo (July 23-August 22) Today you may want to set aside some time to spend with close friends or a love partner, Leo. Other responsibilities could have you on your own, taking care of errands and other important matters. You may have the feeling of being lonely in a crowd. Don't waste time feeling sorry for yourself. Take care of business and get back to your loved ones.</p>	<p>Scorpio (October 23-November 21) Worries about money might plague you today, Scorpio. They might have little, if any, basis in fact, as you're probably fretting over possibilities that aren't likely to ever manifest. A little caution with regard to budgeting and spending today certainly won't hurt you. It's best to be objective and see the situation as it really is. Otherwise, you could make yourself crazy over nothing.</p>	<p>Aquarius (January 20- February 18) Today you may spend some time by yourself working on your own projects, Aquarius. The desire to spend time alone with a special someone may also interfere with plans you've already made to attend a social gathering or event involving a lot of people. You won't want to give up either, so you might try to find a compromise of some kind. Think about it.</p>
<p>Gemini (May 21-June 20) You don't worry too much, Gemini, but today might be different. Insecurity may arise about a partnership. This might be a current or potential romantic relationship. Perhaps there has been little if any communication between you and your insecurity is coming to the forefront. Don't let fear or shyness keep you from meeting this person halfway. Your insecurities are probably unfounded.</p>	<p>Virgo (August 23-September 22) Today you might concentrate on projects. These could be related to your personal relationships. Whatever the nature of your tasks, Virgo, don't be surprised if you find them confusing. You might be tempted to chuck it all and go out, but this isn't a good idea. Better to try to make sense of the confusion than put it off. It won't get any better with time.</p>	<p>Sagittarius (November 22-December 21) Today you could look in the mirror and be appalled by what you see, activating your insecurity about the way you look. This could send you looking for various treatments. Go ahead if you want, Sagittarius, but your impressions are clouded right now and you probably look far better than you think. If you get together with a love partner, this person's reaction should give you the reassurance you need.</p>	<p>Pisces (February 19-March 20) Various personal issues might be on your mind today, Pisces. You could want to work them all out without distractions, so you may decide to spend part of the day alone. Responsibilities from the outside world might make it impossible for you to take as much time as you'd like. Don't let it get to you. Work out the matters that seem most pressing and save the rest for later.</p>

Lifestyle | Features

Dr Bashayer Al-Majed receives the International Muslim of the Year Award

Dr Bashayer Yousef Abdulaziz Al-Majed received the International Muslim of the Year Award 2020 at the annual British Muslim Awards. The award includes different fields, including economics, law, medicine, and politics, the latter of which was won in 2017 by Siddiq Khan, Mayor of London.

Dr Bashayer's award came as a result of her cultural and social contributions in the United Kingdom. This included her

position on several international forums in the service of Islam and Muslim issues, as well as her attendance and delivery of lectures at several conferences, following her graduation with a Ph.D. from a British University. This made her an honorable model for young Muslims in Britain, and as the first Arab woman to win this award and title, she is a strong role model for women in the Arab World also. In her acceptance speech, she stated:

"I was very lucky to be invited to speak in many prestigious academic conferences to encourage young Muslims and young women, and to show them that young Muslim women can achieve a lot. I'm passionate about what I am doing through academia and through the government. I want to challenge the global perceptions ... (of) Muslim Countries." She concluded her speech with the hadith of the Messenger (May God Bless Him

and Grant Him Peace), "the believer for the believer is like an edifice", which was well received by the audience at the British Muslim awards. Dr Bashayer has said that she will strive to continue her support, encouraging the achievements of Muslim youth and empowering young women to see and reach their potential. The British Ambassador in Kuwait, Mr Michael Davenport, received Bashayer and offered her his congratulations for her award.

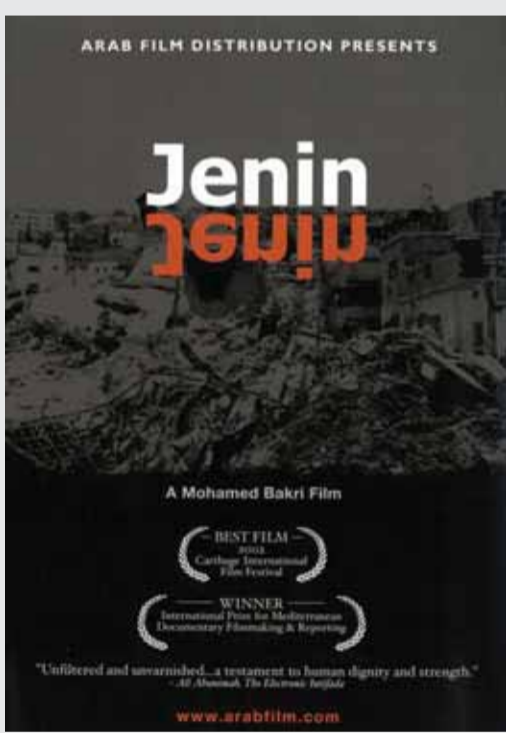


Israeli court bans screening of 'Jenin, Jenin' documentary

An Israeli court has banned screenings of a controversial documentary film about 2002 clashes in the occupied West Bank by prominent director Mohammed Bakri, in ruling seen by AFP yesterday. Bakri enraged the Israeli establishment and Jewish public with his documentary film "Jenin, Jenin" about April 2002 clashes in a Palestinian refugee camp in which 52 Palestinians and 23 Israeli soldiers were killed. The film was banned in Israel after a few screenings, but the supreme court later overturned the ban. An army colonel who participated in the Jenin operation, Nissim Meghnagi, then filed a defamation suit against Bakri after he was accused in the film of stealing money from an elderly Palestinian man, an allegation he denied.

In a ruling late Monday, the district court in Lod found in favour of Meghnagi and banned "the broadcasting and screening of the film in Israel". The ruling said Meghnagi had been "sent to defend his country and found himself accused of a crime he did not commit". It ordered Bakri to pay damages to Meghnagi of 175,000 shekels (\$55,400). Bakri told AFP he would appeal, dismissing the decision as "unfair" and insisting the judge had acted on instructions "from above". Bakri's lawyer, Hussein Abu Hussein, characterised the ruling as a "political decision" aimed at "silencing any voice that differs from the Israeli narrative".

