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Qatar takes part in UN virtual briefing on humanitarian situation in Lebanon

QNA — DOHA

The State of Qatar took part in the virtual briefing on the humanitarian situation in Lebanon, held via video by the United Nations Office for Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA).

Minister of State for Foreign Affairs H E Sultan bin Saad Al Muraikhi represented the State of Qatar at the meeting.

Addressing the meeting, H E Al Muraikhi conveyed heartfelt condolences to the government and people of Lebanon, and best wishes for the injured for a speedy recovery.

H E Al Muraikhi said that this catastrophe comes at a time when Lebanon is already facing grave conditions and difficulties, therefore, it needs the support of the international community to overcome this critical time.

He noted the participation of Amir H H Sheikh Tamim bin Hamad Al Thani in the virtual International Conference on Assistance and Support to Beirut and the Lebanese People, which was hosted by President of the French Republic H E Emmanuel Macron and UN Secretary-General H E Antonio Guterres, and H H the Amir's assertion on the bonds of brotherhood and solidarity with Lebanon and its people, and H H the Amir announcement of providing urgent relief aid that

» Amir H H Sheikh Tamim bin Hamad Al Thani's participation in the virtual International Conference on Assistance and Support to Beirut highlighted.

» United Nations Office for Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs holds briefing on humanitarian situation on Lebanon via video.

» Qatar says Lebanon needs the support of the international community to overcome this critical time.

» Participation of United Nations' Secretary-General H E Antonio Guterres in the meeting appreciated.

worth the sum of \$50m as a contribution to the relief operations and alleviation of the suffering of the Lebanese people and overcoming their extremely difficult circumstances, as well as additional contributions to the international efforts for the reconstruction of Beirut.

Within a few hours of the accident, a Qatari cargo plane took off to Beirut carrying medical supplies, followed by more aircraft equipped with equipment and supplies, and the installation of two complete field hospitals. A Search and Rescue Group consisting of 50 experts from the Internal Security Forces headed to Beirut, HE the Minister of State for Foreign Affairs added.

H E the Minister of State expressed Qatar's appreciation for the participation of UN Secretary-General H E Antonio Guterres in the virtual briefing on the humanitarian situation in Lebanon in order to highlight the severity of this disaster.

"On behalf of the State of Qatar, I would like to extend our sincere gratitude to UN Under-Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs and Emergency Relief Coordinator H E Mark Lowcock for holding and chairing this conference in such a short time, to highlight the seriousness of the situation and the state of emergency resulting from this catastrophic incident in Beirut," H E Minister of State for Foreign Affairs concluded.



The Minister of Public Health and Chair of the National COVID-19 Committee, H E Dr. Hanan Mohammed Al Kuwari, with other officials during a visit to the National Command Center.

Health Minister praises NCC's role in COVID-19 measures

THE PENINSULA — DOHA

The Minister of Public Health and Chair of the National COVID-19 Committee, H E Dr. Hanan Mohammed Al Kuwari has highlighted the important contribution of the National Command Center (NCC) in Qatar's successful fight against COVID-19.

"Since the onset of the pandemic the National Command Center has played a vital role in Qatar's measures to protect the population from COVID-19. The Center supports the Supreme Committee for Crisis, the National COVID-19 Committee and the different

ministries in achieving their goals. It receives information from across the country and acts as our reference center and our information hub," said H E Dr. Al Kuwari, during a visit to the National Command Center.

"I would like to thank the Prime Minister and Minister of Interior, H E Sheikh Khalid bin Khalifa bin Abdulaziz Al Thani, for his leadership and for making this state-of-the-art center, equipped with the most advanced technologies and a resourceful and talented task force available to us. I am deeply indebted to all the ministries and entities that have contributed to our national

COVID-19 response," added H E Dr. Al Kuwari.

"Looking forward, it is very important for everyone to work together and stay vigilant. Now more than ever it is important to wear your masks, and keep your physical distance as the risk of spread of COVID-19 remains high," explained H E Dr. Al Kuwari.

During the visit to the NCC, the Minister of Public Health met with each of the key teams involved in the Center's response and discussed the challenges they had experienced throughout the virus and their strategies to overcome them. ➔P2

Qatar ranks at top in world Internet readiness index

MOHAMMAD SHOEB
THE PENINSULA

Qatar has become one of the most digitally developed countries in the region, and has performed exceptionally well — number one — in terms of Internet readiness, policy support and adaptability of new technology, in a latest study by a globally renowned research and analysis firm.

Qatar ranks 2nd in the region and 28th globally in the overall ranking, in the Inclusive Internet Index prepared by The Economist Intelligence Unit (TheEIU), a research division of the London-based Economist Group. Only Kuwait (24th) is above Qatar in the region, while other countries such as the UAE (38th), Bahrain (41st) Saudi Arabia (43rd) trailing far behind Qatar.

In terms of Internet 'readiness' Qatar has topped in the world among 100 countries studied for the index.

The 'readiness' category examines the capacity to access the Internet, including skills, cultural acceptance, and supporting policy.

In the overall ranking of the Inclusive Internet Index, Sweden, New Zealand and the United States have occupied the top three positions, respectively.

Other parameters/categories evaluated for the index include Literacy, Availability, and Affordability. Literacy measures the level of education and preparedness to use the Internet.

Qatar has secured 11th position in the Internet 'Availability' category globally, which is essentially a remarkable performance. Many advanced economies such as the United States (16th), France (17th) and Germany (20th) are not in top 10 in this category's list. The 'Availability' category examines the quality and breadth of existing infrastructure required for access and levels of Internet usage.

● In terms of Internet 'readiness' Qatar has topped in the world among 100 countries studied for the index.

● In the overall ranking of the Inclusive Internet Index, Qatar ranks second in the region.



In terms of 'Affordability' or price of the Internet service, Qatar has stood at 42nd position. This relatively low ranking in the world is understandably due to small market size and low competitive environment as there are only two players. Price measures the cost

of Internet access relative to income.

The Affordability category measures the competitive environment and the concentration of the marketplace for Internet service provision.

In a separate study released in December last year, Qatar topped the

region and stood second globally in terms of mobile Internet speed. The country had ranked second in the global mobile broadband speed test in November, in Ookla's Global Speed Test Index.

The average download speed in Qatar was 77.07 Mbps in November while the upload speed was 21.49 Mbps. The internet speed in Qatar is more than double of the global average download speed. The global average download speed was 30.93Mbps in November while the upload speed was 11.88Mbps.

Qatar has emerged as one of leading countries in the world in terms of acceptability and adapting new technologies, innovation and system automation. As a result, the size of the local IT market is witnessing one of the fastest growth rates in the region, which is expected to cross over QR4bn (annually), a local industry expert told this newspaper earlier.

Qatar Airways, local partners launch initiative to help Lebanese people

QNA — DOHA

Qatar Airways, in cooperation with Qatar Charity (QC) and Ali Bin Ali Holding's Monoprix Qatar, launched an initiative through which citizens and residents of Qatar can donate essential supplies for the Lebanese people after the explosion that occurred in Beirut last Tuesday.

Qatar Airways initially launched the initiative on Thursday to support donations from its employees in Doha. It extended it until Tuesday to include citizens and residents of Qatar. The essential supplies will be transported free of charge from Doha to Beirut by Qatar Airways Cargo at the end of this week and Qatar Charity will oversee their distribution.

On Sunday, Qatar Airways carried over 45



The essential supplies will be transported free of charge from Doha to Beirut by Qatar Airways Cargo at the end of this week and Qatar Charity will oversee their distribution.

tonnes of supplies donated by its staff and Ali Bin Ali Holding from Doha to Beirut.

Qatar Airways Group Chief Executive H E Akbar Al Baker said Beirut has always shown its strength and steadfastness in the face of challenges. ➔P2

Qatar maintains business continuity with best infrastructure and digital services

IRFAN BUKHARI
THE PENINSULA

The world-class infrastructure and availability of digital services have placed Qatar in a position to maintain business continuity during crisis situations.

It was evident during recent remote working phase adopted in face of COVID-19 pandemic restrictions. The success behind remote work system lies in infrastructure readiness and government shared services under Qatar Digital Government of the Ministry of Transport and Communications (MoTC).

"Crisis Management and Business Continuity Plan in the

State of Qatar supports remote work system thanks to government shared services and infrastructure readiness to providing electronic services to individuals and businesses," MoTC tweeted recently.

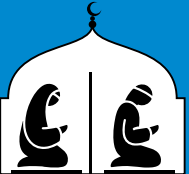
The tweet indicates that crisis management and business continuity plan in Qatar for supporting remote work revolves around four core principles including rolling out policies and framework; activating the crisis management task force; securing best customer services; and adopting remote work mechanism.

It also points out the government shared services which ensure smooth sailing of remote

working and continuity in business including Government Network, Government e-Correspondence System, Government Data Exchange, Government Data Center, Government Contact Center '109', and SMS Gateway.

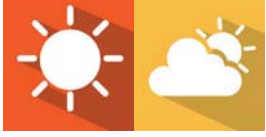
The Ministry's infographic also reveals availability of over 1,000 digital services and 40 smartphone apps by government entities as well as regular update of all services via Hukoomi.

According to information on the MoTC website the Government Network enables a secure and reliable environment for exchanging data between government agencies. ➔P2



PRAYER TIMINGS

FAJR	03.43 am	SUNRISE	05.06 am
ZUHR	11.39 am	ASR	03.08 pm
MAGHRIB	06.14 pm	ISHA	07.44 pm



WEATHER TODAY

35°C | 43°C

Minimum | Maximum

Hot daytime with scattered clouds and slight dust to blowing dust at some places at times.

HIGH TIDE 12:00 - 20:09 LOW TIDE 04:14-15:54

» ALRUWAIS: 35°~37° » ALKHOR: 31°~42° » DUKHAN: 34°~39° » WAKRAH: 32°~44° » MESAIEED 32°~44° » ABUSAMRA 31°~40°



Qatar takes part in UN virtual meeting on Lebanon

The Minister of State for Foreign Affairs, H E Sultan bin Saad Al Muraikhi, representing the State of Qatar at the virtual briefing on the humanitarian situation in Lebanon, held via video-conferencing by the United Nations Office for Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA).

Qatar Airways increases services to Pakistan

THE PENINSULA — DOHA

Qatar Airways has increased its services to Islamabad, Karachi, Lahore and Peshawar as the airline now operates 49 weekly flights to four gateways in Pakistan with its Boeing 787 and A350 aircraft.

Flights to Islamabad have increased from 11 to 14 weekly flights, to Karachi from 10 to 14 weekly flights, to Lahore from 11 to 14 weekly flights, and to Peshawar from five to seven weekly flights.

The airline has effectively increased its flights to Pakistan by 32 percent so that they are now in line with operation levels before the COVID-19 crisis started. All flights can be booked on qatarairways.com or through travel agents.

Qatar Airways Group Chief Executive, H E Akbar Al Baker, said: “We are excited to increase our services to Islamabad, Karachi, Lahore and Peshawar, offering our passengers travelling to and from Pakistan connectivity to the largest networks in Europe, UK and the US via the Best Airport in the Middle East.”

“We remain committed to serving our customers in Pakistan and have worked hard throughout the pandemic to ensure we can operate as many flights as possible, in line with the directions of the Pakistan government. From operating special charter services to a number of commercial flights, we are delighted to now offer a strong schedule of services.”

To ensure a safe travel experience, passengers from

Ashghal completes works on Al Ennabi Street Project

THE PENINSULA — DOHA

The Public Works Authority ‘Ashghal’ has announced the completion of beautification works on Al Ennabi Street Project, within the works of the Supervisory Committee of Beautification of Roads and Public Places in Qatar, as part of the committee’s plan to beautify several streets in Doha city.

Eng. Amna Al Badr, Secretary of the Supervisory Committee of Beautification of Roads and Public Places at Ashghal, clarified that Al Ennabi Street Project, located in the western parts of Doha in Muaither area, is surrounded with many residential and commercial facilities. The project included the construction of pedestrian and cycle paths with a length of 1.7km along Al Ennabi Street

with many trees and bushes adding the aesthetic appearance to the street.

Also, pedestrian tracks and cycle paths are constructed connecting with Umm Al Doom Street and Al Rayyan Al Jadeed Street. Several trees are planted to keep the paths shaded throughout and the natural environment is reserved. The project also included the construction of 1.2km of treated water network.

The implementation of cycle path along Al Ennabi Street within the project has achieved completion of connected Cycle paths beginning from Umm Al Dome Street up to Dukhan highway, linking many important spots such as Al Shafi Street, Education City, Golf Club, and this comes within the plan of the committee to implement a connected cycle path network in Qatar.

OFFICIAL NEWS

Amir congratulates President of Ecuador on Independence Day

DOHA: Amir H H Sheikh Tamim bin Hamad Al Thani, Deputy Amir H H Sheikh Abdullah bin Hamad Al Thani, and Prime Minister and Minister of Interior H E Sheikh Khalid bin Khalifa bin Abdulaziz Al Thani sent yesterday cables of congratulations to President of the Republic of Ecuador H E Moreno on the anniversary of his country’s Independence Day. **-QNA**

Qatar strongly condemns shooting incident in Niger

DOHA: The State of Qatar has expressed its strong condemnation and denunciation of the shooting incident that took place in south-western Niger, which resulted in the killing of six French and two Nigeriens.

In a statement issued yesterday, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs reiterated the State of Qatar’s firm stance on rejecting violence and terrorism regardless of motives and causes.

The statement expressed Qatar’s condolences to the families of the victims and to the governments and peoples of France and Niger. **-QNA**

Doha Municipality records 812 abandoned vehicles in July

DOHA: The General Monitoring Section at Doha Municipality recorded 812 abandoned vehicles out of them 137 abandoned vehicles were removed in July, 2020.

The municipal inspectors caught 498 violations which made reconciliation later and 22 violations were referred to the security agency for further legal action, said the Ministry of Municipality and Environment in statement. The inspectors made 2,180 regular inspection visits last month.

Meanwhile, Al Wakra Municipality removed 30 abandoned vehicles and issued tickets to 85 erring vehicles in July. The municipal inspectors made 266 inspection visits during which they recorded 97 violations which were made reconciliation later.

Ambassador visits Qatari International Search & Rescue Group’s Team at Beirut port

QNA — BEIRUT

Ambassador of the State of Qatar to the Republic of Lebanon H E Mohammed Hassan Jaber Al Jaber paid a visit to the site of the explosion at Beirut port, in the presence of a delegation from the Lebanese army command and a number of diplomats.

During the visit, HE the Ambassador inspected the team of the Qatari International Search and Rescue Group participating in the rescue operation at Beirut port, led by Lieutenant Colonel Abdullah Eid Al Mohannadi.

Lieutenant Colonel Al Mohannadi briefed H E the Ambassador on the progress of the work of the team and the objectives of missions entrusted to it in searching for missing persons and victims in coordination with the Lebanese army and civil defense.



Shipment of medical equipment for Qatar’s field hospitals arrives in Beirut

QNA — BEIRUT

A shipment of medical equipment for the two field hospitals provided by the State of Qatar to Lebanon arrived at Rafic Hariri International Airport, on board an Amiri Air Force aircraft, as part of the air bridge established by the State of Qatar in the wake of Beirut Port explosion.

