The Peninsula

Local focus, Global vision





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2 RIYALS



Qatar-EU trade volume touches $7bn in 9 months

THE PENINSULA — DOHA

Minister of Commerce and Industry, H E Ali bin Ahmed Al Kuwari said yesterday that the trade volume between Qatar and EU members reached $7bn in the first nine months of 2020, which is 12.3 percent of Qatar's total trade globally.

He was speaking during a teleconference meeting held with ambassadors and representatives of EU countries, in the presence of Director of European Affairs Department at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, H E Ambassador Salem Abdullah Al Jaber and representatives from the World Trade Organization (WTO).

During the meeting, officials discussed strengthening friendly relations between Qatar and the EU and ways to open new horizons for cooperation in areas of common interest.

In his opening remarks, the Minister of Commerce and Industry praised the close relations between Qatar and EU countries, noting that despite the economic and commercial repercussions of the coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic, EU countries had been able to maintain their same position as last year as the second trading partner of Qatar.

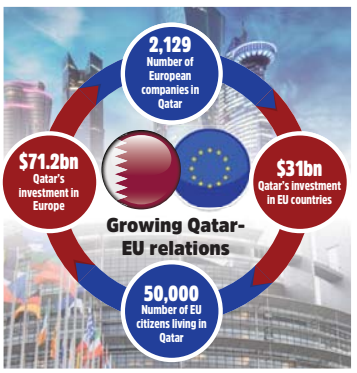
The Minister said that Qatar and the EU are linked by a significant number of commercial and economic agreements, as Qatar has signed 14 commercial, economic, and technical cooperation agreements, as well as 12 "Reciprocal Promotion and Protection of Mutual Investments" agreements. Additionally, the Ministry of Commerce and Industry heads eight joint committees with a number of European countries.

He said there are more than 50,000 EU citizens living in Qatar, 95 percent of them are working in high skilled jobs. Qatar had appointed three commercial attaches in Geneva, London, and Paris as a first step, to be followed by appointing commercial attaches in other EU countries.

The Minister said Qatar invested $71.2bn in Europe as a whole, where 43 percent of these investments were invested in the EU countries at a total of around $31bn.

He added that the number of European companies operating in Qatar currently stood at about 2129, of which 307 are fully owned by European citizens and 1822 owned jointly by Qatari and EU citizens.

Touching on the Qatari economy in the post-COVID era, the minister said the year 2020 has seen major achievements for Qatar despite the significant challenges arising from the outbreak of the COVID-19 virus, which has disrupted supply chains and normal business operations around the globe. ➔P2





Minister of Commerce and Industry H E Ali bin Ahmed Al Kuwari addressing a teleconference meeting held with ambassadors and representatives of EU countries, yesterday.

Qatar aims to host most accessible FIFA World Cup in history

THE PENINSULA — DOHA

More than one million visitors are expected to flock to Qatar when it hosts the FIFA World Cup in 2022 – and in preparation for the tournament, organisers are committed to ensuring that fans with disabilities enjoy an accessible and barrier-free experience.

Speaking to mark the International Day of Persons with Disabilities, Secretary-General of the Supreme Committee for Delivery & Legacy (SC) Hassan Al Thawadi said providing an accessible experience for all fans is a core commitment for tournament organisers.

"Ever since we began working on hosting the first edition of the World Cup in the Middle East and Arab world, we have made a commitment to ensure that all touchpoints of the fan experience meet FIFA's Accessibility Requirements and are accessible to fans with disabilities.

This includes accessible stadiums, transportation networks, accommodation, fan zones, and all other aspects of what will truly be an amazing experience for all," said Al Thawadi.

The SC launched its Accessibility Forum in 2015 to consult local stakeholders and people with disabilities. The forum's objective is to deliver a barrier-free fan experience for all and support FIFA, Q22, and SC towards providing equal opportunities towards an inclusive and accessible environment. Besides, the community platform enables people with disabilities to be active participants in setting priorities and testing the accessibility of various components of the fan experience, including tournament venues.

The forum recently organised a visit to the Qatar 2022 stadium in Al Rayyan, which will be inaugurated when it hosts the Amir Cup final between Al Sadd and Al Arabi on December 18. During the visit, forum members toured the stadium's accessibility features, including the seating, bathrooms, changing rooms, concession stands, and emergency exits. In addition, forum members met the venue team to discuss potential areas of improvement. ➔P2





Qatar to take on Bangladesh today

Qatari players during a training session on the eve of their Group E clash of the Asian Qualifiers against Bangladesh today. The match will be played at Abdullah bin Khalifa Stadium in Doha, with kickoff set for 7pm. ➔ REPORT ON PAGE 16

Disbursal of Qatari grant to 100,000 Gaza families begins

QNA — GAZA

Chairman of Qatar's Committee for the Reconstruction of Gaza, H E Ambassador Mohammed Al Emadi said yesterday that the committee, in cooperation with Qatar Fund for Development, began disbursing cash aid to poor families in Gaza.