Israeli armed forces chief Lieutenant General Aviv Kochavi hailed the verdict as a "clear message of support for the army". Bakri is an Arab Israeli, a term used to describe Palestinians who stayed on their land following the creation of the Jewish state in 1948 along with their descendants. "Jenin Jenin", which recounts deadly clashes during the second Palestinian intifada, or uprising, has been the subject of repeated legal challenges. A 2008 complaint filed by army reservists who participated in the Jenin operation was dismissed, but the judge chastised Bakri for not including the army's account of the clashes to balance the testimony of witnesses. —AFP



Chris Hemsworth is Hugo Boss' first-ever global brand ambassador

The "Thor" actor has been unveiled as the BOSS brand's first international representative and it's a dream come true as a longtime fan of their products. He said in a statement: "I've been a huge BOSS fan for a long time, so I'm really happy to now represent the brand's collections as global ambassador. "Our partnership over the past few years has been absolutely brilliant. I'm very excited to be working more closely with the BOSS team." Fans can expect BOSS' upcoming campaigns with the 37-year-old Australian star to channel his love of surfing and fitness. Hugo Boss AG's managing board spokesman, Yves Muller, commented: "We are proud that, in Chris, we have been able to secure a world-class star who is a perfect fit for our BOSS brand."

"He embodies a contemporary take of success and masculinity. Chris perfectly exemplifies the modern man of today: self-confident, authentic and approachable. His global fame will further augment the BOSS brand's desirability going forward." Chris first started working with the brand in 2017, when he was named as the ambassador for Boss Bottled and the brand's Man of Today campaign. He said at the time: "I feel great about being the new face of [the fragrances]. It's a huge honor and I really identify with the values that the 'Man of Today' stands for. Life should be a journey of passion, honesty and integrity and be about having a greater awareness of your impact in the community and the people you interact with." —Bang Showbiz



Customers are seen eating inside an Argentine restaurant called Quebracho in Mexico City. —AFP

Mexico City restaurants defy COVID shutdown

Hundreds of restaurants in Mexico's capital reopened Monday in defiance of the city ban on non-essential activities meant to tackle a surge in coronavirus cases. Restaurateurs in Mexico City warned that they faced a stark choice—flout the suspension order or risk going out of business. "We're so desperate that we're opening, because if not—the option they gave us is death," said Giuliano Lopresti, owner of the Quebracho restaurant in the Cuauhtemoc district. He said the move was not "an act of rebellion" but a cry for help. In total, more than 500 restaurants were thought to have defied the shutdown order.

Quebracho reopened with around a quarter of its seats available to enable social distancing, along with the usual sanitary measures such as temperature checks for customers and face masks and shields for staff.

Other restaurants on the same street also decided to welcome diners. For many of them, the home delivery service they are allowed to carry out is not enough to cover their costs.

At the Italian restaurant Atteni, manager Velino de la Cruz said business was 10 percent of its previous level, with seating only available on the terrace, but that the reopening had nevertheless boosted morale. Mexico's official COVID-19 death toll, the fourth highest in the world, now stands at around 134,000, with more than 1.5 million cases registered. On Friday, authorities scrapped plans to reopen non-essential activities in the capital, prolonging a ban that took effect on December 18. Hospitals in the city are struggling to cope with an influx of patients following the Christmas and New Year holidays when families typically gather. —AFP

Niger museum is eclectic national 'mirror'

There can be few museums in the world to rival the National Museum of Niger. It has displays covering art, history, dinosaurs, nuclear energy, craftwork and music as well as live animals, for it is also a zoo. Its clientele is similarly diverse, encompassing visitors who have trekked to the capital Niamey from across the country, school groups, well-heeled foreign tourists and street urchins. The cultural gem of the world's poorest country, the 24-hectare (59-acre) museum survives on a budget that for rich counterparts is the equivalent to money found down the back of the sofa.

Yet it charges a rock-bottom entrance fee—around 10 US cents—so that even the most impoverished can walk in and have access to exceptional things... including wild animals. "Fauna and culture," as the museum says. "It's Niger's mirror, its social and cultural reflection," said its director, Haladou Mamane, proudly ticking off its strengths in culture, history, archaeology, palaeontology... not forgetting the zoo section, "part of a multi-disciplinary tradition." "Here, every Nigerien, regardless of their background, can gain insights about the country," said Mamane, noting that many people in Niger have never been to school.

Hot and arid, located in the heart of the Sahel, Niger ranks the lowest among 189 countries on the UN's Human Development Index. Per capita income is just \$1,040 (855 euros) per year—just over \$2.5 per day, according to the World Bank. Adding to the burden is a crippling jihadist insurgency. Two, in fact—one coming from the southeast, from Nigeria, and one from the southwest, from Mali. The state provides the museum with an annual subsidy of 327 million CFA francs (\$610,000 or 500,000 euros), and income from the meagre entrance fee of 50 CFA francs covers just about a third of costs.

Street kids' museum

Before the pandemic, it received more than 100,000 visitors per year, many of them so-called talibe children. These are children who are unique to West Africa—their parents hand them to a type of Islamic school, where they are supposed to learn the Koran. But they typically spend their days begging in the dusty streets with a metal receptacle strung around their neck, and many find the museum is a wonderful escape. One such was 12-year-old Ismael Mariama, who after playing on the slides and seesaws watched a large lion taking an afternoon nap. "I came to see the animals. I paid 50 francs," he said, clad in worn, grubby clothes.

"I came from Yantala," a rundown district in northwestern Niamey, "to come and see the animals, the monkey, the lions, the crocodiles," he said. "I've seen everything," said the lad, before putting his hand between the bars of a cage to give a biscuit to the monkeys. He added that he had been to the museum's section on Nigerian craftwork and was interested in the leather shoes. Mamane said he was especially proud of the craftwork area—a place that provides a shop window for sculptors, painters, potters and leatherworkers, who can sell what they produce. The artisans come from all over this ethnically diverse country—a sign of "national unity," said Mamane.

"It's a bit hard with the coronavirus, but the museum is a good thing for us," said Ali Abdoulaye, a leatherworker. "These days, artisans are losing out to cheaper Chinese products—but you buy a (Chinese) handbag, and it falls apart after a couple of days." A few meters (yards) from



A general view of a dinosaur skeleton at the National Museum of Niger (MNN) or Boubou Hama Museum, which is also a zoo, in Niamey, Niger. —AFP photos



A general view of a giant crocodile skeleton at the National Museum of Niger (MNN).