Medical and humanitarian aid continues to flow from the State of Qatar to Beirut within the framework of Qatar’s support for the brothers in Lebanon.

H E Qatar’s Ambassador to the Lebanese Republic Mohammed Hassan Jaber Al Jaber, HE Brigadier General Elias Youssef, representing the Commander in Chief of the Lebanese Armed Forces



General Joseph Aoun, were present upon the arrival of the medical equipment shipment, along with a number of diplomats at the Qatari embassy.

Qatar Airways, local partners launch initiative to help Lebanese people

FROM PAGE 1

H E Al Baker added that he is confident that the city will recover from the effects of this crisis and return stronger than it was before.

Charge d’Affaires at the Lebanese embassy in Qatar Farah Berri extended in the name of Lebanon his deepest thanks and appreciation to Amir H H Sheikh Tamim bin Hamad Al Thani for the generous gesture towards the Lebanese people after the tragedy of the Beirut port explosion, praising that the State of Qatar’s generous support and its kind people who were always the first to help Lebanon in all the circumstances and hardships that afflicted it.

For his part, Assistant CEO of Operations and International Partnerships at Qatar Charity Faisal Al Fahida said that within the framework of coordination

and cooperation between Qatar Charity and Qatar Airways, a plane carrying food and medical supplies for the brothers in Lebanon left for Beirut, explaining that the staff of the Qatar Charity office and the local executive partners in Lebanon will receive the plane in order to distribute aid to the affected families, in continuation of the field assistance that Qatar Charity has been doing since the beginning of the accident to provide aid to Lebanese people.

Chairman of the Board of Directors of Ali bin Ali Holding Nabeel Ali bin Ali stressed that through such initiatives, solidarity and support for the Lebanese people as well as endeavor to support humanitarian issues during these difficult circumstances are emphasized in cooperation with partners and the local community.

FROM PAGE 1

“Our teams at the National Command Center have been working 24-hours-a-day in collaboration with all government agencies to maintain security and safety during the pandemic under the supervision of the Supreme Committee for Crisis Management,” said Major General Khalifa Abdullah Al Nuaimi, Head of the NCC.

“Qatar has shown great strength and resilience throughout the pandemic and this has been achieved through a comprehensive, cross-sectoral approach to the country’s COVID-19 strategy. The Ministry of Interior is proud of the role the National Command Center has played in supporting Qatar’s healthcare sector during this national crisis,” added Major General Al Nuaimi.

Qatar maintains business continuity with best infrastructure and digital services

FROM PAGE 1

The Government Network comprises 100 government entities, and facilitates access to the Internet, in addition to providing access to existing shared government services and future government applications.

The Government e-Correspondence System has been

developed to provide all government entities with a secure and robust system for sending and receiving correspondences (official letters) through the government network.

As many as 125,365 government e-correspondences were done via Government e-Correspondence System

(Morasalat) in the first six months of 2020, the Ministry of Transport and Communications tweeted.

The Government Data Exchange system helps government entities to raise their efficiency and improves collaboration between them to provide services to the public. Through this centralized back-end data

exchange system, entities no longer require the public to submit hardcopy documents for verification purposes. Such verifications can be done through this system directly with the data sources entities, therefore increasing the entities to deliver end-to-end e-services to the public.

The Government Data Center offers a centralized facility to host government entities’ IT infrastructure and provides essential hosting and basic monitoring services for all government entities.

The Government Contact Center ‘109’ receives public inquiries and complaints 24/7.

The Ministry of Transport and Communications (MoTC) has implemented the “Government Call Center” project to provide supporting services to the public and communicate with customers, on one hand, and with government and semi-government entities, on the other hand.



Al Muraikhi receives copies of credentials of Turkey, Sudan and India Ambassadors

Minister of State for Foreign Affairs H E Sultan bin Saad Al Muraikhi received separately yesterday copies of the credentials of H E Mehmet Mustafa Goksu (top left), Ambassador of the Republic of Turkey; H E Abd Al Rahim Al Siddig Mohammed, Ambassador of the Republic of Sudan, and H E Deepak Mittal (top right), Ambassador of the Republic of India to the State of Qatar. H E the Minister of State for Foreign Affairs wished the new Ambassadors success in their mission, assuring to provide all support to upgrade bilateral relations between the State of Qatar and Turkey, Sudan and India to closer cooperation in various fields.

Public advised of COVID-19 precautions for most vulnerable

FAZEENA SALEEM
THE PENINSULA

Though, the number of corona-virus (COVID-19) cases are on decline, the Ministry of Public Health (MoPH) has reminded that now more than ever, public must be careful and protect the most vulnerable.

The Ministry has also stressed on the importance of seeking dedicated services and of COVID-19 safety precautions for elderly people and those with chronic illnesses.

Through notifications on different social media platforms, the Ministry and its partners have informed the public about Elderly Daycare Unit and The National Alzheimer's and Memory Services helpline named 'Raha.'

Elderly Daycare Unit is open

from 7am to 10pm every day at Rumailah Hospital. Its services are open for people above the age of 60 years with medical problems that are not life-threatening but need urgent medical attention.

Rapid assessment and management are done by the specialist geriatric multidisciplinary team in a less busy and age-friendly setting. Public can call the unit on 33253128 or 55193240 to arrange an appointment.

The National Alzheimer's and Memory Services will provide information about Alzheimer's and related dementias and memory loss while giving support to help people manage the impact of the condition at the same time.

Helpline (40262222) service is available between 8am and

3pm from Sunday to Thursday.

A multidisciplinary team including geriatricians, geriatric psychiatrists, psychologist and specialised nurses with multi-lingual skills are assigned to support callers of the helpline.

In continues social media campaigns the Ministry has insisted the safety of elderly and those with chronic illnesses, during the phased lifting of COVID-19 restrictions.

"If you are over 65 years of age, especially if you have underlying medical problems like cardiovascular disease, diabetes, chronic respiratory disease, and cancer, you can experience more severe symptoms and are more likely to need intensive hospital care if you get the infection," said the Ministry.

Elderly and those with

chronic conditions are also urged to follow the instructions of the Ministry by practicing physical distancing, staying home, avoiding crowds, parks and refraining from touching one another or surfaces.

However the Ministry has said that, "For any life-threatening conditions, chest pain, suspected stroke or difficulty breathing, please dial 999 or visit your nearest Emergency Department."

"If you have health-related questions regarding COVID-19, please call 16000 or visit www.moph.gov.qa," it added.

To mention, in May this year, Qatar set up targeted care to protect elderly, most vulnerable during COVID-19

Hamad Medical Corporation in collaboration with the Ministry of Public Health and

Primary Health Care Corporation (PHCC), established a comprehensive plan to help protect the elders, the vulnerable group of society from COVID-19.

Also the World Health Organization has repeated that older adults (60 & above) or people with underlying health conditions are at higher risk of catching and developing severe forms of COVID-19. It has also said that they should delay or cancel any travel plans.

"Because you are at a higher risk of serious illness or even death from COVID-19, you should delay or cancel travel plans," said the WHO in a social media message.

In an unavoidable situation the WHO advised that older people should take all safety precautions while travelling.

315 new virus cases recorded as 284 recover

THE PENINSULA — DOHA

The Ministry of Public Health (MoPH) yesterday announced the registration of 315 new confirmed cases of COVID-19 in the country. Another 284 people have recovered, bringing the total number of recovered cases in Qatar to 109,993.

The Ministry has also reported four new deaths due to COVID-19. Two of them were aged 46 and 57, and other two were at the age of 60, who were receiving medical care.

All new cases have been introduced to isolation and are receiving necessary healthcare according to their health status.

The Ministry further said that measures to tackle COVID-19 in Qatar have succeeded in flattening the curve and limiting the spread of the virus. The number of daily new cases and hospital admissions has gradually declined over the past few weeks.

The Ministry has also said that Qatar has one of the lowest COVID-19 death rates in the world, as a result of Qatar's young population, proactive testing to identify cases early, expanding hospital capacity, especially intensive care to ensure all patients receive the medical care they need, protecting the elderly and those with chronic diseases.

However, the Ministry has emphasized on the importance of taking precautions against COVID-19.

"Even though restrictions are being lifted, and numbers are declining, this does not mean that the COVID-19 pandemic is finished in Qatar — every day between 50 and 100 people are admitted to hospital with moderate to severe COVID-19 symptoms," the Ministry said.

Over 867 tonnes of local vegetables sold through marketing programs in July

THE PENINSULA — DOHA

Over 867 tonnes of local vegetables were sold under 'Qatar Farms Program' and 'Premium Qatar Farms Program' in July, 2020.

Qatar Farms Program helped in marketing over 624 tonnes vegetables and the contribution of Premium Qatar Farms Program was 243 tonnes



of vegetables, said the Ministry of Municipality and Environment in a statement.

The marketing program of local products is being run by the Ministry of Municipality and Environment in cooperation with the Ministry of Commerce and Industry at a number of major commercial outlets like Al Meera, Lulu Hypermarkets, Family Food Center (FFC), Carrefour.

Both programs enable local farms to supply their produce to commercial outlets without middlemen.

The initiatives aim at proving reasonable prices to local farmers for their investments and hard-work by offering farm fresh vegetables to the customers at competitive prices. The good yield also encourages local farms to increase their products.

QA's Privilege Club extends Qmiles policy

THE PENINSULA — DOHA

Qatar Airways' loyalty programme, Privilege Club, has announced a change to its Qmiles policy in efforts to enhance the programme to further honour members loyalty. When a member earns or spends Qmiles, their balance is valid for 36 months.

Members can now earn or spend their Qmiles for as long as they stay active with the programme. This enhancement is among the initial steps in Privilege Club's journey of change in exceeding expectations from the airline passengers can always rely on.

Qatar Airways Group Chief Executive, H E Akbar Al Baker said: "At Qatar Airways, we are dedicated to provide our promised five-star service to our passengers and our Privilege Club plays an important role in this. We want to reward our most loyal customers with generosity and flexibility. As such, we have embarked on a journey of change within Privilege Club that puts our



members and their needs at the forefront."

"Privilege Club has recently undergone multiple changes and our enhanced Qmiles policy is the first major step towards perfecting our loyalty programme with many more exciting new initiatives planned in the coming months. It is a true delight to see our loyal members enjoy our programme and I am very excited for what is to come."

Privilege Club launched in year 2000 as a form of appreciation to Qatar Airways' loyal

passengers, offering them the opportunity to earn Qmiles when travelling on Qatar Airways, oneworld® airlines, or any of the airlines' partners. It has since served as another convenient means of payment at the award-winning Qatar Duty Free (QDF) outlets, Oryx Galleria in Doha and now at Al Maha meet and assist services at Hamad International Airport (HIA).

Privilege Club offers four membership tiers – Burgundy, Silver, Gold and Platinum – each with their own exclusive benefits for members to enjoy.

Mathaf holds online summer camp

RAYNALD C RIVERA
THE PENINSULA

Mathaf: Arab Museum of Modern Art kicks off today an online summer camp for children to learn about modern and contemporary art through various educational activities highlighting the museum's collection and exhibitions.

In a social media post yesterday, Mathaf invites parents whose children have been interested in art to have them join the programme which offers a series of eight short videos catered to two age groups namely five to seven years old and eight to 12 years old.

The activities will be presented on @MathafModern IGTV weekly starting today and will continue on August 18 and 25 and September 1.

Mathaf said the summer camp is an annual program dedicated for young children to learn about the museum's collection and exhibitions

through deep observation, discussion and analysis of artworks and participating in hands-on learning activities. The program introduces children to different concepts and practices behind modern and contemporary art.

Recently, Mathaf launched three major exhibitions including two major monograph exhibitions by leading women artists and an extensive survey of art and culture in Doha from 1960 till today. These exhibitions are part of the extensive programme of exhibitions, artist residencies, research projects, discussions, workshops and community events taking place in line with Mathaf's 10th year anniversary.

The exhibitions namely "Yto Barrada: My Very Educated Mother Just Served Us Nougat", "Huguette Caland: Faces and Places" and "Lived Forward: Art and Culture in Doha from 1960–2020" run until November 30.

Established by Qatar Museums in

partnership with Qatar Foundation, Mathaf has a significant role to play in increasing understanding and appreciation of modern and contemporary artists from the Arab world. The museum's programme features world class exhibitions by leading artists alongside regular survey shows from its permanent collection, which is the largest and most important of modern art from North Africa, Middle East, and West Asia.

Mathaf also provides a unique platform for rising young generation artists, as well as organising extensive education programmes, and producing authoritative documentation and peer reviewed academic research.

Work continues on the development of its pioneering Mathaf Encyclopedia, a bilingual, peer-reviewed online resource providing free in-depth information on modern and contemporary artists from Mathaf's collection.

4th edition of 'Seeds for the Future' scholarship program launched

THE PENINSULA — DOHA

Huawei Technologies LLC has collaborated with the Communications Regulatory Authority (CRA), Qatar University, Hamad Bin Khalifa University and Community College of Qatar where 35 students will participate in a week online learning "Seeds for the Future" which began yesterday and will conclude on August 14, 2020.

This weeklong intensive courses covers the latest developments in cloud computing, Internet of Things (IoT), Artificial Intelligence (AI), 5G, Smart Home, Cyber Security, Digital Trade, Digital Economy, Digital Transformation and industry trends.

The initiative is part of the long-term strategy of building highly skilled national cadres skillset and experience readiness to enter the workforce and future leadership programs. This collaboration between the government and private sector on programs such as Seeds for the Future, highlights the importance of the close relationship between the two sectors in working together to enable

future talents, expose them to cutting edge futuristic technologies where growth is taking place.

"I would like to thank Huawei Technologies LLC for their efforts in conducting the 4th edition of Qatar's "Seeds for the Future" program to educate the students and develop their information and communications technology (ICT) skills and knowledge. This year the program is conducted online which is a sign of the key role that the ICT sector plays in terms of business continuity during crises, like the exceptional circumstances related to COVID-19 pandemic," said Mohammed Ali Al-Mannai, President of CRA.

He added: "The CRA encourages youth to develop their skills and knowledge about this dynamic sector, that contributes fundamentally in various aspects of life, and from our side we work to ensure that the ICT sector develops to meet the needs of the public, contribute to achieving Qatar National Vision 2030 goals, transform Qatar to a digital country and develop a knowledge-based economy,"



Al Muraikhi bids farewell to Kazakhstan envoy
Minister of State for Foreign Affairs H E Sultan bin Saad Al Muraikhi met yesterday with Ambassador of the Republic of Kazakhstan to Qatar H E Askar Shokybayev on the occasion of the end of his tenure in the country. H E the Minister of State for Foreign Affairs extended thanks to H E the Ambassador for his efforts in supporting and strengthening the bilateral relations and wished him success in his future duties.

QTM exhibition postponed by a year

THE PENINSULA — DOHA

NeXTfairs, the multi-format events organiser, has announced that in view of global spread of COVID-19, the first edition of Qatar Travel Mart (QTM), which was scheduled to be held from November 17 to 19 at Doha Exhibition and Convention Centre (DECC) will now be held from November 16 to 18 in 2021.