He said that the aid will be provided to 100,000 families in the strip, with each family receiving $100. He added that the process will take place through branches of the post office and will be fully supervised by staff from the Qatari committee in cooperation with the designated authorities, led by the Ministry of Social Development and the Ministry of communications and Information Technology in Gaza.

Ambassador Al Emadi said that there are strict precautionary and preventative measures followed while implementing the process, to ensure the safety of the beneficiaries and the workers. The measures ensure both parties adhere to physical distancing and the use of disinfectants in light of the spread of the Coronavirus (COVID-19) in Gaza.

Global praise for progress in Afghanistan peace negotiations

QNA — DOHA

Several countries across the world have praised the progress made in the agreement between the Afghan government and the Taliban. Along with Qatar, countries including The United States, Germany, Indonesia, Norway, and Uzbekistan yesterday welcomed the announcements by the negotiating sides that they have adopted the rules of procedures and moved to discuss the draft agenda. North Atlantic Treaty Organization (Nato) also welcomed the announcement.

The US welcomed the agreement announced by the Afghan negotiators in Doha, expressing gratitude to the State of Qatar for its role as a host and facilitator of the Afghan peace talks. Rapid progress on a political roadmap and a ceasefire is what the people of Afghanistan want more than anything else, the US Department of State said.

This agreement is a major milestone in the Afghanistan Peace Negotiations that have been underway since September 12, the State Department added.

It also said that the agreement codifies the rules and procedures the two sides have been negotiating since the start of talks, adding that the teams made a number of important decisions that will guide their negotiations on a political roadmap and a comprehensive ceasefire.

The US Department of State congratulated both sides on their perseverance and willingness to find common ground, noting that this achievement demonstrates that the Afghan Islamic Republic and Taliban are serious, able to overcome differences, and ready to deal with difficult issues.

What has been achieved provides hope the two sides will succeed in reaching a political settlement to this more than forty-year-old conflict, the State Department said, adding that the US will continue to support the peace process and work with all sides in pursuit of a serious reduction of violence and ceasefire. Germany, Indonesia, Norway and Uzbekistan also praised Qatar's key role in hosting and facilitating this phase of negotiations and this important breakthrough. ➔P2

Doha International Book Fair postponed

THE PENINSULA — DOHA

The Ministry of Culture and Sports announced yesterday that Doha International Book Fair has been postponed.

The Ministry said in statement that the next edition of Doha International Book Fair, which was scheduled from January 7 to 16, has been postponed until further notice. The decision was taken in coordination with the Ministry of Health and the competent authorities due to the current situation of COVID-19 pandemic which has created new challenges for the world.

MINISTRY OF CULTURE AND SPORTS
STATE OF QATAR

PRAYER TIMINGS

FAJR	04.42 am
SUNRISE	06.04 am
DHUHR	11.24 am
ASR	02.24 pm
MAGHRIB	04.45 pm
ISHA	06.15 pm

WEATHER TODAY

22°C Minimum | 30°C Maximum

Misty to foggy at places at first becomes moderate temperature daytime with some clouds.

- ALRUWAIS : 24° → 27°
- ALKHOR : 20° → 29°
- DUKHAN : 21° → 26°
- WAKRAH : 19° → 29°
- MESAIEED : 19° → 29°
- ABUSAMRA : 20° → 27°

HIGH TIDE 07:07 - 17:38

LOW TIDE 00:11 - 14:49

Dhow Festival sheds light on pearl diving, trade

THE PENINSULA — DOHA

The 10th Katara Traditional Dhow Festival sheds light on the history of pearl diving and pearling trade as well as other marine resources which Qatar and other participating countries had been known for.

Pearls have been one of the most valuable and ancient natural resource of Qatar, and deep-sea diving history of the nation has been well-known for ages. But for the younger generation, the presence of people engaged in pearl trade, how oysters are brought to land and how a pearl is actually found is fascinating.

Deep-sea diving was once a source of livelihood in the past as 'tawash' and carpentry being among the prominent occupations. The Qatari 'Al Hayrat' oyster is considered to be one of the finest in the Arabian world, as the finest pearls are extracted from them.

Al Majid jewellery pavilion showcases some of the finest, ancient and modern jewels including pearls. It also includes a section which shows how pearls are measured and assembled into jewellery, as well as an assortment of necklaces mixed with traditional heritage and shaped by modern designs.

While pearls and pearl diving is an important facet, the boats used for fishing is an equally challenging dimension of maritime culture.



Shura Council Speaker H E Ahmed bin Abdullah bin Zaid Al Mahmoud and other officials visiting the 10th Katara Traditional Dhow Festival.