A boy stands near a cage at the National Museum of Niger (MNN).



A monkey in a cage is seen at the National Museum of Niger (MNN).



A worker stands next to a lion in a cage at the National Museum of Niger (MNN).



Visitors look at a hippopotamus at the National Museum of Niger (MNN).

the museum's main hall is a star attraction—the skeletal remains of three monsters from the Age of the Dinosaurs. They include Sarcosuchus imperator, an 11m (36-foot) - long crocodile, whose fossil was discovered in the Agadez region by a French palaeontologist, Philippe Taquet.

Makeover

The museum, founded just before Niger gained independence from France in 1960, is planning on a refurbishment and an expansion next year with the help of international donations. As in many museums around the world, it

Beckham inspired to 'step away' from Spice Girls by Sir Elton John

Victoria Beckham was inspired to "step away" from the Spice Girls by Sir Elton John. The 46-year-old star shot to fame as a member of the girl group and, though she stayed with them throughout their chart career, their 2007 reunion and 2012 appearance at the London Olympics, she declined to join in with their later plans - including a 2016 reunion, which was axed after Geri Horner fell pregnant, and a 2019 concert tour - and admitted it was seeing her "dear friend" perform that made her realise she'd never be passionate about music.

Writing a letter to her future self in Britain's Vogue magazine, she recalled: "Remember years ago, watching your dear friend Elton John on stage in Las Vegas. He performed 'Tiny Dancer', as if it were the first time, and you realized this was like oxygen for him. It was a life-changing moment

- while singing and dancing was fun for you, it wasn't your passion. "That day, you started your quest to uncover your own dreams. It was time to step away from being a Spice Girl. For the first time, you were venturing out on your own, and it was terrifying. It was scary to close a chapter that defined you." After launching her own fashion empire and diversifying into beauty, Victoria - who has four children with husband David Beckham - hinted she also has other projects in the pipeline and will continue to ignore her critics. She continued in her letter: "I know you are still reinventing yourself, taking on new challenges, and ignoring the naysayers. You always look beyond the conventional wisdom to pave your own path. "First, you found this passion in fashion, and most recently, beauty. What comes next? I'm dying to know. —AFP



Lifestyle | Features

Pop stars slam UK govt over failure to secure visa-free EU travel

The British government on Monday blamed the EU for a failure to reach agreement on visa free-travel for musicians post-Brexit, after coming under fire from performers including Radiohead frontman Thom Yorke. The singer called Boris Johnson's government "spineless" while Tim Burgess, frontman with indie band The Charlatans, accused leaders of "treating artists with... contempt". But a government spokesman on Monday insisted the European Union was culpable. Britain had tried to secure visa-free travel

for touring musicians as part of an "ambitious agreement on temporary movement of business travellers", but Brussels rejected it, he added.

London dismissed the EU's counter-offer of a visa exemption for performers visiting any of its 27 countries for less than 90 days, according to the Independent newspaper, citing Brussels sources. Stars including One Direction's Louis Tomlinson and former Boyzone member Ronan Keating urged fans to support a campaign calling for a "free cultural work permit", with an online petition collecting almost 250,000 signatures. The visa would give free travel throughout the EU for music-touring professionals, bands, musicians, artists, TV and sports celebrities.

Horace Trubridge, general secretary of the Musicians' Union (MU), said Britain's rejection of the EU's offer was "nigh-on unbelievable". "With the British music business having been devastated by Covid-19 and with no end in sight to the black hole of cancelled concerts, tours, festivals and regular gigs..., the news, if true...is nigh-on unbelievable,"

he added. Last week, organizers of British music festivals said the pandemic had devastated the industry and warned events could disappear for good without more government support. Cabinet Office minister Nicholas True has said talks with Brussels over visa-free travel for artists were "unlikely" to resume in the near future. — AFP



Radiohead frontman Thom Yorke

FROM MACAQUES TO CRABS, WILDLIFE FACES THREAT FROM FACE MASKS

Masks that helped save lives during the coronavirus pandemic are proving a deadly hazard for wildlife, with birds and marine creatures ensnared in the staggering number of discarded facial coverings littering animal habitats. Single-use surgical masks have been found scattered around pavements, waterways and beaches worldwide since countries began mandating their use in public places to slow



In this file photo Gary Stokes, founder of the environmental group Oceans Asia, poses with discarded face masks he found on a beach in the residential area of Discovery Bay on the outlying Lantau island in Hong Kong.

the pandemic's spread. Worn once, the thin protective materials can take hundreds of years to decompose. "Face masks aren't going away any time soon-but when we throw them away, these items can harm the environment and the animals who share our planet," Ashley Fruno of animal rights group PETA told AFP.

Macaques have been spotted chewing the straps off old and tossed-aside masks in the hills outside Malaysia's capital Kuala Lumpur—a potential choking hazard for the diminutive monkeys. And in an incident that captured head-

lines in Britain, a gull was rescued by the RSPCA in the city of Chelmsford after its legs became tangled in the straps of a disposable mask for up to a week. The animal welfare charity was alerted after the bird was spotted, motionless but still alive, and they took it to a wildlife hospital for treatment before its release. "It's clear the mask was there for some time and the elastic straps had tightened around his legs as his joints were swollen and sore," said RSPCA inspector Adam Jones.

Cut off mask straps

The biggest impact may be in the water, with green groups alarmed at the flood of used masks, latex gloves and other protective gear finding their way into already contaminated seas and rivers. More than 1.5 billion masks made their way into the world's oceans last year, accounting for around 6,200 extra tons of marine plastic pollution, according to environmental group OceansAsia. Already there are signs that masks are worsening threats to marine life. Conservationists in Brazil found one inside the stomach of a penguin after its body washed up on a beach, while a dead pufferfish was discovered caught inside another off the coast of Miami.

French campaigners Operation Mer Propre found a dead crab ensnared in a mask in a saltwater lagoon near the Mediterranean in September. Masks and gloves are "particularly problematic" for sea creatures, says George Leonard, chief scientist from US-based NGO Ocean Conservancy. "When those plastics break down in the environment, they form smaller and smaller particles," he told AFP. Those particles then enter the food chain and impact entire ecosystems, he added.