The move has been confirmed after discussions with all stakeholders and with a view to allow all participants

to safely navigate through the impacts of COVID-19, said a statement.

Speaking about the postponement, Rawad Sleem, General Manager of NeXTfairs, said: “Considering the effects of the current crisis on the travel and tourism sector, we have had intense discussions with our strategic partners, founding partners and strategic sponsors.”

“The welfare of our exhibitors is our priority and taking into consideration the recommendations of the relevant industry pioneers and partners

regarding the economic slowdown in the large markets, we have come to the smart decision to postpone the physical exhibition by a year.”

“The delay will also help the industry understand the long-term effects of the pandemic and pave the way to a new line of thinking. Our team is constantly monitoring the global situation and it was concluded that the announcement of the postponement should be done at the earliest to enable our exhibitors and partners to make necessary alterations to their plans,” said Saleem.

KIA Motors unveils Sonet, an all new smart urban compact SUV

THE PENINSULA — DOHA

Kia Motors Corporation, one of the world’s largest auto-makers, has revealed the Kia Sonet to the world in a digital presentation.

Manufactured at Kia’s state-of-the-art production facility at Anantapur, Andhra Pradesh, the Sonet is Kia’s all-new smart urban compact SUV, and the brand’s latest made-in-India global product after the Seltos.

The new Sonet marks Kia Motors’ entry into the



burgeoning compact SUV segment, and sets new

benchmarks with its first-in-class features.

The world premiere of the production-ready model follows the global unveiling of the Sonet concept at the Delhi Auto Expo in February 2020. Sales of the new car will commence soon in India, with sales in many of Kia’s global markets due to follow.

“Kia Motors continues to be recognised globally through products which offer exquisite design and world-class

Ooredoo ONE to include Apple TV 4K

THE PENINSULA — DOHA

Ooredoo has announced that the new and existing customers can now get an Apple TV 4K set-top box as part of their Ooredoo ONE monthly subscription plan.

Apple TV 4K delivers the highest quality cinematic experience of stunning 4K HDR visuals and immersive sound with Dolby Atmos. Since the Ooredoo tv app is integrated with the Apple TV app, customers will be able to access on-demand programmes in the Watch Now section, and add shows or movies to Up Next, ensuring they never miss a new episode.

Customers who select the Apple TV 4K will also enjoy a bundle of entertainment with OSN El Farq, Starz Play and Ooredoo tv.

To complement the best entertainment in Qatar, customers will be able to use the Apple TV app to buy or rent films and subscribe to Apple TV+ and Apple TV channels, as well as enjoy Apple Music, Apple Arcade and thousands of other apps, including games, fitness and education, all through one device built for the biggest screen in the home.

Ooredoo One customers receiving Apple TV 4K will also be able to enjoy a limited time offer of one year of Apple TV+ included for free, so they can watch Apple Originals from the world’s greatest storytellers on the Apple TV app.

Apple TV 4K delivers the highest quality cinematic experience of stunning 4K HDR visuals and immersive sound with Dolby Atmos. Since the Ooredoo tv app is integrated with the Apple TV app, customers will be able to access on-demand programmes in the Watch Now section, and add shows or movies to Up Next, ensuring they never miss a new episode.

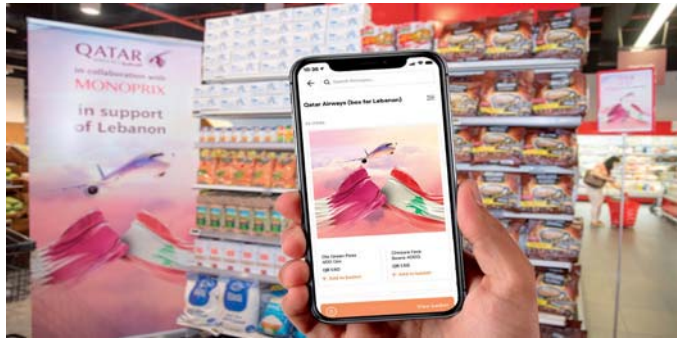


Ooredoo also announced a three-month launch promotion whereby customers will receive an Apple TV 4K set-top box free of charge, along with OSN El Farq, when they sign up for any Ooredoo One 150Mbps and above plans. These plans also come with Starz Play. Existing customers who upgrade their plans to a higher tier will also be able to enjoy the offer.

Sabah Rabia Al Kuwari, Director PR at Ooredoo, said:

“We’re delighted to be able to offer our customers the opportunity to watch all their regular Ooredoo tv through the Apple TV set-top box, as well as giving them access to Apple TV. Adding Apple TV to our already awesome Ooredoo One offering makes it an even better proposition and even better value, especially if customers choose a plan or an upgrade that gives them discount on the Apple TV 4K set-top box too.”

Donating to those impacted in Beirut: Talabat collaborates with QA, Monoprix and QC



THE PENINSULA — DOHA

As we keep Lebanon in our thoughts, talabat, the region’s leading food and grocery delivery app, has partnered with Qatar Airways, Monoprix and Qatar Charity to create the ‘Qatar Airways box for Lebanon.’

Each box will be sent via a special Qatar Airways Cargo to Beirut tomorrow.

Francisco De Souza, Managing Director of talabat Qatar, has said that talabat employees

feel a strong sense of solidarity with the people of Beirut and are proud of the way the people of Qatar have come together to help Lebanon.

“Over 94 million Qatari Riyals have already been raised throughout the country for those affected by the blast, which in itself is amazing and inspiring. Please continue to show the warm hospitality and generosity that is well-known about the people of Qatar. The Qatar Airways box is another way of helping people donate goods to those affected, through their talabat app.”

To donate through talabat, download the app and select ‘Umm Salal Ali,’ ‘The Pearl-Qatar,’ or ‘Al Dafna’ areas to open the Monoprix grocery menu. Under the section “Qatar Airways Box for Lebanon”, select the items you wish to purchase to add them to the box.

AZF successfully concludes ‘Aspire Summer 2020’

THE PENINSULA — DOHA

Aspire Zone Foundation (AZF) successfully attracted huge participants at “Aspire Summer 2020” on its official social media accounts Instagram and Youtube during the month of July to promote a healthy lifestyle and encourage individuals to exercise and stay fit during the summer.

Abdullah Aman Al Khater, Director of Events and Venues at AZF, said, “In light of the circumstances facing the world related to the coronavirus COVID-19, we succeeded at Aspire Zone Foundation in filling the free time of kids during July and freeing their energies in sports activities during the quarantine. Many kids who acquired new skills with group of best coaches, and took advantage of tips for nutrition and healthy eating with recipes for healthy meals.”



Pre-qualification Tender

Meseimeer City Real Estate Company is pleased to invite companies who are specialized in real estate and asset management for major residential and commercial complexes to submit their prequalification applications, in preparation for specifying a list of eligible companies, to be invited in the tender of (Property & assets management in the Mesaimeer City (formerly Barwa City).

-For all specialized Real-Estate companies, please contact the mail below.

osmohammed@Grsia.gov.qa

PAmbatt@Grsia.gov.qa

Landline: (+974)40079800

This is to receive the pre-qualification documents include scope of works, qualification form and a list of documents required to be submitted from 11/08/20 to 16/08/2020 from 8 am until 1 pm.

Companies must submit (their pre-qualification documents after filling in the qualification form and attach the required documents) to the headquarters of Maseimr City Real Estate Company no later than 31/08/2020 at 1 pm or before if desired.

The companies participating in the pre-qualification must have managed similar services/projects in Qatar during the last five years.

Meseimeer City Real Estate Company
Street 1129 / Zone 56 / unit 15

Role title: Chief Strategy, Mergers and Acquisitions Officer

Company: Confidential

Job location: Doha, Qatar

Employment Status: Full time

Employment Type: Employee

Job Description/ Role Responsibilities:

- Direct and manage the Strategy, Merger & Acquisitions Team
- Ultimately responsible for the organisation’ strategic direction analysis, planning and articulation
- Sponsor the development of organisation ’s vision, mission, objectives and programs
- Lead / support multiple change initiatives within long-term transformation projects impacting various functional areas
- Manage implementation of all strategic initiatives and ensure alignment to budget and achievement of strategic KPIs across multiple programs or across the organisation
- Conduct overall corporate performance analysis to measure and report performance to board
- Responsible for the identification of industries and geographies to expand into, targets to acquire and the execution of the transaction
- Identify potential growth opportunities for M&As, JVs and new licenses. Conduct the initial due diligence and take lead in transactions. Select and appoint transactional and strategic advisors
- Manage and direct the business planning process for transactions to ensure a fair, reasonable and transparent plan is produced and used to be presented to the Board and Top Management

Experience:

- Minimum 15 years’ experience directly related to the duties and responsibilities specified
- Proven previous and extensive international experience, preferably in emerging markets.
- Board and Line Management experience in large companies or groups
- Experience in delivering strategic plans, large transactions, significant shareholder value and credibility to a complex and diverse group

Qualifications:

- MBA from a recognised school
- Finance qualification from a recognised and credible body (CFA, CPA, ACAEW etc...)

Preferred Candidate

Career Level: Executive level

Residence Location: Qatar

Nationality: Any nationality, priority to be given to Qatari Nationals

To apply for this role please submit your resume at
QA.ExecutiveSearch@yahoo.com

Lebanon govt resigns over Beirut blast

AP — BEIRUT

Lebanon's government resigned yesterday amid widespread public fury at the country's ruling elite over last week's devastating explosion in Beirut. The move risks opening the way to dragged-out negotiations over a new Cabinet amid urgent calls for reform.

Prime Minister Hassan Diab headed to the presidential palace to submit the Cabinet's group resignation, said Health Minister Hamad Hassan. It follows a weekend of anti-government protests in the wake of the August 4 explosion in Beirut's port that caused widespread destruction, killed at least 160 people and injured about 6,000 others.

Although Diab's resignation had appeared inevitable after the catastrophe, he seemed unwilling to leave and only two days ago made a televised speech in which he offered to stay on for two months to allow for various factions to agree on a roadmap for reforms. But the pressure from within his own Cabinet proved to be too much.

Diab's government was formed after his predecessor, Saad Hariri, stepped down in October in response to the demonstrations. It took months of bickering among the leadership factions before they settled on Diab.

His government, which was supported by Hezbollah and its allies and seen as one-sided, was basically doomed from the start,

Although Prime Minister Diab's resignation had appeared inevitable after the catastrophe, he seemed unwilling to leave and only two days ago made a televised speech in which he offered to stay on for two months to allow for various factions to agree on a roadmap for reforms.

tasked with meeting demands for reform but made up of all the factions that reformers want out. His government was basically doomed from the start, tasked with meeting demands for reform but made up of all the factions that reformers want out.

Now the process must start again, with Diab's government in a caretaker role as the same factions debate a new one.

"I hope that the caretaking period will not be long because the country cannot take that. Let's hope a new government will be formed quickly," Public Works Minister Michel Najjar told reporters.

"An effective government is the least we need to get out of this crisis." The weekend protests saw clashes with security forces firing tear gas at protesters.

The explosion is believed to have been caused by a fire that ignited a 2,750-tonne stockpile of highly volatile ammonium nitrate. The material had been stored at the port since 2013 with few safeguards despite numerous warnings of the danger.

The result was a disaster Lebanese blame squarely on their leadership's corruption and

neglect. Losses from the catastrophic blast are estimated to be between \$10 billion to \$15 billion, with nearly 300,000 people left homeless.

The last decision taken by Diab's government before its resignation was to refer the case of the explosion to the Supreme Judicial Council, which handles crimes infringing on Lebanon's national security as well as political and state security crimes. The Supreme Judicial Council is Lebanon's top judicial body.

A judge yesterday questioned the heads of the country's security agencies. Public Prosecutor Ghassan El Khoury questioned Maj Gen Tony Saliba, the head of State Security, according to state-run National News Agency. It gave no further details, but other generals are scheduled to be questioned.

State Security had compiled a report about the dangers of storing the material at the port and sent a copy to the offices of the president and prime minister on July 20. The investigation is focused on how the ammonium nitrate came to be stored at the port and why nothing was done about it.



Lebanon's Health Minister Hamad Hasan (right) talks to Prime Minister Hassan Diab during a cabinet meeting at the government palace, in Beirut, yesterday.

Najjar, the public works minister, said he learned about the material's presence 24 hours before the blast, receiving a report about the material and holding a meeting with port officials before calling its chief, Hassan Koraytem.

"I wrote a report in the morning the explosion happened in the evening," Najjar said. Asked why he only learned of it the day before, Najjar said, "I don't know. Truly I don't know." About 20 people have been detained after the blast, including the head of

Lebanon's customs department and his predecessor, as well as the head of the port. Dozens of people have been questioned, including two former Cabinet ministers, according to government officials.

On Sunday, world leaders and international organisations pledged nearly \$300m in emergency humanitarian aid to Beirut, but warned that no money for rebuilding the capital would be made available until Lebanese authorities commit themselves to the political and

economic reforms demanded by the people.

Iran, meanwhile, expressed concern that Western countries and their allies might exploit anger over the explosion to pursue their political interests. Iranian Foreign Ministry spokesman Abbas Mousavi said "it is natural for people to be frustrated." But he said it would be "unacceptable if some individuals, groups and foreign countries use the incident as a pretext for their purposes and intentions."

Hamas fires rockets into sea in 'message' to Israel

AFP — GAZA CITY

The Gaza Strip's rulers Hamas fired rockets into the sea yesterday after repeated exchanges of fire with Israel in recent days, Palestinian security sources and eyewitnesses said.

At least eight rockets were seen in the sky, heading toward the Mediterranean Sea, said journalists in the coastal strip, which has been under Israeli blockade for more than a decade.

The interior ministry of the Palestinian enclave under Hamas control since 2007 referred to "an act of

resistance".

The rockets were a "message" to Israel to let it know that armed groups in Gaza will not "remain silent" in the face of an Israeli blockade and "aggression", a source close to Hamas said.

The source noted that Monday's rocket fire coincided with the recent launch of incendiary balloons into Israel.

In the past week, such balloons have flown three times from Gaza into Israel, each time triggering retaliatory strikes against Hamas positions.

The latest came on Sunday night when the Israeli military

announced that one of its aircraft had struck at a Hamas observation post in northern Gaza.

Hamas and Israel have fought three wars since 2008.

"I don't expect a war because neither side wants a war" at this stage, Jamal Al Fadi, professor of political science at Gaza's Al Azhar University, said.

"These rockets and incendiary balloons are messages from Hamas to Israel to improve economic conditions in the enclave, ease the blockade and implement part of the agreements reached by the two sides," he added.

According to the World Bank, around 53 percent of Gaza's population lived below the poverty line before the novel coronavirus crisis.

That number could rise above 60 percent due to economic fallout from the pandemic, it has said.

So far 81 cases of the novel coronavirus, including one death, have been recorded in the enclave of two million people, where schools reopened this weekend after a five-month shutdown.

Israeli Defence Minister and alternate prime minister Benny Gantz said yesterday he would "be happy to see Gaza

develop" and for Palestinians in the strip to be able to work in Israel.

"But that can only happen on one condition: that the boys come home," he said.

Gantz was referring to the bodies of two soldiers believed to have been killed in the 2014 Gaza war and their remains held by Hamas, and possibly to two Israeli civilians thought to be held captive by Hamas after they crossed into Gaza over five years ago.

In 2011, Israeli soldier Gilad Shalit was freed in exchange for more than 1,000 Palestinians held in Israeli prisons.

Iran shuts newspaper after expert questions virus numbers

AP — TEHRAN

Iran shut down a newspaper yesterday after it published remarks by an expert who said the official figures on coronavirus cases and deaths in the country account for only 5 percent of the real toll, allegations rejected by the Health Ministry.

Mohammad Reza Sadi, the editor-in-chief of *Jahane Sanat*, told the official IRNA news agency that authorities closed his newspaper, which began publishing in 2004 and was mainly focused on business news.

On Sunday, the daily quoted Mohammad Reza Mahboobfar, an epidemiologist the paper said had worked on the government's anti-coronavirus campaign, as saying the true number of cases and deaths in Iran could be 20 times the number reported by the Health Ministry.

He also said the virus was detected in Iran a month earlier than February 19, when authorities announced the first confirmed case. He said they held up the announcement until after the commemorations of the anniversary of the 1979 Islamic Revolution and parliamentary elections earlier that month.

"The administration resorted to secrecy for political and security reasons," he said, and only provided "engineered statistics" to the public.

He also criticised testing efforts and warned of a renewed outbreak next month as universities hold entrance exams and people mark major Sha holidays.

Yemen's Unesco-listed Old Sana'a houses collapse in heavy rains

REUTERS — SANA'A

Houses in Yemen's Unesco-listed Old City of Sana'a are collapsing under heavy rains, as months of floods and storms assail a country already reeling from war, food shortages and disease.

The distinctive brown and white mud brick houses of Sana'a neighbourhoods, which date from before the 11th century, have long been under threat from conflict and neglect.

Muhammad Ali Al Talhi's house partially collapsed on Friday as heavy rain battered Sana'a, leaving the six women and six children of his family homeless.

"Everything we had is buried," he said surrounded by ancient debris and mud, appealing for help to find shelter.

Aqeel Saleh Nassar, deputy head of the Historic Cities Preservation Authority, said citizens today do not maintain these old buildings as in the past, leading to cracks and weakness.

Around 5,000 of the towering buildings in the old city have leaky roofs and 107 have partially collapsed roofs, he said. The authority has been working with Unesco and other funds to preserve some.

This year's exceptionally heavy rains, which began mid-April and last into early September, have added to what the United Nations describes as the world's worst humanitarian crisis. Five years of war have killed more than 100,000 people, and left 80 percent of the population reliant on aid and millions on the brink of famine.

On top of the new



Workers demolish a building damaged by rain in the Unesco World Heritage site of the old city of Sana'a, Yemen, yesterday.

coronavirus, which is believed to be spreading largely undetected, heavy rains spread diseases like cholera, dengue fever and malaria.

The Iran-aligned Houthi authorities who have controlled Sana'a since ousting the

internationally recognised Saudi-backed Yemeni government in late 2014, appealed this week to Unesco to save the city's heritage.

They said around 111 houses had partly or completely collapsed in recent weeks.

Sana'a resident Adel San'ani on Saturday said he saw five houses severely damaged this weekend.

"The families have no shelter. A local bank launched a campaign to distribute plastic sheeting to act as roofs," he said.

Palestinian family in cave home faces Israeli eviction

AFP — FARASIN

Ahmed Amarneh's home, with a wooden door opening onto cushion-lined rooms, is not the first Palestinian residence in the occupied West Bank to receive a demolition notice from Israel.

But it may be the first built inside a cave which the Jewish state has threatened to destroy.

Amarneh, a 30-year-old civil engineer, lives with his family in the northern West Bank village of Farasin, where Israel insists it must approve any new residential construction and can tear down

homes built without permits. "I tried twice to build (a house), but the occupation authorities told me it was forbidden to build in the area," Amarneh said, using a term for Israel used by some Palestinians.

The Oslo peace accords of the 1990s gave the Palestinians self-rule in parts of the West Bank.

However, some 60 percent of the territory dubbed Area C, where Farasin is located, remains under full Israeli civil and military control.

The United Nations con-

siders Area C as occupied Palestinian Territory.

But Israel has increasingly allocated land there for construction of Jewish settlements — communities considered illegal under international law.

Convinced he would never get Israeli approval to build a home in his village, Amarneh set his sights on a cave in the foothills overlooking Farasin.

Amarneh said he figured that as an ancient, natural formation, Israel could not possibly argue that the cave was illegally built, while the Palestinian Authority (PA) agreed to

register the land in his name.

Amarneh, whose handyman skills are considerable, sealed the entrance to the cave with a stone wall and installed a wooden door at its centre.

He fashioned a kitchen, a living room and sleeping areas for himself, his pregnant wife and their young daughter. There is even lodging for guests.

He said he had been living there for a year and half, but received a demolition notice from the Israeli authorities in July, along with 20 other Palestinian families in Farasin.



Ahmed Amarneh and his wife prepare coffee at his home, built in a cave in the village of Farasin, west of Jenin, in the northern occupied West Bank.

Troops launch manhunt after Niger killings

In a phone call on Sunday, French President Emmanuel Macron and Niger President pledged to clarify the circumstances of the deadly attack by “all means”, the French presidency said.

AP — NIAMEY

Armed forces from Niger and France have been deployed to pursue the gunmen who killed seven aid workers, mostly French citizens, and a leading guide in a Niger giraffe park considered one of the safer places in the vast West African country.

The group had been on a day of sightseeing on Sunday when they were attacked just before noon, according to one of the aid groups they worked for, Paris-based NGO ACTED. An ambulance sent by the French military stationed in Niger found the bodies later in the day in their burned-out vehicle in the giraffe reserve in Koure, the group said.

The victims were six French citizens and one Nigerien working for ACTED and Geneva-based IMPACT Initiatives. The other victim was their Nigerien guide, who was the president of the guides at the park. Four of the French aid workers were women, two men, and all were between the ages of 25 and 50, according to ACTED.

Niger's Interior Minister Alkache Alhada said yesterday that the area around Koure has

been cordoned off by Niger's army and French soldiers from Operation Barkhane.

“We have deployed the army and intelligence services to identify and neutralise the assassins,” he said.

“We have also deployed air cover to reinforce the troops on the ground.”

French prosecutors said in a statement yesterday they opened an investigation for “murders in relation to a terrorist undertaking.”

The governor of the Tillaberi region where the attack took place, said he was surprised by this “cowardly attack and assassination” against foreign tourists.

“This area has always been a peaceful and secure place, we really want to know what happened,” Governor Tidjani Katiella said.

Hundreds of people each year visit the protected national park in Koure that contains among the only remaining West African giraffes in the world, who live amid dense vegetation and tall trees about 70km southeast of the capital.

The NGOs condemned “in the strongest terms the senseless and



A view of the wreckage of the car where six French aid workers, their local guide and the driver were killed by unidentified gunmen riding motorcycles in an area of southwestern Niger, on Sunday.

barbaric killing of our colleagues and their guide.”

“Our colleagues have been working to support the people of Niger facing hardship, driven by values of humanity and solidarity,” the NGOs said.

The Association of Giraffe Guides of Koure also released a statement condemning the death of the president of their association, Kadri Abdou.

“We are deeply saddened and thinking of the victims and their families to whom we offer

our most sincere condolences and especially to the family of Kadri, our friend. May he rest in peace,” said the statement.

Niger President Issoufou Mahamadou also condemned the killings in a post on Twitter.

“I condemn the cowardly and barbaric terrorist attack perpetrated this Sunday in the peaceful town of Koure,” he wrote, extending condolences to the families of the victims and to the French president, adding that France's “commitment to our

side in the fight against terrorism is unwavering.”

In a phone call on Sunday, French President Emmanuel Macron and Niger's president pledged to clarify the circumstances of the deadly attack by “all means,” the French presidency said.

French Foreign Affairs minister Jean-Yves Le Drian condemned the attack on yesterday, saying that those responsible “will have to answer for their acts.”

Zimbabwe President decries ‘divisive falsehoods’ over rights abuse claims

REUTERS — HARARE

Zimbabwe's President Emmerson Mnangagwa yesterday called criticism of human rights abuses by his government “divisive falsehoods” and said his administration was under renewed attack from domestic and foreign opponents.

Mnangagwa, during a Heroes Day speech in Harare, said the allegations were “unjustified attacks by our perennial

detractors, both inside and outside our border”.

“The divisive falsehoods and concoctions by renegades and supremacists who want to pounce on our natural resources will never win the day. Truth shall triumph over lies, and good over evil,” said Mnangagwa, who replaced Robert Mugabe after a 2017 coup. Hopes that Mnangagwa would unite a polarised country and revive a stricken economy following the Mugabe

era have been dashed. Like his predecessor, Mnangagwa accuses the West of funding the opposition to destabilise the country. Human rights groups and lawyers say activists are being arrested, abducted and tortured after they called for street demonstrations on July 31, which the government snuffed out by deploying security forces.

The main opposition Movement for Democratic Change says about 30 of its

members have fled their homes fearing abduction or arrest by state security agents.

The events in Zimbabwe have worried South Africa enough that President Cyril Ramaphosa send two veteran politicians Sydney Mufamadi and Baleka Mbete to Harare.

The envoys arrived yesterday and were expected to meet Mnangagwa later in the day, a government official said.

Critics also say Mnangagwa

is using the cover of a COVID-19 lockdown to silence critics as anger grows over 737 percent inflation — which has brought back memories of hyperinflation under Mugabe a decade ago — a collapsing health sector and shortage of public transport.

Mnangagwa, however, said his government had set a firm foundation “for a thriving constitutional democracy, and a just, open, accountable and prosperous society”.



Pupils wear face masks in their classroom at a school, Lingwala site, in Kinshasa, Democratic Republic of Congo, yesterday.

Schools reopen in DR Congo amid COVID-19

ANATOLIA — YAOUNDE

Schools and universities in the Democratic Republic of Congo reopened yesterday after more than four months of suspension amid the coronavirus pandemic.

President Felix Tshisekedi visited some of the schools in the capital Kinshasa, where he congratulated and thanked the Education Ministry for their efforts to ensure the reopening of schools that were closed in

March due to the coronavirus.

“We ask you to be careful. We have lifted the state of emergency, but the virus is still there,” Tshisekedi told students at the Athenee De La Gombe Eligo Secondary School.

“It is true that young people are resilient, but they can be carriers. Avoid manual contact and wash your hands. Do everything not to get infected, you risk infecting your families,” he added. Tshisekedi also visited

Kinshasa University.

The resumption of schools was initially scheduled for August 3, but it was postponed due to “technical and administrative reasons,” according to Willy Bakonga, the education minister.

The Central African country has so far recorded 9,454 coronavirus cases, with 224 deaths and 8,324 recoveries, according to the African Centres for Disease Control and Prevention.

19 killed in massacre in eastern DR Congo’s Ituri

AFP — BUNIA

Nineteen civilians were killed and two were wounded in attacks on three villages by a militia in the troubled eastern DR Congo province of Ituri, a local chief said yesterday.

The attacks took place on Sunday in the Banyali Kilo area, local chief Innocent Madukadala said.

“They killed 19 people... some were killed by machete and others were shot dead,” he said, blaming the Cooperative for the Development of Congo (CODECO), an armed group accused of ethnic attacks.

CODECO is drawn from the Lendu ethnic group, a predominantly farming community who have historically clashed with the Hema, a group of traders and herders.

The two communities were embroiled in a bloody conflict between 1999–2003 which led to the European Union's first foreign military mission, the short-term Operation Artemis.

Madukadala said the coordinated assault claimed five lives in the village of Lisey, two in neighbouring Tchulu and 12 in Aloys.

South Africa vows to empower women to ensure equality

ANATOLIA — JOHANNESBURG

South Africa's president said yesterday his government will support women-owned businesses as part of its commitment to ensure gender equality in Africa's most advanced economy.

“We are going to drive women's economic inclusion through public procurement,” Cyril Ramaphosa said in his weekly newsletter as he paid tribute to South Africa's women on Women's Day.

“We have set the target of ensuring that at least 40 percent of goods and services procured by public entities are sourced from women-owned businesses,” he said.

South Africa celebrates Women's Day on August 9 to commemorate the anniversary of the day in 1956 when 20,000 women from all races marched to the Union Buildings (Seat of South Africa's government) to demand for an end to the dreaded pass laws.

During the Apartheid regime Blacks were required to carry passes that would allow them to move from one area to another.

Trial of Sudan’s former president Bashir delayed

AFP — KHARTOUM

The trial of Sudan's ousted ex-president Omar Al Bashir was delayed yesterday at the request of his defence, a prosecution lawyer said.

The trial of Bashir over the military coup that brought him to power more than three decades ago, as well as of 27 other defendants, opened with a brief hearing in July.

The second hearing had been set for August 11.

But defence lawyers requested a delay for three of the defendants — Bashir as well as two former senior leaders of the once powerful but now defunct National Congress Party.

“Lawyers for three defendants petitioned the Court of Appeal to release three defendants on bail, after the court refused to grant their request at the trial's first hearing on July 21,” Moaz Hadra, one of the prosecution lawyers, said.

“The Court of Appeal must rule, and then a new date for the trial will be set,” Bashir, 76, and his co-accused could face the death penalty if convicted over the 1989 Islamist-backed overthrow of the democratically elected government of prime minister Sadek Al Mahdi.

It is the first time in the Arab world's modern history that the architect of a coup is tried for plotting a putsch, although the man dubbed the true brain behind it, Hassan Turabi of the National Islamic Front, died in 2016.

Bashir stayed in power for 30 years before being overthrown on April 11, 2019 after several months of unprecedented, youth-led street demonstrations.

The trial comes as Sudan's joint civilian-military transitional government is introducing a host of reforms and has relaunched peace talks with rebel groups.

Namibia to auction fishing quota to raise money for COVID-19 medicines

REUTERS — NYAUNGWA

The Namibian government will for the first time auction its 60 percent share of the country's annual horse mackerel and hake output to the highest bidder by the end of October, as it scrambles to raise funds for equipment and medicines to fight the coronavirus pandemic, according to a government letter.

The government's 60 percent quota is normally reserved for state-owned company Fishcor, which has been caught up in a

corruption scandal.

“Government is in need of financial resources on an emergency basis with a view to mitigate the effects of COVID-19,” Albert Kawana, the minister of Fisheries and Marine Resources, said in an August 7 letter to the fishing industry, seen by Reuters on Monday.

“We do not produce medicines in Namibia nor do we manufacture medical equipment... In order to obtain these items, we have to buy them with foreign currency,” Kawana said.

Last month Namibia approached the International Monetary Fund for a \$254m emergency loan to help it fight COVID-19.

Namibia has seen a steady uptick of new infections and has now reported 2,949 cases of COVID-19 and 19 deaths since the start of the outbreak, according to the latest statistics released on Sunday.

Fishing is the third-biggest contributor to Namibia's gross domestic product, after mining and agriculture, contributing

around N\$10bn (\$783m) in foreign currency earnings annually. The proposed auction of the government's fishing quota would be the first of its kind in the country.