There has been a shift towards greater use of reusable cloth masks as the pandemic has worn on, but many are still opting for the lighter single-use varieties. Campaigners have urged people to bin them properly and snip the straps to reduce the risk of animals becoming ensnared. OceansAsia has also called on governments to increase fines for littering and encourage the use of washable masks. — AFP



This picture shows a macaque monkey playing with a face mask, used as a preventive measure against the spread of the COVID-19 coronavirus, in Genting Sempah in Malaysia's Pahang state.



This undated handout photo shows a gull with its feet wrapped up in a face mask in the British city of Chelmsford. — AFP photos

Rattle to quit London Symphony for Munich from 2023

Simon Rattle will leave the London Symphony Orchestra to become chief conductor of the Bavarian Radio Symphony Orchestra in Munich from 2023, in what has been described as a blow to Britain's classical music world. Rattle, one of the world's most

renowned conductors and a vocal opponent of Brexit, has signed a five-year contract with the German orchestra.



This file photo shows the London Symphony Orchestra's Music Director Simon Rattle pausing between pieces as he conducts the LSO playing at The Barbican in London. — AFP

Jansons," he added. Jansons died of a cardiac arrest aged 76 in December 2019.

Rattle, who turns 66 next week, is a prominent figure in Germany, where he led the Berlin Philharmonic from September 2002 to June 2018. He still

lives in Berlin with his third wife Magdalena Kozena and their three children. "My reasons for accepting the role of Principal Conductor in Munich are entirely personal, enabling me to better manage the balance of my work and be close enough to home to be present for my children," he said in a statement.

'Cultural jail'

Rattle has called Brexit a "terrible

mistake" and made no secret of the fact that he would not have returned to lead the LSO had he known Brexit might turn his homeland into a "self-built cultural jail". He officially took the baton of the LSO in 2017, a year after the Brexit referendum. However, British media reported that his reason for quitting London was dissatisfaction with the home of the LSO, the Barbican Hall, which he views as inadequate for music at the highest level. Music critic Jessica Duchon noted that the chances of London getting a new concert hall now "are slender, given the UK's gloomy economic prospects beyond Covid-19 and Brexit".

Rattle's "move does not feel like a vote of confidence in the UK," she added. Rattle made his name at 25 when he powered the City of Birmingham Symphony Orchestra into the international big league. He first performed with the LSO when he was 22 and conducted the orchestra at the opening ceremony for the 2012 London Olympics, accompanied by comedian Rowan Atkinson as Mr Bean on keyboards. Of his 16 years with the Berlin Philharmonic, he has described his relationship with the orchestra as sometimes turbulent, but never destructively so. During his time in Germany, he reorganized the orchestra into a foundation, giving members more control over its activities and decreasing the say of politicians, while championing contemporary music. — AFP

ORPHANED RHINOS FIND SAFE REFUGE IN S AFRICA SANCTUARY

Rhinoceros calf "Jessie" was just four-months-old when she arrived at a shelter in northern South Africa, bleeding from a cut to the shoulder and deeply traumatized. Rescuers suspect the animal was injured by poachers who took out its mother, hitting the calf with a machete to keep it away. Jessie was lucky to escape alive and land in a unique center devoted to rehabilitating rhino orphans. "It took two days of giving her Valium for her to calm down," carer Zanre Van Jaarsveld recalled. "She was very dehydrated too."

The Rhino Orphanage is tucked away in the lush forests of South Africa's Limpopo province, hidden at the end of a red-dirt track dotted with potholes. Mischievous monkeys dart across the road as a tower of giraffe gallop away elegantly in the distance. A large metal gate guards the entrance to the center-surrounded by several dozen game reserves at an undisclosed location. "If farm workers give information to poachers... they will make more money than they would make in a year's wages," said founder Arrie Van Deventer. Security and vigilance are therefore key to protecting the orphanage, which survives on private donations.

'We're their mothers'

Van Deventer, a former history teacher turned game breeder, started the project after he was called to help with a poaching incident in 2011. Two white rhino females had been found dead in the area, presumably killed for their horns. One of their two calves was still alive and needed a new home. Van Deventer, 67, made several enquiries to no avail. The only options for the traumatized calf, he said, were tourist facilities where it would be pestered by visitors. "I found out there was nothing, nowhere ethical," Van Deventer recalled. "Then I heard myself saying over the phone: 'I'll build one.'" Today the orphanage is home to a number of rhino calves. Most are of the square-lipped species, also known as white rhino, but some of the rarer critically endangered black rhino are also housed there.

The mission is clear: rescue, rehabilita-



Carer Zanre Van Jaarsveld, 26, plays with a rhino calf at the Rhino Orphanage.

tion and release. No tourists allowed, very few visitors and minimal human contact. "If they get too accustomed to people it makes it more difficult to release them into the wild," Van Deventer explained, adding that the grounds were also closed to the public for "security reasons". Four staff and two volunteers, all women, work around the clock to nurse the rhinos, sometimes even sleeping next to the youngest calves in an open faced barn. "We're their mothers," said manager Yolande Van Der Merwe, 38. "They sleep very close for warmth and comfort. "Someone brings (us) food, or if we want to take a dinner or a bathroom break someone comes to stay with them," she told AFP. "As soon as they are left alone they start screaming." Their cries are high-pitched, something like the sound of a dolphin, according to Van Deventer.

Most of the calves have been orphaned by poachers. Rhinos are killed for their horns, highly prized across Asia for traditional and medicinal purposes. One kilogram of the keratin, obtained from their horns, can sell for over \$110,000 (90,000 euros) on the black market. The trade is lucrative and thousands of rhinos have been poached in South Africa over the past decade as a result. At the orphanage, the three youngest residents—two females and a male—impatiently wait for large baby bottles brimming with a mix of milk and boiled rice.

Rhinos gain over 350 kilograms in their first year of life and calves need to feed every few hours. "At five or seven days old they are tiny, knee-high," gestured Van Der Merwe. "They gain a kilo a day at least." By their first birthday, rhinos generally weigh close to half a ton. —AFP



Rhino calves sleep under a tree at the Rhino Orphanage in an undisclosed location near Mokopane, Limpopo province. — AFP photos



Rhino calves are seen at the Rhino Orphanage in an undisclosed location near Mokopane.