“The available quota is as follows: Horse mackerel - 72,000 MT, out of which 40 percent will be reserved for local companies. Hake - 11,000 MT out of which 40 percent will be reserved for local companies. Monk - 392 MT, all to be auctioned to the highest bidder,” Kawana said in the letter.

Algerian reporter sentenced to 3 years over protest coverage

AP — ALGIERS

An Algerian journalist who played a prominent role in covering the country's pro-democracy movement last year was sentenced yesterday to three years in prison for inciting unauthorised demonstrations and attacking national unity.

Dozens of journalists and activists in the Hirak movement protested outside the courthouse, demanding freedom for Khaled Drareni. His supporters said the verdict was reminiscent of the tightly controlled era of former President Abdelaziz Bouteflika, who was pushed out by the mass demonstrations and whose successor promised a more democratic, open leadership. Drareni's arrest in March drew widespread condemnation among protesters and media watchdog groups such as Reporters Without Borders.

Australia borders to stay shut as COVID-19 daily deaths reach record

REUTERS — SYDNEY

Australian Prime Minister Scott Morrison said internal border closures were unlikely to lift before Christmas, as the country yesterday reported a record single day rise in COVID-19 deaths.

There was, however, some evidence that drastic lockdown measures in the city of Melbourne were having an effect, with daily new infections in the state of Victoria slowing to a near two week low.

“I am more hopeful of that today than I was in the course of the past week,” Morrison told reporters in Canberra, as he called on state leaders to cooperate to allow stranded residents to return home.

Australia’s federal political system has led to its eight states and territories taking different measures in response to the crisis, resulting in several internal border closures.

Victoria state reported 19 people had died from the virus over the past 24 hours. With some other states still to report daily new case and death numbers, that already marks the country’s biggest single day rise in fatalities.

Victoria state, which is home to Melbourne, the country’s second biggest city and the epicentre of its second coronavirus wave, reported 19 people had died from the virus over the past 24 hours. With some other states still to report daily new case and death numbers, that already marks the country’s biggest single day rise in fatalities.

“This is an agonising day for the members for the 19 families

who have lost a loved one to COVID-19 today,” Michael Kidd, Australia’s deputy chief medical officer, told reporters.

“We are now seeing the first promising signs of a significant decline in the number of cases.”

However, Victoria officials also reported 322 new coronavirus cases in the last 24 hours, the lowest single day rise in new infections since July 29.

Melbourne, home to nearly five million people, has been in lockdown since early July, with people largely confined to their homes and business shuttered.

State Premier Daniel Andrews said yesterday he understood frustrations but declined to put an end date on the lockdown.

“If I could paint you a picture that had any kind of reliability for next week, let alone five weeks away, then, of course, I would,” Andrews said



People exercise along Port Melbourne Beach in Melbourne yesterday, as the city struggles to cope with COVID-19 outbreak.

during a televised media conference.

With around 21,000 COVID-19 cases and 314 deaths, Australia has still recorded fewer infections and fatalities than many other developed nations.

It was considered a global leader early in the pandemic, when it was swift to close its international border, impose

social distancing restrictions and implement mass virus testing.

But as the country began to reopen, community transmissions rose significantly in Victoria, where triple digit daily new cases have now been recorded for weeks.

Authorities worry the spike in cases in Victoria has already spread to other states

despite borders border closures.

Australia’s most populous state, New South Wales, reported 14 new cases, and no deaths, yesterday.

Twelve cases were linked to known clusters while another was a person in hotel quarantine after returning from overseas, leaving one case with no known links.

Morrison extends lead as country’s most preferred leader: Survey

REUTERS — SYDNEY

Australian Prime Minister Scott Morrison has extended his lead as the country’s most preferred leader, a poll showed yesterday, boosted by his government’s coronavirus wage subsidy scheme and efforts to contain the spread of the pandemic.

A Newspoll conducted for *The Australian* newspaper showed Morrison enjoyed the best approval rating over an opposition leader in more than five years.

Morrison’s popularity fell over his handling of bush fires late last year but he has improved his standing with his response to the pandemic, as the country battles a new wave of infections in Victoria state.

Morrison jettisoned his conservative government’s aversion to deficits to pledge spending worth about A\$100bn (\$71.50bn) to employers to keep staff they might otherwise have let go.

The government last week eased rules to qualify for its wage subsidy scheme as a flare-up in infections in Victoria forced large parts of the economy to close.

With just over 21,400 infections and 314 deaths from the virus, Australia has fared better than many other developed nations, helped by strict lockdowns that are expected to push unemployment up towards 10 percent.

Weather dismissed as factor in India plane crash

BLOOMBERG — NEW DELHI

Weather conditions were within safe ranges and pilots were briefed about them by controllers just before the Air India Express jet they were flying crashed at a southern Indian airport on Friday, killing at least 18 people and injuring more than 100, according to a person with direct knowledge of the matter.

The Boeing Co 737 appeared to touch down near the middle of the 9,000-foot-long runway at Kozhikode, the person said, before skidding off the end and careening down a slope, breaking into three parts. The

captain was experienced, with 11,000 flying hours, while the co-pilot had 2,000 hours. Neither one made a distress call, and both died in the crash. Visibility, precipitation and tailwinds were within acceptable guidelines for landing, the person said, asking not to be identified because the investigation is ongoing.

A playback on the Flight-Radar24 website shows a first attempt to land the plane was aborted before another effort was made from the opposite direction. The flight-tracking site shows visibility at the airport was 1,500-to-2,000 metres, and winds were blowing at 12-13

knots, which is a moderate breeze on the Beaufort scale. Indian officials say 800 metres is sufficient visibility for landing.

Kozhikode’s table-top runway, so named because it sits on higher ground, was shortened by 150 meters to create a bigger safety area before the downward slopes, but it still is long enough under international regulations, the person said. He didn’t say when it was shortened. Most table-top runways in the US and elsewhere have areas called arresting beds that stop planes from going off the edge.

Flight 1344, operated by the low-cost unit of state-run Air

India Ltd was carrying 190 passengers and crew from Dubai to Kozhikode, the Kerala city formerly known as Calicut, in southwest India. Many were on the repatriation flight after losing their jobs because of the coronavirus pandemic. There was no distress call from the cockpit to the air traffic control tower prior to the 7.41pm crash.

The flight-data recorder and cockpit-voice recorder, known as the black boxes, were recovered from the crash site for examination. Teams from the US National Transportation Safety Board and Boeing will join India’s Aircraft Accident Investigation Bureau in the investigation, and

an initial report could come in a few months, the person said. A representative of India’s civil aviation ministry didn’t immediately respond to a request for comment.

A representative for Boeing in India didn’t have an immediate comment. Investigators are looking at both human error and mechanical failure as potential causes of the crash, the person said.

The last major commercial aviation disaster in India was in 2010, when a plane — also a Boeing operated by Air India Express and flying from Dubai — overshot another table-top runway in Mangalore and burst into flames, killing 158 people.



Rehearsal for India’s Independence Day

India’s Punjab police personnel take part in a rehearsal for the upcoming ceremony to celebrate India’s 74th Independence Day in Amritsar, yesterday.

Graft case: Malaysia’s former finance minister charged again

AP — PENANG

Malaysia’s former finance minister pleaded not guilty yesterday to a second corruption charge related to a \$1.5bn undersea tunnel project and slammed the case as a trumped-up charge by the new government.

Lim Guan Eng, 59, was first charged Friday with soliciting 10 percent of potential profits in 2011 as a bribe for the project planned in northern Penang state. Yesterday, he was accused of abusing his power as Penang chief minister to obtain 3.3m ringgit (\$786,182) as inducement to help a local company secure the construction contract.

The project was approved during Lim’s tenure as Penang chief minister from 2008-2018, before he became Malaysia’s finance minister.

Lim, who was part of a reformist government ousted in March, said anti-graft officials had never questioned him on the 3.3m ringgit he allegedly received nor was there any evidence he had the money. He also noted charge gave a vague timeline, from 2011 to August 2017.

“This is clearly a baseless allegation and politically motivated. I will fight in court to prove my innocence,” Lim told a news conference after the hearing. Each charge against him carries a potential

punishment of up to 20 years in jail and a fine if convicted.

The 7.2km tunnel project from Penang island to peninsular Malaysia includes several highways and is to be funded through a land swap of reclaimed prime land. Construction hasn’t started as the state government is still reviewing the feasibility study.

The anti-graft agency has said Lim will face a third charge Tuesday over a different case. Lim said in a Facebook post on Monday that his lawyer wife, Betty Chew, will also face money-laundering charges on Tuesday. He said his son has also been the target of slander on social media.

“To our political enemies out there, go for me as much as you want but leave my family alone,” Lim wrote.

Prime Minister Muhyiddin Yassin took power in March, after he pulled his party out of the ruling coalition and then-premier Mahathir Mohamad resigned in protest. Muhyiddin’s new Malay-centric government is supported by graft-tainted parties defeated in the 2018 general election.

Some political observers said Lim’s prosecution could indicate a possibility of early elections. Muhyiddin faces pressure from ally parties to call for polls as his unelected government has only a two-seat majority in Parliament.

New Zealand eyes Cook Islands travel bubble

AFP — WELLINGTON

New Zealand plans to open a virus-free “travel bubble” with the tiny Pacific realm of Cook Islands before year’s end, Prime Minister Jacinda Ardern said yesterday, while expressing caution about a similar arrangement with Australia.

Ardern said the quarantine-free travel corridor was possible because New Zealand and the Cooks — an archipelago of under 10,000 people — had successfully contained the

coronavirus. “Our expectation is that it would be in place before the end of the year,” she told reporters, adding that officials were being careful not to move too quickly on the proposal.

“The last thing anyone wants is to reopen travel, only to have it closed down again because it hasn’t been done properly.” New Zealand has recorded only 22 coronavirus deaths in a population of five million, and marked 100 days since its last case of community

transmission on Sunday, while the Cooks declared itself virus-free in mid-April.

The economic benefits of the travel bubble are expected to be felt mostly in the Cooks, a popular tourist destination where Ardern estimated 60 percent of pre-virus visitors were from New Zealand.

A trans-Tasman bubble with Australia would be far more advantageous to New Zealand’s economy, where international tourism screeched to a halt when borders were

closed in March.

The prospect looked tantalisingly close a few months ago, before Australia was hit with a second wave of infections centred on Victoria state.

“We’re still undertaking the foundational work for trans-Tasman travel arrangements but obviously that’s going to be sometime off,” Ardern said.

All international arrivals into New Zealand are currently required to spend at least 14 days in strictly supervised quarantine.

India’s largest crocodile park strapped for cash after virus lockdowns

REUTERS — CHENNAI

India’s largest crocodile park may have as little as four months before it runs out of funds to feed animals, pay staff and do research, as ticket revenue shrinks after coronavirus lockdowns choked the flow of visitors,

park officials said.

Annual sales of about five million tickets usually make up roughly half the revenue of the park, located about 40km from the southern city of Chennai, but it has been shut since March 16, with no prospect of reopening in sight.

The lockdowns during the

summer vacation season have cost an estimated Rs14m (\$187,000) as visitors dropped by almost 2.5 million, said Allwin Jesudasan, the director of the Madras Crocodile Bank.

“Our present funding situation will allow us to stay functional for another three or four months,” he said.

Started in 1976 by American-born snake expert Romulus Whitaker, who has also won recognition for his conservation work, the park is spread over 8.5 acres (3.44 hectares).

It is home to more than 2,000 crocodiles and alligators, as well as reptiles such as

turtles, tortoises, lizards and snakes.

“Our senior staff have taken a voluntary 10 percent to 50 percent pay cut on their salaries and we have cut down our activities to just the critical ones,” the park said in an appeal for funds on its website.

But the future of its staff

and animals was not immediately clear after funds are exhausted.

The Madras Crocodile Bank Trust and Centre for Herpetology, which has bred more than 5,000 crocodiles during its existence, houses 14 of 23 existing crocodile species, three of them endangered.

China sanctions 11 Americans in retaliation for US move

AFP — BEIJING

China yesterday sanctioned 11 Americans, including senators Marco Rubio and Ted Cruz, in retaliation for similar US moves prompted by Beijing's crackdown in Hong Kong.

Washington last week accused 11 officials of suppressing "freedom and democratic processes" in Hong Kong, including city leader Carrie Lam, and announced plans to freeze their US assets.

It was the toughest US action yet in response to Beijing's introduction of a sweeping and controversial new national security law for the territory.

Authorities have also issued arrest warrants for six exiled pro-democracy campaigners and launched a crackdown on other activists.

Beijing said the measure was a violation of international law and "grossly interferes in China's internal affairs".

"China has decided to impose sanctions on some people that behaved badly on Hong Kong-related issues," foreign ministry spokesman Zhao Lijian said

yesterday, with Human Rights Watch director Kenneth Roth and National Endowment for Democracy president Carl Gershman also on the list.

Zhao did not give details of what the sanctions would entail.

"The Chinese government's announcement of unspecified sanctions against me is little more than an effort to distract attention from its wholesale assault on the rights of the people of Hong Kong," Roth said in a statement issued by Human Rights Watch.

Republican senators Rubio and Cruz established themselves as two of the most vocal supporters of Hong Kong's

democracy movement last year, when the city was convulsed by huge and sometimes violent protests.

Beijing has accused "external forces" of fomenting unrest and responded to the unrest by imposing the security law in late June, sending a political chill through the semi-autonomous finance hub.

Since then, the city's leaders have postponed local elections, citing the coronavirus pandemic.

Authorities have also issued arrest warrants for six exiled pro-democracy campaigners and launched a crackdown on other activists.

The US measures come three months ahead of the November presidential election in which the incumbent Donald Trump, who trails his rival Joe Biden in the polls, is campaigning hard on an increasingly strident anti-Beijing message.

As public disapproval has grown for his handling of the pandemic, Trump has pivoted from his previous focus on striking a trade deal with China to blaming the country for the coronavirus crisis.

Washington and Beijing have sparred on multiple fronts in recent months, and both sides have already imposed sanctions

on each other over China's mass internment of mostly Muslim minorities in Xinjiang.

Trump on Thursday ordered Americans to stop doing business within 45 days with popular Chinese apps WeChat and TikTok.

The order claimed TikTok could be used by China to track the locations of federal employees, build dossiers on people for blackmail and conduct corporate espionage.

Zhao said yesterday that Washington's Hong Kong-related sanctions "will only make the world more aware of US hegemony, bullying and double standards".

Hong Kong media tycoon arrested under national security law: Top aide

REUTERS — HONG KONG

Hong Kong media tycoon Jimmy Lai has been arrested over suspected collusion with foreign forces under the new national security law, his top aide said on Twitter, in what is the highest-profile arrest yet under the legislation.

Lai, 71, has been one of the most prominent democracy activists in the Chinese-ruled city and an ardent critic of Beijing, which imposed the sweeping new law on Hong Kong on June 30, drawing condemnation from Western countries.

The new security law punishes anything China considers subversion, secession, terrorism and collusion with foreign forces with up to life in prison.

Critics say it crushes freedoms in the semi-autonomous city, while supporters say it will bring stability after prolonged pro-democracy protests last year.

"Jimmy Lai is being arrested for collusion with foreign powers at this time," Mark Simon, a senior executive at

Lai's media company Next Digital, which publishes local tabloid *Apple Daily*, said early yesterday.

Hong Kong police said they had arrested seven people on suspicion of breaching the city's new national security law, citing offences including collusion with foreign powers. They were all local men, aged 39 to 72, it said, without naming them.

Police said the operation was ongoing and further arrests were possible.

Apple Daily reported that Lai was taken away from his home in Ho Man Tin early yesterday. The paper says one of Lai's sons, Ian, was also arrested at his home.

An *Apple Daily* source said other senior executives in the company were among those targeted. Police were searching their homes, the source said.

"We are arranging lawyers and so on to defend ourselves. We see this as straight harassment," the source said.

Around 10 other people were expected to be arrested, local newspaper *South China Morning Post* reported, without



Police lead Hong Kong pro-democracy media mogul Jimmy Lai (centre), 72, away from his home after he was arrested under the new national security law, in Hong Kong, yesterday.

naming its sources.

The law has steered China further on a collision course with the West, prompting countries including Australia, Canada and Britain to suspend extradition treaties with Hong Kong.

On major cases in Hong Kong, the central government in Beijing can claim jurisdiction. The legislation allows agents to take suspects across the border for trials in Communist

Party-controlled courts, one issue that has raised alarm at home and overseas.

Lai was also arrested this year on illegal assembly charges, along with other leading activists, relating to protests last year.

In an interview with *Reuters* in May, Lai pledged to stay in Hong Kong and continue to fight for democracy even though he expected to be one of the targets of the new

legislation.

The new legislation has sent a chill through Hong Kong, affecting many aspects of life. Activists have disbanded their organisations, while some have fled the city altogether.

Slogans have been declared illegal, certain songs and activities such as forming human chains have been banned in schools, and books have been taken off shelves in public libraries.

Pakistan court indicts former president Zardari in graft case

BLOOMBERG — ISLAMABAD

Pakistan's anti-graft court yesterday indicted former president Asif Ali Zardari (pictured) on charges of corruption, as the opposition groups accused the government of Prime Minister Imran Khan of persecution.

Azam Khan, a judge of an accountability court, formally framed charges against Zardari for buying assets overseas from undeclared sources, Muzafar Abbasi, a deputy prosecutor at the National Accountability Bureau, said by phone.

Zardari, who is the co-Chairman of Pakistan Peoples Party party — the second biggest opposition party in Parliament — rejected the charges.

The indictment is the latest in a string of legal proceedings against premier Khan's political opponents. A Pakistani court has jailed ex-premier Nawaz Sharif while many other opposition leaders are facing investigations by the nation's anti-graft body. Both Zardari and Sharif, who is in London, are on bail and seeking medical treatment.



Philippine Navy wants to protest Chinese ships in disputed sea

BLOOMBERG — MANILA

The Philippines' Navy chief is urging the government of President Rodrigo Duterte to file a diplomatic protest against China over the presence of two Chinese survey ships at an oil-rich disputed area in the South China Sea.

The surveillance vessels were spotted in Reed Bank last week and have no clearance from the Philippine government, Vice Admiral Giovanni Bacordo said at a virtual forum yesterday.

"We would like to conclude that they are conducting surveys," Bacordo said.

The Philippine Navy may send a ship to guard the area, which has been considered for joint oil exploration between the two nations, he added.

A spokesman for the Philippine Department of Foreign Affairs was not immediately available for comment.

The presence of survey ships adds to China's growing presence in South China Sea areas claimed by both Manila and Beijing. It also comes after Duterte said he wants to pursue diplomacy with China, while the US is challenging Beijing's claims in the disputed sea.

In recent years, the Philippines and Vietnam have become the most vocal opponents to China's claims in the areas that overlap with their own. But despite several run-ins with Chinese ships, they have to weigh their response against the prospect of losing the backing of one of the region's biggest investors.

In 2016, the international tribunal in The Hague found that Beijing's expansive claim to sovereignty over the South China Sea had no legal basis.

Southeast Asia reports over 8,800 new virus cases

ANATOLIA — JAKARTA

With 8,887 new coronavirus infections in Southeast Asia, the tally of cases in the region has crossed 333,300, authorities said yesterday. The death toll in the region has hit 8,291, while recoveries are at 212,507.

In Philippines, the worst-hit in the region, total infections climbed to 136,638 after the country's health authority confirmed 6,958 new cases.

The archipelago nation reported 24 more virus-related fatalities, raising the nationwide death toll to 2,292, while recoveries jumped by 633 to reach 68,306.

Indonesia reported 42 more fatalities from COVID-19 over the past 24 hours, bringing the nationwide death toll to 5,765.

A further 1,687 infections were recorded in the country, bringing the total number of cases to 127,083, while recoveries

rose by 1,284 to reach 82,236.

In Singapore, 188 new cases were registered over the past 24 hours, bringing the total to 55,292, while the death toll stands at 27.

Malaysia confirmed 15 more cases, pushing the total to 9,094, while recoveries reached 8,803 and the death toll remained at 125.

Vietnam reported 29 new infections, raising the total number of cases to 841, while

two more deaths were confirmed, taking the tally to 13.

A total of 399 patients have recovered in the country so far.

Cambodia confirmed three new cases, bringing the tally to 251. In Myanmar, total cases climbed to 360 after one new infection was confirmed, while recoveries reached 312.

There were no reports of new infections or fatalities in Brunei Darussalam, Laos and Thailand.



Locals harvest their potatoes as Mount Sinabung spews volcanic ash in Karo, North Sumatra province, in Indonesia, yesterday.

Mt Sinabung erupts for a second time in a week

REUTERS — JAKARTA

An Indonesian volcano spewed a giant ash cloud 5km into the sky yesterday in its second eruption in three days, emitting a thunderous noise and turning the sky dark, authorities and witnesses said.

The eruption of Mount Sinabung on the island of Sumatra comes after more than a year of inactivity and was the

second since Saturday, as authorities warned residents and tourists about possible lava flows.

Dramatic footage of the morning eruption captured by residents showed a giant cloud of thick ash rising from the peak of the 2,460-metre mountain in Karo, North Sumatra.

"The sound was like thunder, it lasted for less than 30 seconds," resident Fachrur

Rozi Pasi told *Reuters* by phone.

Residents have been advised to stay outside of a 3km radius of the volcano and to wear masks to minimise the effects of falling volcanic ash, the volcanology agency said in a statement.

No casualties have been reported and a spokeswoman for the civil aviation authority said flights were still operating in the region.

Afghan President signs decree to release Taliban prisoners

REUTERS — KABUL

Afghan President Ashraf Ghani signed a decree to release a final batch of "hardcore" Taliban prisoners demanded by the militants, sources said, paving the way for long-awaited peace talks to begin.

"It is signed," a presidential palace source said yesterday.

Afghanistan's grand assembly, or Loya Jirga, on Sunday approved the release, under election-year pressure from US President Donald Trump for a deal allowing him

to bring home American troops.

The war has ground on since US-backed Afghan forces ousted the Taliban government in late 2001.

"We are ready to sit for talks within a week from when we see our prisoners released. We are ready," Taliban spokesman Suhail Shaheen said.

It was not immediately clear when the release would happen.

"The original plan is the talks will begin on Sunday," a government source said before the decree was signed.

Bombing in Pakistan town near Afghan border kills 5 people

AP — QUETTA

A bomb targeting an anti-drug force tore through a busy market in southwestern Pakistan near the Afghan border yesterday, killing at least five people and wounding 10 others, police and hospital officials said.

No one immediately claimed responsibility for the explosion in the border town of Chaman, which was caused by a bomb attached to a motorcycle. The bombing targeted a

unit tasked with combating narcotics smuggling.

Mohammad Ali, a local police official, said some of the wounded were in critical condition.

Security forces and police cordoned off the area of the blast, where residents said several shops and vehicles were damaged.

Pakistan's Prime Minister Imran Khan condemned the bombing and said he was praying for the recovery of those wounded.

WHO decries ‘vast global gap’ in funds needed to fight coronavirus

REUTERS — GENEVA

There is a “vast global gap” between funds needed to fight the coronavirus pandemic and funds committed, World Health Organisation chief Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus said yesterday, and the WHO was only “10 percent of the way” there.

More than 19.92 million people have been reported to be infected by the coronavirus globally and 729,883 have died, according to a tally.

Infections have been reported in more than 210 countries and territories since the first cases were identified in China in December 2019.

“The coming three months present a crucial window of

More than 19.92 million people have been reported to be infected by the coronavirus globally and 729,883 have died, according to a tally. Infections have been reported in more than 210 countries and territories since the first cases were identified in China in December 2019.

opportunity to scale-up the impact of the ACT Accelerator for global impact,” Tedros told a briefing in Geneva, referring to the “Access to COVID-19 Tools” initiative.

“However to exploit this window, we have to fundamentally scale up the way we are funding the ACT Accelerator and prioritise the use of new tools. There is a vast global gap

between our ambition for the ACT Accelerator, and the amount of funds that have been committed.” He said the WHO was only “10 percent of the way” to funding the billions of dollars required.

“For the vaccines alone, over \$100bn will be needed,” Tedros said. This sounds like lot of money and it is.

“But it’s small in comparison



Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus, Director-General of the World Health Organisation.

to the \$10tn that have already been invested by G20 countries in fiscal stimulus to deal with the consequences of the pandemic so far.” However, he said he saw “green shoots of hope”.

“It is never too late to turn the pandemic around,” Tedros said. The message is to “suppress, suppress, suppress”.

Dr Mike Ryan, head of WHO’s emergencies programme, said the coronavirus was simple, brutal and cruel.

“It’s brutal in its simplicity, it is brutal in its cruelty, but it doesn’t have a brain,” he said.

“We have the brains... we can

outsmart something that doesn’t have a brain but we are not doing such a great job right now.” Ryan said that Brazil is registering 50,000-60,000 cases per day.

“Brazil is sustaining a very high level of epidemic, the curve is somewhat flattened, but it’s not going down and the system is under great deal of pressure.

“In a situation like that, hydroxychloroquine is not a solution and not a silver bullet,” he added, referring to the malaria drug which President Jair Bolsonaro has encouraged Brazilians to take against COVID-19.

COVID-19 Test and Trace scheme changes tack in England

REUTERS — LONDON

England’s COVID-19 Test and Trace scheme is to become more locally targeted, the government said yesterday, after data suggested it was not reaching as many contacts of infected people as needed to avoid a second wave of infections.

Launched in late May, the scheme jointly operated by the National Health Service (NHS) and private contractors Serco and Sitel has had setbacks ranging from scrapping a promised homegrown mobile app to reports of contact tracers

with nothing to do.

The scheme will lose 6,000 people on August 24, out of a total of 18,000 currently employed by Serco and Sitel to call people who have tested positive for COVID-19 and trace anyone with whom they have been in recent contact.

“As the approach becomes more locally targeted the national service will adjust. NHS Test and Trace will reduce current extra capacity and reduce the number of non-NHS call handlers,” the health ministry said in a statement.

The new approach will give more responsibility to local

authorities and public health teams to track people down, with back-up from teams from the national scheme who will be allocated specific local areas to work on.

“If the dedicated national team cannot make contact with a resident within a set period of time, the local public health officials can use the data provided by NHS Test and Trace to follow up,” the health ministry said.

The scheme had been criticised by some in the medical and scientific communities for relying too much on contact tracers hired at speed by the private firms and

given basic training, as opposed to experienced public health teams with local knowledge.

Last week, a scientific report warned that Britain risked a second wave twice as large as the initial outbreak if it went ahead with plans to reopen schools full-time in September without improving the Test and Trace scheme.

The latest data shows that between August 23 and 29, contact tracers reached just under 80 percent of people referred to the system after a positive test, and just under 80 percent of those provided

recent contacts.

Of the 19,150 people who were identified as recent close contacts of infected people, 72 percent were reached, down from 76 percent in the previous week.

The scheme covers England, which accounts for about 85 percent of the UK population. In Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland, the health systems are run by semi-autonomous governments.

More than 46,000 people have died of COVID-19 in the United Kingdom, the highest death toll in Europe.

Scholz named SPD chancellor pick in race to succeed Merkel

REUTERS — BERLIN

Germany’s Social Democrats yesterday proposed Olaf Scholz, the finance minister and the party’s most popular politician, to run to succeed Chancellor Angela Merkel in next year’s national election, when her fourth and final term is expected to end.

The decision marks a comeback for the former Hamburg mayor, who was last year defeated by two left-wing outsiders in the race to lead the Social Democratic Party (SPD), the junior partner in Merkel’s conservative-led ruling coalition.

“The question now is what path Germany takes after the coronavirus crisis,” Scholz told a news conference after the announcement. “Is it one of rebuilding and strengthening our social state, or one that throws it all into question?” Scholz said that strengthening relations within Europe would be one of his top three priorities as chancellor, adding that the EU leaders’

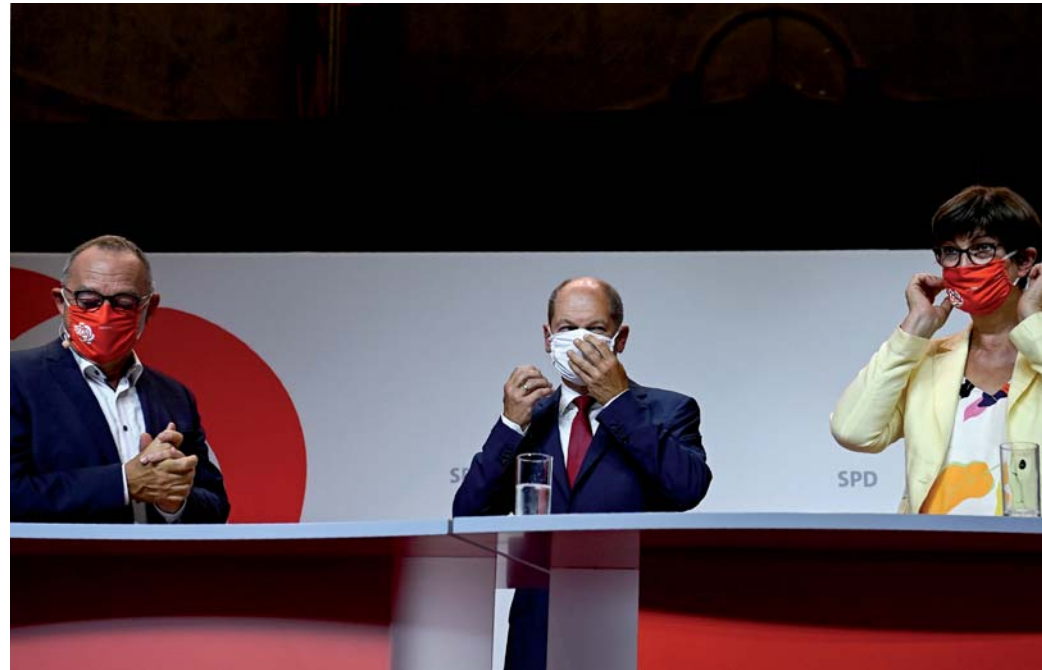
agreement to help coronavirus-hit member states financially should not be viewed as a one-off event.