Sports

Photo of the Day



Wakeboarder Dominik Hernler performs during a photo shoot in Austria. — Photo taken from www.redbullcontentpool.com

Ozil eyes Turkey or US move as he nears Arsenal exit

LONDON: Arsenal misfit Mesut Ozil has revealed he plans to play his football in Turkey or the United States when he finally leaves the Premier League club. The German has not played for Mikel Arteta's side since March last year and has just six months left on his contract at the Emirates.

He dropped plenty of hints about his next destination in a Twitter question and answer session, with Fenerbahce and DC United reported to be among the teams leading the chase for his signature. The 32-year-old World Cup winner was asked if he would continue his career when he left Arsenal, whom he joined in 2013. "I definitely will," he replied. "There are two countries I want to play football in before I retire: Turkey and USA. If I went to Turkey, I could only go to Fenerbahce."

Ozil, the highest-paid player in Arsenal's history, said he was a Fenerbahce fan when growing up in Germany. "Every German-Turkish person supports a Turkish team when they grow up in Germany," he said. "And mine was Fenerbahce. Fenerbahce is like Real Madrid in Spain. The biggest club in the country." Arteta made the decision not to select Ozil when the Premier League resumed in June after being halted early in the coronavirus pandemic. Before football was suspended, the former Real Madrid playmaker had been a regular under the Spaniard but has failed to feature since and was not included in the club's Premier League or Europa League squads for the first half of the current campaign. —AFP

Golf distances itself from Trump despite his love of the game

WASHINGTON: As much as President Donald Trump loves golf, leaders of the sport are racing away from the embattled US leader for what they say is the good of the game. The PGA of America stripped the 2022 PGA Championship from Trump National at Bedminster, New Jersey, on Sunday, days after Trump supporters attacked the US Capitol.

PGA of America chief executive officer Seth Waugh says associating with Trump would be harmful for the organization's brand and its mission to grow and support the sport. "It became clear to us that our brand was at stake," Waugh told The Golf Channel on Monday. "We thought we were putting at risk that mission if we were to hold the tournament at Trump Bedminster."

The R&A, global golf's governing body, said Monday that Trump Turnberry, a past regular stop for the British Open, was not in current plans for the championship. "We had no plans to stage any of our championships at Turnberry and will not do so in the foreseeable future," the R&A said in a statement. "We will not return until we are convinced that the focus will be on the championship, the players and the course itself and we do not believe that is achievable in the cur-

rent circumstances."

Trump Bedminster hosted the 2017 US Women's Open, the US Golf Association pressing ahead despite protesters outside the club. It was awarded the 2022 PGA in 2014 by the PGA of America, which called removing the event a business decision rather than a political one.

"Right now in the country almost anybody views any decision being made as political," PGA of America president Jim Richerson told Golf Channel. "We tried to take politics out of it and just get back and focus on our brand and what's best for the game of golf. We all believe it was the right decision." Trump's trademark love of golf includes ownership of at least 17 worldwide golf properties and hundreds of rounds played during his presidency. At the 2017 Presidents Cup, Trump became the first sitting President to award the trophy after a 19-11 US victory at Liberty National in New Jersey.

Trump has played alongside such stars as Tiger Woods and Rory McIlroy, who gave lukewarm support after rounds. "Well, he's the president of the United States. You have to respect the office," Woods said in 2018. "You may like, dislike personality or the politics, but we all must respect the office."

Woods, a 15-time major winner, received the Presidential Medal of Freedom from Trump in 2019. McIlroy played alongside Trump in 2017 but said last year he doubted he would do it again. "I probably wouldn't, no," McIlroy said last May. "The day that I did spend with him and others was very enjoyable. He's very charismatic and was nice to everyone... That doesn't mean I agree with everything — or, in fact, anything — that he says." Waugh wouldn't say if he thought Trump was good for golf. "I know he has a passion for it and I know he has certainly done an awful lot of good," Waugh said. "He owns some of the greatest properties on the planet and I know he has been a good steward for those properties. I know he has an abiding love for the game and I hope he continues to have a home in it."

There'll be detractors

Waugh also realizes that in a divided nation, Trump has his supporters even among the PGA of America membership. "We're not naive about the fact there will be detractors," Waugh said. "We hope they can understand we made this not as a political statement but as caretakers for our mission and our game."



WASHINGTON: In this file photo professional golfer Tiger Woods listens while US President Donald Trump speaks during a Presidential Medal of Freedom ceremony in the Rose Garden of the White House May 6, 2019, in Washington, DC. — AFP

Critics of the PGA of America move included PGA Tour player Grayson Murray. The 27-year-old American, ranked 563rd, won his only title at the 2017 Barbasol Championship. "Hey @POTUS you should just host a tournament the

same week as the 2022 PGA championship at your course," Murray tweeted. "Put up a huge purse that players can't turn down. Make the pga championship a weak field or force them to up their purse and cost them more money." — AFP

Olympics organizers say cancellation report 'fake news'

TOKYO: Tokyo Olympics organizers played down a poll showing plunging support for the Games yesterday and said a report claiming cancellation could be discussed next month was "fake news". The comments, less than 200 days before the postponed Games start in July, come with greater Tokyo under a state of emergency over a spike in coronavirus cases and with countries around the world battling outbreaks.

In a New Year's address to staff, Tokyo 2020 CEO Toshio Muto put a positive spin on a Kyodo news poll published Sunday showing 45 percent want the 2020 Games delayed again, with 35 percent favouring outright cancellation. "The number of people calling for it to be cancelled has only risen by about five percent," Muto said.

"The number of people calling for it to be postponed has risen a lot, but that means those people

still want it to be held," he added. "Of course, for it to be held, we have to guarantee that we hold a safe Games with anti-virus measures. If you think of it in those terms, I firmly believe people will get more and more behind it."

Muto also dismissed as "fake news" a Japanese media report claiming the International Olympic Committee and Tokyo 2020 organizers would debate the fate of the Games in February. "When these types of reports surface, some people might feel anxious about them," said Muto. "I want to say that we are not thinking that way at all, and that these reports are wrong."

Tokyo 2024?

British rowing great Matthew Pinsent on Monday called for the Games to be cancelled and for Tokyo to host the event in 2024 instead. The four-time Olympic gold medalist tweeted that it would be "ludicrous" to host an event with thousands of people flying in unvaccinated.

Pinsent called for Tokyo to host the Games in 2024, with Paris taking over in 2028 and Los Angeles moving back to 2032. But Tokyo 2020 President Yoshiro Mori said in a speech on Tuesday that it was "absolutely impossible" to postpone this year's

has been made not to move forward with the award."

Reports at the weekend that Trump planned to honor Belichick tomorrow had sparked calls for the taciturn 68-year-old to refuse it as Trump faces a possible second impeachment for inciting supporters to attack the US Capitol building as legislators confirmed Joe Biden's victory in the November presidential election.

Representative Jim McGovern and Senator Edward J. Markey, both Democratic lawmakers from Massachusetts, urged him to turn it down. "Bill Belichick should do the right thing and say, 'No thanks,'" McGovern told The Hill newspaper.

Belichick has been a Trump supporter, calling him the "ultimate competitor and fighter" in a letter that Trump read during a rally during the 2016 presidential campaign. But, Belichick said in his statement, "Above all, I am an American citizen with great reverence for our nation's values, freedom and democracy."

He added that "one of the most rewarding things" in his storied career was the emergence of



TOKYO: A man wearing a face mask walks past Olympic Rings in Tokyo on January 8, 2021. — AFP

Olympics again, according to Kyodo News. Mori also said Japan will decide whether to admit overseas fans for the Games in the coming months, saying: "We will have to make a very difficult decision from February to March." Japan's government is expected to expand the state of emergency to several additional regions soon, and it has already lowered spectator caps at sports events in greater Tokyo to 5,000 people or 50 percent capacity, whichever is less. — AFP



FOXBOROUGH: In this file photo head coach Bill Belichick of the New England Patriots looks on before the game against the Arizona Cardinals at Gillette Stadium on November 29, 2020 in Foxborough, Massachusetts. — AFP

conversations within his team "about social justice, equality, and human rights". "Continuing those efforts while remaining true to the people, team, and country I love outweigh the benefits of any individual award," he said. — AFP

After 10-month delay, England get COVID-hit Lanka series underway

GALLE: Ten months after aborting their tour of Sri Lanka as the pandemic advanced, England will finally play the first Test tomorrow with the coronavirus still causing problems. Joe Root's team, missing Ben Stokes and Jofra Archer, need a convincing win in the two-match series to keep alive their hopes of reaching the World Test Championship final.

All-rounder Moeen Ali is also out of the two-Test series' opener after testing positive for the coronavirus on arrival in the island on January 3. After England left Sri Lanka without playing a Test last March, and cut short a tour of South Africa last month over coronavirus fears, it's been an unsettling time for the team.

But the players, living in a bio-secure 'bubble' in Sri Lanka, have remained united throughout, according to wicketkeeper-batsman Jonny Bairstow. "Everyone's together. That's been a strength of the team, the unity. It's been a real key throughout this whole period of COVID," he said. Bairstow, who last played a five-day match in late 2019, is expected to return to the Test team in Galle.

With Moeen's isolation only ending today, Dom Bess and Jack Leach will be the premier spin bowlers in the 18-member squad. And the slow bowlers could be crucial. But England do have three reserve spinners in Mason Crane, Matt Parkinson and Amar Virdi. "We can play plenty of spin if required to," coach Chris Silverwood insisted. "They are all here, so they're available. We travel with such a large group so should any eventuality come up we have it covered. It is difficult to win here." Moeen and Leach were key to the touring England team that won 3-0 in Sri Lanka in 2018 and Silverwood said they have the muscle to beat the hosts on their home territory again. "It is difficult to win here. I read (Sri Lanka head coach) Mickey Arthur's comments about our win in 2018 being in the back of their minds and wanting to get revenge for that," said Silverwood. — AFP

Patriots coach refuses Medal from Trump

NEW YORK: New England Patriots coach Bill Belichick said Monday he would not accept the Presidential Medal of Freedom from Donald Trump as planned this week after the "tragic" riot at the US Capitol last Wednesday. Belichick, who has guided the Patriots to six Super Bowl titles, said in a written statement that he was "flattered" to be considered for the highest civilian honor in the United States but had decided against accepting.

"Recently, I was offered the opportunity to receive the Presidential Medal of Freedom, which I was flattered by out of respect for what the honor represents and admiration for prior recipients," Belichick said in the statement. "Subsequently, the tragic events of last week occurred and the decision

Sports

NBA MVP Antetokounmpo propels Bucks past Magic, Wizards beat short-handed Sixers

COVID-19 postpones matches for third straight day

LOS ANGELES: Milwaukee star Giannis Antetokounmpo shook off foul trouble to score 13 of his 22 points in the second half Monday as the Bucks pulled away for a 121-99 NBA victory over the Magic in Orlando. Antetokounmpo, the two-time defending NBA Most Valuable Player, showed no sign of the back spasms that forced him out of the Bucks win over Cleveland on Saturday, adding six rebounds, four assists and two blocked shots.

Khris Middleton scored 20 points and grabbed 10 rebounds and Bobby Portis chipped in 20 points off the bench as the Bucks notched their fifth win in six games. Orlando's Nikola Vucevic led all scorers with 28 points and 13 rebounds, but it wasn't enough in the first meeting between the teams since Milwaukee ousted Orlando in the first round of the Eastern Conference playoffs in August.

Orlando forward Aaron Gordon threw down a dunk over Antetokounmpo early in the fourth to pull the Magic within 88-86. Antetokounmpo responded with a three-pointer and assisted on Portis's shot from beyond the arc as the Bucks rebuilt their lead.

After Gordon's dunk, the Bucks scored 22 of the next 24 points as they put the game out of reach. "He's growing in all ways and it was just two huge plays, because the momentum could've swung on the dunk," Bucks coach Mike Budenholzer said of Antetokounmpo's late-game effort.

It was a tight finish in Portland, where CJ McCollum scored 30 points, including the game-winning pull-up jumper with 9.9 seconds remaining to give the host Trail Blazers a 112-111 victory over the Toronto Raptors. Toronto's Pascal Siakam missed a floater in the closing seconds and the Blazers escaped with a victory after trailing by as many as 17 points. The Blazers posted their third straight win, despite losing center Jusuf Nurkic to a

left quadriceps contusion in the first quarter.