He was one of the key architects of a Franco-German proposal for a European Recovery Fund to enable the European Commission to take on joint debt and channel the money to member states worst hit by COVID-19. That plan paved the way for the agreement among EU leaders last month.

It is not yet clear who the conservatives’ candidate for chancellor will be. Merkel, 66, has said she will not run again in the next election, after leading Germany since 2005.

Nevertheless, Scholz faces a stiff challenge: The SPD, which for decades vied with Merkel’s Christian Democrats (CDU) for dominance of German politics, has not won a national election since 2002 and now languishes a distant third in most opinion polls behind the CDU and the Greens.

“We know we have plenty of catching up to do,” Scholz said,



Saskia Esken (right) and Norbert Walter-Borjans (left), co-leaders of Germany’s SPD party put their face protection masks on after presenting German Finance Minister and Vice-Chancellor Olaf Scholz (centre) as the party’s chancellor candidate, in Berlin, yesterday.

when asked about his party’s rivalry with the Greens for leadership of the centre left. “But nobody is out of reach.” The Social Democrats will be hoping that Scholz’s transformation during the coronavirus pandemic from austere custodian of the public purse to free-spending paymaster in charge of a massive economic stimulus programme will bolster their support in next

year’s election. Scholz promised an agenda focused on respect for essential workers. Rather than making do with the applause meted out during the coronavirus pandemic, “respect and recognition must be expressed in good salaries and wages.”

Gerhard Schroeder, Germany’s last SPD chancellor and a harsh critic of many SPD leaders since he left office in

2005, hailed Scholz’s appointment as “a good decision at the right time.”

Scholz was nominated as chancellor candidate by SPD co-leaders Saskia Esken and Norbert Walter-Borjans, who praised him as a good crisis manager whom Germany could thank for having come through the pandemic in relatively good shape.

More migrants cross Channel to Britain as political tension rises

REUTERS — DOVER

British border agents brought ashore migrants in the port of Dover yesterday after picking them up from an inflatable boat as they crossed the Channel, the latest in a surge of crossings that is causing political tensions with France.

Taking advantage of hot weather and calm sea conditions, more than 500 migrants have reached England since Thursday, many in overloaded rubber dinghies.

A photographer in Dover saw a Border Force boat arrive carrying a group of migrants wearing life jackets. A blue inflatable dinghy was towed in by a separate vessel.

“What is going on is the activity of cruel and criminal gangs who are risking the lives of these people, taking them

across the Channel...in potentially unseaworthy vessels,” Prime Minister Boris Johnson told broadcasters.

“We want to stop that, working with the French.” The Home Office, or interior ministry, has said it would return as many migrants as possible to France. Immigration minister Chris Philp is due to meet his French counterpart in Paris this week.

France says it has already deployed extra resources and that many boats are being intercepted before they cross.

Stephen Hale, chief executive of the charity Refugee Action, said the numbers crossing the sea to Britain – about 4,000 so far this year – were tiny in the context of what he described as a global refugee crisis.

“This is serious for the people

concerned, but it’s a modest movement by international standards and it’s certainly something that Britain can cope with,” he told Reuters, contrasting the situation with that of Lebanon, which has a million Syrian refugees.

France received 138,000 asylum applications last year, more than three times the 44,200 that were received by Britain, according to Eurostat.

Many of the migrants seeking to reach Britain come from Afghanistan, Iraq, Syria and countries in Africa, fleeing poverty, persecution or war. Some stand a chance of being granted asylum, while others, considered illegal economic migrants, are unlikely to be allowed to remain in Britain.

Britain’s interior ministry has asked the military to help deal with the migrant boats, although

it has not explained what it wanted them to do.

French lawmaker Pierre-Henri Dumont, who represents the Calais area across the Channel from Dover, dismissed the idea as an attempt by kind of muscle.”

“My question is: what for? If a small boat full with migrants is entering the British waters, is the British navy going to shoot at them?” he said in a BBC interview.

Johnson said it was very difficult to send people away when they had arrived illegally, suggesting he wanted that to change.

“We need to look at the legal framework that we have, all the panoply of laws that an illegal immigrant has at his or her disposal that allows them to stay here,” he said.

Any attempt to change the

rules could be complicated by Britain’s exit from the European Union. As things stand, most EU accords still apply during a transition period that will end on December 31.

Dumont said after that, Britain would no longer be able to send migrants back to EU countries as that was only possible under an EU scheme.

“That will cause a huge increase in the number of migrants trying to cross the Channel,” he said.

Hale said the government was presenting the situation on the south coast as a crisis when it was not.

Restrictions on international travel since March due to the coronavirus have also shut down a government scheme that allowed Syrian refugees to come to Britain from Jordan, Lebanon and Turkey, he added.

Fire destroys Spanish holiday park popular with Britons

AFP — MOLLINA

A wind-fuelled fire ripped through a holiday park in Spain that is home to a large number of British pensioners, destroying dozens of homes and injuring two people, officials said yesterday.

The blaze broke out on Sunday afternoon at the Lazy Days holiday park in the southern town of Mollina, about 65km inland from the port of Malaga, sending huge plumes of black smoke into the air.

Firefighters backed by a water-dropping helicopter took more than two hours to put out the blaze, which destroyed 40 prefab homes and damaged another three, local emergency services said. Another 17 homes escaped damage.

Two people suffered first degree burns and were treated at the scene.

“It was a small fire but it just took off because of the wind,” said Carol Piper, a 76-year-old from Suffolk country near London who has lived at the holiday park on her own for the past year.

“Everything burned -- my home, my passport, my debit card, everything,” she said. “All I got out was the dog. We had gas bottles blowing up, black smoke, it was awful. Awful.” Local authorities have opened an investigation into the cause of the blaze.

Some people vacation at the holiday park but most of the some 70 residents are pensioners who live at the site year-round.

They were all evacuated and are now staying with friends or at a nearby youth centre.

“We haven’t got anything. We have the clothes we are wearing. There are a lot of elderly people who have lost everything,” said Susan Johnson, a 62-year-old from the northern English city of Sheffield who has lived at the site with her husband since September 2019.

The site, which is surrounded by fields, features an outdoor pool and mini-golf course.

Face masks now required at crowded Paris locations

AP — PARIS

From the most romantic spots along the Seine to popular shopping streets, residents and visitors in Paris were required to wear face masks in some outdoor areas of the French capital starting yesterday amid an uptick in reported coronavirus cases.

Police are authorised to issue a \$159 fine to people who do not follow the new public health requirement.

One location covered by the measure is the banks of the Canal Saint-Martin, among the city’s most popular outdoor spots for lunch or an aperitif with friends.

“In the morning when there is nobody on the canal, I think it is a bit of a drastic measure,” lawyer Helene Rames said after the face mask rule took effect.

“But it is true that at night and on the weekends, you can see many young people here close to each other, which is scary,” she added. “If it’s for the health of our elders then let’s wear it.”

Wearing a face mask outdoors also is required at the city’s open-air markets, at popular tourist sites like Notre Dame Cathedral and Montmartre district neighbourhoods, on several typically crowded streets and in parts of the Paris suburbs, authorities said. A similar requirement is being applied in Marseille and many other tourist destinations.

Belarus President vows to quash oppn rallies

AP – MINSK

Belarus President Alexander Lukashenko warned yesterday that the protesters who challenge the official vote results extending his 26-year rule will face a tough crackdown, deriding the opposition as “sheep” manipulated by foreign masters.

Dozens were injured and thousands detained hours after Sunday’s vote, when police brutally broke up mostly young protesters with tear gas, water cannons and flash-bang grenades and beat them with truncheons.

Election officials said yesterday that Lukashenko won a sixth term in office with 80% of the vote, while opposition challenger Sviatlana Tsikhanouskaya got 10%.

Tsikhanouskaya dismissed the official results as a sham and demanded a recount, submitting a formal request to the Central Election Commission. The opposition is planning new protests in the capital, Minsk, and other cities.

The brutal police crackdown drew harsh criticism from European capitals and will likely complicate Lukashenko’s efforts to mend ties with the West amid tensions with his main ally and sponsor, Russia.

But Lukashenko warned that he wouldn’t hesitate to use force

The Interior Ministry said 89 people were injured during the protests, including 39 law enforcement officers, and about 3,000 people were detained, some 1,000 of them in Minsk. It insisted that no one was killed during the protests and called reports about a fatality “an absolute fake”.

again to disperse the opposition demonstrations. He argued that the protesters met a due response overnight after injuring 25 police officers and attempting to take control of official buildings in several Belarusian cities. “We will not allow them to tear the country apart,” he said.

The 65-year-old former state farm director asserted that the opposition was being directed from Poland and the Czech Republic, adding that some groups in Ukraine and Russia could also have been behind the protests. “They are directing the (opposition) headquarters where those sheep don’t understand what they want from them,” he said in a dismissive reference to Tsikhanouskaya and her campaign.

The Interior Ministry said 89 people were injured during the protests, including 39 law enforcement officers, and about 3,000 people were detained, some 1,000 of them in Minsk. It insisted that no one was killed during the protests and called

reports about a fatality “an absolute fake”.

Tsikhanouskaya, a 37-year-old former English teacher without any prior political experience, entered the race after her husband, an opposition blogger who had hoped to run for president, was arrested in May. She has managed to unite fractured opposition groups and draw tens of thousands to her campaign rallies – the largest opposition demonstrations since the 1991 collapse of the Soviet Union.

“We don’t agree with (election results), we have absolutely opposite information,” Tsikhanouskaya said. “We have official protocols from many poll stations, where the number of votes in my favor are many more times than for another candidate.”

The post-election protest, in which young demonstrators — many of them teenagers — confronted police, marked a previously unseen level of violence. Internet and mobile networks went down after the polls closed



Riot police disperse protesters after polls closed in the presidential election, in Minsk.

as authorities tried to make it more difficult for protesters to coordinate.

“The more they beat us, the less we believe in the official results,” said Denis Golubev, a 28-year-old IT specialist who joined the protests. “They cut the internet and blocked communications to shut our mouths, but it won’t stop the protests.”

The European Union condemned the police crackdown and called for an immediate release of all those detained.

In a joint statement, EU foreign policy chief Josep Borrell and the EU commissioner responsible for relations with Europe’s close neighbours, Oliver Varhelyi, lamented that “the election night was marred with disproportionate and unacceptable state violence against peaceful protesters”.

“The Belarusian authorities must ensure that the fundamental right of peaceful assembly is respected,” they said. Belarus’ EU and Nato neighbours, Poland

and Lithuania, also issued strong rebukes. Polish Prime Minister Mateusz Morawiecki called on European Union’s leaders to convene an extraordinary summit to support the Belarusian people’s democratic aspirations.

Russian President Vladimir Putin called Lukashenko and congratulated him yesterday on winning the vote. The Belarusian leader also received congratulations from Chinese President Xi Jinping and heads of several ex-Soviet nations.



Jorge Enrique Salgado explains how he built a replica of the Eiffel Tower on the roof of his home in Havana, Cuba.

Havana, once dubbed the ‘Paris of the Caribbean’, gets its own Eiffel Tower

REUTERS – HAVANA

Havana was once dubbed the ‘Paris of the Caribbean’ for its beautiful architecture, vibrant arts scene, and flourishing nightlife. Now it even has its own Eiffel Tower.

The illuminated four-metre high replica by Cuban blacksmith Jorge Enrique Salgado lights up a corner of the otherwise dimly-lit Arroyo Naranjo southern residential district of the capital.

Salgado, 52, an accountant who learnt metalworking from his father, says he has never been to Paris. But he had seen the Eiffel Tower in films and photos and when his son asked him to make an antenna to

capture the Wi-Fi signal of a nearby park, he hit on the idea of making a model. Home Internet service is not widely available in the Communist-run island, but Wi-Fi hotspots have been rolled out in parks and plazas nationwide since 2015.

In the end, the project took on a life of its own and they never installed the antenna because they felt it would ruin the aesthetic of the model that took months to build. Cuba has also rolled out mobile internet over the last year and a half.

“To make the tower, my son downloaded plans, models, photos and other details via the internet,” said Salgado. “I realized the original tower was built piece by piece so that’s

what I did.” Salgado said he bought and salvaged pieces of iron railings to built the tower on the roof of his home, using car halogens to light it up, in a country where it is often difficult to find material.

“We based our lighting exactly on the original,” said his son, Enrique Salgado, who helped him build the replica.

The enthusiasm in the neighbourhood for his Eiffel Tower has kindled hopes he could make a living from the passion project and he is now working on a slightly smaller model to sell. “I never thought of dedicating myself to this, never,” said Salgado. “(But) it would be an honor to be able to live off this.”

Drier than the Sahara: Heatwave fans fire risk for French farmers

REUTERS – AUBENCHEUL-AU-BAC, FRANCE

On a farm in France, firefighters beat down the flames that had turned a field of wheat black, but they were too late to save the combine harvester. Caught in the blaze, it belched out flames and thick smoke while the farmer looked on helpless.

Crop and forest fires are a ritual of summer in France, but a warming climate has meant the risk has increased and the danger zone has expanded from southern France to the north, scientists say.

The blaze in July that destroyed the combine harvester was in a district near the

border with Belgium where, farmers say, worrying about wildfires is something new.

“It’s an occurrence that we weren’t seeing four or five years ago here,” said Benoit Vaillant, who with his family runs a different farm in the same region of northern France.

Scientists who track forest and crop fires in France say that last year saw a small decline in the surface area affected, and this year has not seen any exceptional increase. But they say that is largely down to good fortune; while this July was the driest in about 60 years in France, that has not coincided with the winds that stoke fires.

“But if the drought persists

and if there is a lot of wind, the situation could quickly get worse,” said Eric Martin of France’s National Institute of Agriculture Research.

The fundamental precursor for fires, according to scientists, is how much moisture there is in vegetation. And studies show that the moisture level has been dropping year by year, in step with rising temperatures. Vaillant said last year the moisture content of the straw he grows on his farm dropped to 9%.

“That means that the straw is drier than the Sahara air,” he said. “And so you put a spark in there and it catches fire, and with a bit of wind, it’s fanned and stoked.”

Bolsonaro assails TV network blaming him for virus deaths

AFP – RIO DE JANEIRO

President Jair Bolsonaro lashed out at the “cowardice” of Brazil’s most widely viewed TV network for suggesting he bore heavy blame for the nation’s more than 100,000 coronavirus deaths.

The far-right president accused TV Globo of treating the death milestone as if it were “a World Cup final,” saying on Twitter that it had been both “cowardly and disrespectful of the dead.” On Saturday night, shortly after the official announcement that the 100,000-death mark had been passed, TV Globo opened its news report with a long editorial highly critical of Bolsonaro’s handling of the health crisis.

News anchors pointedly noted that an article in the Brazilian constitution states that “health is the right of all and

the duty of the National Government.” They then asked, “Has the president of the republic done his duty?” Bolsonaro said in his tweet that “disinformation kills more than the virus.” He suggested that TV Globo was using COVID-19 for political purposes.