In Charlotte, Gordon Hayward scored 28 of his game-high 34 points in the first quarter to fuel the Hornets' 109-88 victory over the New York Knicks. The Hornets notched their fourth straight victory — longer than any streak they put together last season.

The Washington Wizards notched their first home win of the season, downing the Phoenix Suns 128-107. With star guard Russell Westbrook absent with a quadriceps injury, Bradley Beal led the Wizards with 34 points, eight rebounds and nine assists.

Coronavirus questions

Beal, who had totaled 101 points in his previous two games, was back in action after missing Saturday's contest against Miami because of the league's coronavirus health and safety protocols. But the ongoing pandemic was having an effect on the young season, with Monday's game between the Dallas Mavericks and New Orleans Pelicans postponed, along with a scheduled Tuesday clash between the Boston Celtics and Chicago Bulls.

The latest postponements will make for three straight days of lost games, after Miami's matchup with the Celtics in Boston on Sunday was called off because the Heat were unable to field a minimum eight players due to COVID-19 issues. Some of the enforced absences were due to positive or inconclusive COVID-19 tests, and others to the league's stringent contact tracing and isolation of possibly exposed players.

The Philadelphia 76ers, among the teams feeling the pinch with five players sidelined by coronavirus protocols, endured a third straight defeat, 112-94 to the Hawks in Atlanta. Hawks point guard Trae Young led all scorers with 26 points and Atlanta took a 32-



PORTLAND: Fred VanVleet #23 of the Toronto Raptors drives to the basket during the game against the Portland Trail Blazers on Monday at the Moda Center Arena in Portland, Oregon. —AFP

point lead into the fourth quarter.

Philadelphia center Joel Embiid, back after missing one game with a tight back, scored 14 points with 11 rebounds but played less than four minutes in the third quarter and sat out the fourth. Sixers coach Doc Rivers was still irked that his team had to take the court on Saturday with just seven fit play-

ers between COVID protocols and late injuries.

"We had enough guys tonight, but the other night, we were not happy with the way that went down," Rivers said, although he acknowledged that "No one is going to feel sorry for us. We've been in a tough spot with COVID. I have a sneaking feeling a lot of teams are going to have this problem." —AFP

Smith leads Alabama to coveted collegiate football crown

MIAMI: Heisman trophy winner DeVonta Smith scored three touchdowns as the University of Alabama capped an undefeated season with a 52-24 victory over Ohio State in the US college football's championship game.

Najee Harris also scored three TDs as 13-0 Alabama notched their sixth national title under coach Nick Saban, who now has a record seven overall. "This is a team that was always together," Saban said of how his players responded to the difficulties of the pandemic-disrupted season.

"Everybody bought into the principles and values of the organization and program," Saban said. "And they just did a great job. They played together. They supported each other. This is a great team." Smith, the first wide receiver since 1991 to win the Heisman as the top college player in the country, didn't disappoint.

He had 12 catches for 215 yards in the first two quarters, when his 18 points were one more than the Buckeyes' 17, and he out-gained Ohio State 215-190 yards. He was unstoppable until injuring a finger on his right hand early in the third quarter, departing first to the sideline and then to the locker room only to return in the fourth quarter to watch from the sidelines.

"I'll be all right," said Smith, a likely top-five pick in the next NFL draft. His 12 catches were a record since the current College Football Playoff system was instituted seven years ago. His 215 yards were six shy of tying the record for most receiving yards in a full game.



MIAMI GARDENS: DeVonta Smith #6 of the Alabama Crimson Tide reacts following the College Football Playoff National Championship game win over the Ohio State Buckeyes at Hard Rock Stadium on Monday in Miami Gardens, Florida. —AFP

He helped give Alabama a 35-17 halftime lead, which was 45-24 after three quarters. Once Smith had left, Harris — who finished fifth in the Heisman Trophy voting — picked up he Smith left off. Alabama quarterback Mac Jones, who was third in the Heisman voting, finished with 464 passing yards and five touchdowns. "Unbelievable," Smith said. "We just finished writing our story." Saban, who coached Louisiana State to the title in 2003, notched his

sixth championship with Alabama and his third of the playoff era. He had entered the contest tied with legendary Alabama coach Bear Bryant for most titles of any college coach.

"I'm just happy that we won tonight," he said. "I really haven't thought about that (record) because you're always looking forward. And I just love this team so much," Saban added. "What they've been able to do, I can't even put it into words." —AFP

COVID-19 forces divisional shakeup, shrinks NHL season

WASHINGTON: A National Hockey League season disrupted by COVID-19 even before the first puck drops will start today with defending champion Tampa Bay among the Stanley Cup contenders. The campaign has been shortened from 82 games per club to 56 and scheduled to run until May 8 in home arenas with playoffs to follow into July, bringing hope of returning to a normal October start for the 2021-22 season.

Teams have been realigned due to US-Canada border travel restrictions with all seven Canadian clubs in their own division and new eight-team breakdowns in three US-only divisions. The Dallas Stars have already had their first four games postponed, two at Florida and two at Tampa Bay in a rematch of last year's Stanley Cup Final, after six players and two staff members tested positive last week for COVID-19.

And without spectators in the stands for most clubs over most of the season due to the deadly virus, the league stands to lose more than \$1 billion, NHL commissioner Gary Bettman said Monday. "We're coming back to play this season because we think it's important for the game," Bettman said. "It would be cheaper for us to shut the doors and not play."

Bettman said revenue from spectators accounts for half of all NHL income. "Everybody is going to lose a lot of money to do this," Bettman said. Only Dallas, Florida and Arizona plan to have a limited number of spectators for games among the NHL's 31 teams.

There has been an off-season break similar to normal since the Tampa Bay Lightning captured the Stanley Cup on September 28, beating Dallas four games to two in the best-of-seven NHL Final inside a COVID-19 bubble at Edmonton.

It ended four days shy of a year from the 2019-20 season opener, concluding a campaign halted March 12 by the pandemic with an expanded playoffs in August and September in quarantine bubbles at Toronto and Edmonton that saw no COVID-19 positive tests.

Regular season and pre-season NHL contests in Europe, outdoor contests in Minnesota and North Carolina and the NHL All-Star Game in Florida were all wiped out due to COVID-19 issues. But Vegas will face Colorado and Boston will meet Philadelphia outdoors at Lake Tahoe in February.