Bolsonaro has played down the coronavirus from the beginning, dismissing it as a “little flu,” questioning the lockdowns ordered by some state governors and saying their economic impact could be “more deadly than the virus”.

Bolsonaro said that he has a “clear conscience,” adding that “we have done everything possible to save lives.” On Saturday, numerous politicians sent messages of comfort to the families of the 100,000 people who died and criticized the government’s handling of the crisis.

Cuba reports record number of COVID-19 cases

REUTERS – HAVANA

Cuba reported a record 93 cases of the new coronavirus yesterday as a surge of the disease in the Havana area threatened to stall the re-opening of the country after a partial lockdown beginning in March.

Most of the cases were in Havana, where a partial lockdown was re-imposed on Monday, and in neighboring Artemisa province. The area has been isolated from the rest of the country where with but few exceptions no cases have been reported in more than two months.

In Havana, restaurants, clubs and pools are once more closed, public transportation suspended and access to the beach banned.

Cuba has been hailed as a rare success story in Latin America for its textbook handling and containment of its coronavirus outbreak through contact tracing and isolation of potential asymptomatic carriers of COVID-19.

Perhaps of most concern to officials in yesterday’s health ministry report was that 22 cases had not been traced to contacts, a figure way above the usual two or three untraceable cases per day.

“We are witnessing a new epidemiological outbreak that puts our entire population at risk,” Cuban Health Minister Jose Angel Portal said during a daily coronavirus briefing on Saturday.

Cuba has reported just under 3,000 cases and 88 deaths to date.

Captive beluga whales released into Iceland sea sanctuary

AFP – REYKJAVIK

Two beluga whales from a Shanghai aquarium have returned to the sea in an Icelandic sanctuary, conservationists said yesterday, expressing hopes of creating a model for rehoming some 300 belugas currently in captivity.

Little White and Little Grey, two 13-year-old females, left behind their previous lives entertaining visitors at the Changfeng Ocean World in June 2019 when they were flown to Iceland’s Klettsvik Bay in the Westman Islands, in specially tailored containers.

On Friday, they were moved

from their landbased facility to care pools in the sea at Klettsvik Bay — the first time the two belugas have been in the sea since they were taken from a Russian whale research centre in 2011, the conservation charity Sea Life Trust said in a statement yesterday.

They will stay in the care pools “for a few weeks” before they are released into the bigger sanctuary, a 32,000-square-metre sea pen that will become their home, organisers said.

Little Grey and Little White “will need a short period of time to acclimatise to their new natural environment and all the outdoor elements before they

are released into the wider sanctuary in Klettsvik Bay,” the statement said.

After having been cared for by humans for so many years, it is unlikely the belugas would survive in the wild. The pen is thus sealed off by nets that still allow sea life, such as fish, to swim through.

Andy Bool, the head of Sea Life Trust, said the belugas’ release “was as smooth as we had hoped and planned for.” “We are carefully monitoring Little Grey and Little White with our expert care team and veterinarians,” he said.

Bool said the whales were “ambassadors for the 300 other

belugas that are in human care across the world.” “We hope to show that Little White and Little Grey thrive in this bay, and we’re conducting a research study... that will hopefully show that there’s a welfare benefit to being in a natural environment like this. “We hope that can then persuade others that maybe their beluga whales might be better off in a different environment,” Bool said.

Ahead of their sea transfer, the whales were trained to hold their breath longer, become physically stronger to cope with tides and currents, and put on blubber to help them cope with colder water temperatures.

The whales each weigh 900 kilogrammes (2,000 pounds) and measure four metres (13 feet). Originally from Russian Arctic waters, it is thought they were two or three years old when captured.

Belugas typically live for 40 to 60 years. According to Sea Life Trust, Klettsvik Bay is the world’s first open water beluga sanctuary.

Klettsvik is also where Keiko, the killer whale in the 1993 film “Free Willy”, was flown in 1998. The orca was fully released in 2002 but did not manage to adapt to life in the wild and died 18 months later in a Norwegian fjord.

Virus cases among US children soared in late July: Report

REUTERS — NEW YORK

The number of new COVID-19 cases among children in the United States rose 40% in the last two weeks of July, according to a report released just weeks before tens of millions of American students are scheduled to begin the new school year.

Health experts are keeping an eye on coronavirus infections among kids and teenagers as officials struggle with the thorny question of whether to reopen schools for in-person classes, adopt a virtual learning model or a hybrid of the two.

President Donald Trump, who is seeking a second term in the White House in a November 3 election, has pushed states to allow students to physically return to classrooms, but health officials have expressed caution about doing so in areas where cases have been rising sharply.

The new report by the American Academy of Pediatrics and the Children's Hospital Association found that more than 338,000 children have tested positive for COVID-19 since the onset of the US epidemic, with 97,078 new cases reported in the July 16-30 period.

Most of the new infections in this group occurred in states in the US South and West, according to the report, which was based on data from 49 states, New York City, the District of Columbia, Puerto Rico and Guam.

It did not give a reason for the recent spike. Testing for the novel coronavirus overall has risen in the United States and

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concerns about children as possible spreaders of the virus have been sparked by new studies showing they can catch it.

The American Academy of Pediatrics noted the data showed that severe illness due to COVID-19 appears to be rare among children. The US Centers for Disease Control and Prevention also has said that children who get the virus are less likely to have severe symptoms.

The CDC recently updated its guidance to recommend that schools reopen to some degree unless their communities were experiencing an uncontrolled or high rate of transmission of the virus.

Some cities including Chicago and Los Angeles plan to start the school year with online classes, while New York City, once the epicenter of the US epidemic, plans to have at least some in-person learning in all its school districts in the fall.



People load merchandise into a car near a looted Best Buy store after parts of the city had widespread looting and vandalism, yesterday in Chicago, Illinois.

More than 100 arrested after widespread looting in Chicago

ANATOLIA — CHICAGO

Dozens of stores, banks, and other businesses were broken into across Chicago overnight, causing widespread damage in the city.

More than 100 people were arrested following a night of looting and confrontations with the police, city authorities probing the incidents said. Officials briefly raised bridges and suspended some train and bus services yesterday. There was also an exchange of gunfire with the police, according to police spokesman Tom Ahren.

"Police involved shooting Michigan and Lake," he published on his Twitter account early yesterday. He said that there were "shots fired at police who returned fire," and that

although no officers were injured, it was "unknown at this time if offenders were shot."

In some of the videos that circulated on social media, people can be seen entering various businesses such as Walgreens, Macy's, Tesla, Lamborghini, Neiman Marcus, Saks Fifth Avenue, Coach, Apple and other stores along the Magnificent Mile, one of Chicago's most-visited tourist attractions.

Chicago Mayor Lori Lightfoot said the violent events that began around 11pm local time on Sunday night (0400GMT yesterday) and continued into the morning undermine public safety and recovery efforts after COVID-19-related closures.

"Stores that were targeted were more than just large chain stores," said Lightfoot. "They

were small businesses and restaurants representing our city jobs and livelihoods, all of which were on the verge of recovering and getting back to work."

Chicago authorities said they were not sure what had sparked the vandalism and looting but local reports said hours earlier dozens of people had confronted police after officers shot and wounded a person on Sunday in the Englewood neighbourhood. These events prompted a crowd to face off with police hours later.

Those arrested were expected to face charges, including looting, disorderly conduct, and battery against police. "To those who engaged in this criminal behavior, let's be clear: we are coming for you," said Lightfoot.

100 prominent black men urge Biden to pick woman of colour for running mate

AFP — WASHINGTON

Rapper Sean "Diddy" Combs led more than 100 prominent African-American men yesterday in penning an open letter urging presidential candidate Joe Biden to choose a woman of colour as his running mate.

The presumptive Democratic nominee is expected to announce his vice-presidential pick in the coming days.

The group, including faith leaders like Reverend William Barber, warned that failing to choose a woman of colour would cost Biden the election against President Donald Trump. "For too long black women have been asked to do everything from rally the troops to risk their lives for the Democratic Party with no acknowledgment, no respect, no visibility, and certainly not enough support," they wrote.

"Failing to select a black woman in 2020 means you will lose the election," they added. The men said the letter — also signed by civil rights attorney Benjamin Crump — is a mark of "solidarity" with some 700 black women leaders who wrote Biden last week calling on him to choose a woman of colour.

Both groups highlighted the excessive criticism and scrutiny to which several of the leading contenders for the post, including Senator Kamala Harris and Susan Rice, have been subjected in recent weeks. Other women in the running are House Democrats Karen Bass and Val Demings, who are black, and Gretchen Whitmer and senators Elizabeth Warren and Tammy Duckworth.

Protesters in Portland set fires, use mortar; 2 officers hurt

AP — PORTLAND

Protesters outside a Portland police union building set fires and used a mortar to launch commercial grade fireworks at police and officials said yesterday that two officers were injured and 16 demonstrators were arrested.

A day after demonstrators managed to get inside the union building and set a fire, the protesters on Sunday night blocked a road and set dumpster fires outside it, police said in a statement.

The fireworks were launched at police as they tried to clear out the demonstrators and one of the two officers treated at the scene suffered a burn on her neck.

The demonstrators who were arrested face misdemeanor charges of disorderly conduct or interfering with a peace officer. Their detentions came after nine protesters were arrested on Saturday night.

Sunday night's demonstration came after demonstrators marched to the building from a nearby park. As police moved to break up the gathering, the commercial-grade fireworks were thrown at officers, police said.

The department released photos of the officers' injuries, including a photo of a face covering that the statement described as being "partially melted" from the fireworks.

The protests in Portland have happened nightly for 70 days since George Floyd was killed in Minneapolis.

The violence reached an apex when protesters targeted a federal courthouse last month that was defended by federal agents who lobbed tear gas at the attacking demonstrators in two straight weeks of nightly confrontations.

The federal agents withdrew more than a week ago amid hopes for calm, but the violent protests have resurfaced miles from the courthouse. Three officers were injured in a protest on Saturday night.



Fire fighters look for survivors at the scene of an explosion in a residential area of Baltimore, Maryland, US, yesterday.

1 dead and children trapped as gas blast destroys homes in Baltimore

REUTERS — BALTIMORE

A gas explosion ripped through a Baltimore neighbourhood yesterday, killing at least one person, injuring four and trapping children as the blast destroyed at least three homes, firefighters said.

Fire officials described it as a natural gas explosion but said the exact cause was under investigation. The blast destroyed three brick row homes and ripped open the wall of another, spreading debris throughout the

neighbourhood. Rescuers picked through the rubble, searching for victims with their hands and hand tools, Baltimore City Fire Department spokeswoman Blair Adams said.

One woman was killed, four people were hospitalized in serious condition, and firefighters were trying to rescue a sixth person. At one point at least five people were trapped, some of them children, the Baltimore Firefighters IAFF Local 734 said on Twitter.

Neighbours responding to

the blast dug through rubble and called out for victims. One neighbor told the *Baltimore Sun* he could hear shouts from trapped children. "Come get us! We're stuck!" came the cries, Kevin Matthews told the Sun.

Matthews found one person buried from the neck down and another sheltering in a closet, the Sun said. "You knew it was something catastrophic," Dean Jones told WBFF television about hearing the blast. Jones and several others freed at least one woman from the scene.

Gun seizures on the rise at US airports

AP — DALLAS

With air traffic nearing a five-month high, airport security is finding guns in passenger carry-on bags at three times the rate recorded before the pandemic. And 80% of the guns are loaded.

The discoveries at airports comes at a time when US gun sales are surging, and analysts believe many of those purchases are being made by first-time buyers. Officers found 15.3 guns for every million people screened in July, compared with 5.1 per million people in July of last year, the Transportation Security Administration said yesterday.

There has been a significant increase in loaded guns at checkpoints, said TSA Administrator David Pekoske. He said screeners are already working in conditions of heightened risks and that "no one should be introducing new ones".

"Even more concerning is that 80% of the firearms coming into the checkpoint are loaded, and it's just an accident waiting to happen," Pekoske said in a prepared statement.

After an extended lull in activity, gun sales have begun to surge in recent months.

FBI figures show that there were more than 3.6 million firearms background checks

requested in July, a 79% increase from July 2019.

Background checks have been rising every month compared with a year earlier since April 2019, but they picked up even faster this year, with checks topping 3 million in four of the last five months. Checks had not exceeded 3 million in one month since December 2015.

Cowen analyst Cai von Rumohr, who tracks gun sales, said the increases are likely due to fear about COVID-19 lockdowns, civil unrest, and former Vice-President Joe Biden's lead over President Donald Trump in polls ahead of the November 3 election "given his more restrictive stance on gun control relative to President Trump".

The analyst said an outsized rise in handgun sales in June and July indicates that many purchases are being made by first-time gun owners.

It is legal to transport guns in checked bags if they are unloaded and in a locked case. There are federal civil penalties for improperly placing a gun in a carry-on bag, and violators can lose the use of faster-screening programs such as TSA PreCheck, but criminal charges are usually left to local authorities.

Last year, 4,432 guns were found in carry-on bags, or about 12.1 per day, and 87% were loaded.

US Attorney-General Barr says the left wants to tear down system

REUTERS — WASHINGTON

US Attorney-General William Barr mounted a partisan attack on the Democratic Party in an interview that aired on Sunday, claiming the left believes in "tearing down the system" and pursues absolute victory as "a substitute for religion".

Barr also told a Fox News TV host he was worried that an increase in mail-in voting could lead to a contested presidential election in November, sounding in on an issue often raised by US President Donald Trump.

In an interview with conservative pundit Mark Levin,

Barr said Democrats had pulled away from classic liberal values and now were akin to the "Rousseauian Revolutionary Party" aimed at destroying the institutions upon which the country was built.

"They're not interested in compromise, they're not interested in dialectic exchange of views. They're interested in total victory," Barr said of the left. "It's a secular religion. It's a substitute for a religion."

The comments come nearly two weeks after a contentious hearing before the House Judiciary Committee in which Barr denied accusations he was doing

Trump's bidding by intervening in high-profile cases and sending federal agents into cities.

Barr has come under fire from Democratic lawmakers for sending federal officers to disperse protesters in Portland, Oregon, where some demonstrators have attacked a federal courthouse and others have gathered to speak out against racism and police brutality following the May 25 death of George Floyd.

Barr said police have been unfairly maligned and targeted with violent attacks during nationwide protests, and argued greater attention should be paid

to a recent surge in violence in some cities that has led to numerous deaths of Black people.

He said he believed systemic racism existed, but that the "best example" was in education, with public schools consistently failing inner-city youth. He pointed to school choice - a policy endorsed by Trump - as one solution to the problem.

"I believe Black lives matter, but I believe all Black lives matter. I also believe that it's not just a matter of protecting their safety from physical harm, it's also providing economic opportunity, which this administration has done," Barr said.

Trump, who trails Democratic challenger Joe Biden in opinion polls, has raised questions about the integrity of the November election and he and his allies have proclaimed without evidence that expanded voting by mail — sought by many due to the coronavirus pandemic — will lead to widespread fraud.

When asked about the push to expand mail-in ballots, Barr said he was "very worried about it." He said he was fine with "individual cases" where people that have difficulty making it to the polls apply for and receive a ballot in the mail.