The Lightning have the most wins, playoff wins and goals scored in the NHL over the past six seasons and figure to challenge for the Cup again with Steven Stamkos healthy after missing most of Tampa Bay's playoff run, Andrei Vasilevskiy solid at goaltender and Victor Hedman anchoring a strong defensive unit. The divisional shakeup makes Dallas a division rival instead of a foe from the opposite conference, with Carolina and Nashville also likely to challenge among Central rivals.

Ovechkin sparks Caps

Washington's Alex Ovechkin, whose 48 goals shared the NHL lead last season with Boston's David Pastrnak, has topped the league in goals for seven of the past eight seasons and hopes the Capitals can repeat the Stanley Cup title run of 2018 under new coach Peter Laviolette.

The Capitals also boast the NHL's oldest and tallest player (6-foot-9, 2.06m) in 43-year-old



WASHINGTON: In this file photo taken on October 16, 2019 a detailed view of the NHL logo on the back of the goal netting before the game between the Washington Capitals and the Toronto Maple Leafs at Capital One Arena in Washington, DC. —AFP

defenseman Zdeno Chara and the NHL's top assist producing backliner in John Carlson, who set-up 60 goals last season while scoring 15. Boston, which led the NHL with 44 wins last season, should be a factor as well with Pastrnak and a fast, physical lineup.

Colorado, powered by 35-goal scorer Nathan MacKinnon, will be a favorite in the West along with the Vegas Golden Knights, who lost to Washington in the 2018 final in their inaugural season and reached the Western Conference final last year before falling to Dallas.

Hockey-mad Canada will enjoy a season unlike any other with its seven teams together playing only each other. The Edmonton Oilers should be a force behind stars Connor McDavid and Leon Draisaitl while the Toronto Maple Leafs, sparked by 47-goal scorer Auston Matthews, figure to contend for Canadian bragging rights as well. —AFP

Man Utd to face Liverpool in FA Cup 4th round

LONDON: Manchester United will face Liverpool in the blockbuster tie of the FA Cup fourth round, while League Two Cheltenham host Manchester City. Liverpool and United will clash for two consecutive weekends with the top two also facing off in the Premier League on Sunday.

National League North side Chorley's reward for their victory over a depleted Derby was a home tie with Premier League Wolves. Chorley manager Jamie Vermiglio told BBC Sport: "That's what we really wanted. Premier League opposition, great. And there's a bit of history because in 1986, Chorley played against Wolves at home and beat them 3-0, so we just need to do that again."

Should Chorley pull off another upset, they could face holders Arsenal in the fifth round. League Two Crawley, who thrashed Leeds 3-0 in the third round, travel to Bournemouth. The fourth round ties will be played across the weekend of January 22 to 25 with the fifth round taking place between February 9 to 11.

In Premier League news, Tottenham Hotspur's match against coronavirus-ravaged Aston Villa has been postponed with Jose Mourinho's men instead set to face Fulham in a rearranged fixture today. Fulham's match against Spurs on December 30 was itself postponed because of a COVID-19 outbreak among Scott Parker's squad.

"Following Aston Villa's request to rearrange the fixture, and due to the number of players and staff who have either tested positive for COVID-19 or have been placed in isolation by the club, the Premier League had no other option than to reschedule the match," the Premier League said in a statement on Monday. "As a result of this rescheduling, Spurs will now play their home match against Fulham in its place, on Wednesday 13 January at 20:15 GMT." —AFP

Australia, China F1 postponed as COVID hits 2021 calendar

MELBOURNE: Formula One's Australian Grand Prix was postponed to November and China's race was put on hold indefinitely as the coronavirus forced a 2021 calendar rejig yesterday. The Australian race, usually the season-opener, was delayed from March to November, but no new date was set for the Chinese Grand Prix, normally held in April.

The announcement means a second season of coronavirus disruption for Formula One, which was delayed and truncated into 17 races in 'bubble' conditions last year. The record, 23-race 2021 season will now begin in Bahrain on March 28, a week later than the originally scheduled start in Melbourne.

"The global pandemic has not yet allowed life to return to normal, but we showed in 2020 that we can race safely as the first international sport to return," F1 president Stefano Domenicali said in a statement. Many of Formula One's teams are based in England where cases are surging, spurred by a more infectious new variant, further complicating matters.

Domenicali said talks were still underway about the Chinese Grand Prix. An F1 statement said the Shanghai race would be held "later in the season if possible", citing travel restrictions. —AFP

Kuwait lift 28th Crown Prince Cup



KUWAIT: Kuwait Sporting Club players pose with the HH the Crown Prince Cup after beating Qadsiya at Jaber Stadium yesterday. — Photo by Yasser Al-Zayyat

By Abdellatif Sharaa

KUWAIT: Kuwait Sporting Club won the 28th edition of HH the Crown Prince Cup after beating Qadsiya at Jaber Stadium yesterday. The final between the two traditional rivals was attended by Minister of Information and State Minister for Youth Affairs Abdulrahman Al-Mutairi, who represented HH the Crown Prince Sheikh Mishal Al-Ahmad Al-

Jaber Al-Sabah, President of Kuwait Football Association Sheikh Ahmad Al-Yousuf Al-Sabah and other officials and dignitaries.

The match started with Kuwait attacking and almost scoring an early goal. Qadsiya did not wait long in replying, and the teams exchanged attacks until the 9th minute, when Qadsiya's Udai Al-Saifi scored for his team, and that is how the scores remained in the first half. Kuwait were still sluggish

in the second half until forward Akaishi scored in the 65th minute from a free kick. Kuwait's performance then picked up, as Qadsiya began to lose steam.

Regulation time ended in a 1-1 draw and the match went into extra time. The first extra half saw Qadsiya improving significantly. There were scoring opportunities for both teams, they but could not convert any chance. The second extra time saw Kuwait produce a beautiful goal in the 116th minute,

giving Kuwait a 2-1 lead, which they held on to till the final whistle. Kuwait have now equaled the number of times they have won the Crown Prince Cup with Qadsiya.

Meanwhile, Burgan took third place in the HH the Crown Prince Cup after beating Tadhamon 3-0. Burgan's goals were scored by Khalid bin Yahya in the 20th minute, Geovani Silva in the 25th and Rami Bu-Shunaiba in the 92nd minute.



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