The marine heritage of Iraq while distinct can at the same time be commonly associated with Arabian maritime tradition and history.

Mahdi Mutashar, who supervises the Iraqi pavilion Al Janaj, speaking about their presence at the festival this year said, "We are this time displaying Iraqi folk craft such as making 'mushaf' boats used for fishing in addition to handmade woollen carpets. Our craftsmen are also making baskets and table mats (woven rugs) which people can see for themselves and realise the originality of the tradition and culture."

The pavilion of Oman is showcasing antiques and rare collectibles of the sea.

Hammoud bin Abdullah Al-Amrani, managing the Omani pavilion, said they have antiques and rare collectibles of the sea, also personal supplies of sailors from their long voyages that could last up to six months and more. Utensils used for cooking, food storage methods, in addition to natural oil utensils that are used for treatment purposes are also shown at the pavilion.

Also displayed is medication, in addition to many exhibits representing models of famous ships of the Omani maritime heritage, pearl extraction tools, oysters and scales used by the tawash and boxes (pashtata) used to collect the pearl crop, as well as many ancient antique collectibles such as Rumaila clocks and compass dating back 150 years.

The festival will receive visitors from 1pm until 11pm today, and from 10am to 10pm tomorrow.

OFFICIAL NEWS

Amir sends condolences to French President

DOHA: Amir H H Sheikh Tamim bin Hamad Al Thani and Deputy Amir H H Sheikh Abdullah bin Hamad Al Thani sent yesterday cables of condolences to President of the French Republic H E Emmanuel Macron on the death of Former French President Valery Giscard d'Estaing. Prime Minister and Minister of Interior H E Sheikh Khalid bin Khalifa bin Abdulaziz Al Thani also sent a cable of condolence to Prime Minister of the friendly French Republic H E Jean Castex, on the death of Former French President Valery Giscard d'Estaing. — **QNA**

Deputy PM holds phone call with British Defence Minister

DOHA: Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of State for Defence Affairs Dr. Khalid bin Mohammed Al Attiyah, received yesterday a phone call from British Defence Minister H E Ben Wallace. During the call, they reviewed bilateral relations in the military fields between the two friendly countries and ways to enhance them. — **QNA**

Qatar attends IOFS General Assembly

QNA — DOHA

Minister of Municipality and Environment, H E Eng. Abdullah bin Abdulaziz bin Turki Al Subaie, participated yesterday in the meeting of the third session of the General Assembly of the Islamic Organization for Food Security (IOFS), which was held under the title 'sustainable development of food security in the Organization of Islamic Cooperation (OIC) region', and was hosted by Ankara via video conference.

During the meeting, a number of topics on the agenda were discussed, including: the IOFS action plan for the development of strategic commodities (wheat, cassava, rice and palm oil), the establishment of a food security reserve for the IOFS, the establishment of an Islamic Food Processing Association, and the management of food security, science, technology and innovation programmes, agri-food trade promotion and investment, humanitarian food programmes, and improvement of the balanced food database for the IOFS.



Minister of Municipality and Environment, H E Eng. Abdullah bin Abdulaziz bin Turki Al Subaie, attending the IOFS meeting, yesterday.

Qatar aims to host most accessible FIFA World Cup

FROM PAGE 1

Additionally, the SC has installed sensory rooms in multiple stadiums to create accessible experiences for fans with autism. The rooms are equipped with noise cancellation, soft furnishings, mood lighting, relaxing music, and brightly-coloured sensory toys and equipment. These features are designed to manage a person's anxiety and allow them and their families and friends to watch football matches in a welcoming, calming, and inclusive environment. They are set to be available in the upcoming FIFA Club World Cup Qatar 2020.

Mark Dyer, the SC's Access & Inclusivity Strategist, said: "We are proud of our collaborative efforts with FIFA and Q22 towards including people with disabilities at every step of the process to prepare for the tournament which is key to ensuring that stadiums and other key facilities are tried and tested by those who will use them. We believe in the principle of 'nothing about us, without us,' and that is central to all of our work."

Dyer also spoke of the importance of building an accessible ecosystem that goes beyond the accessibility of stadiums. "Through the Accessibility Forum, we are able to engage those key stakeholders in the country that are responsible for some of the most important touchpoints of the user journey when fans with disabilities come to Qatar for the FIFA World Cup," he added. Some of the key accessibility features that fans will enjoy during Qatar 2022 include barrier-free stops of the Doha Metro network, inclusive accommodation options, and barrier-free entry to key tourist destinations.

Looking to the future, Al Thawadi concluded his message by saying, "People with disabilities will be some of the most important beneficiaries of the legacy left behind by Qatar 2022. The transformation which Qatar's infrastructure has witnessed to host this tournament will, without a doubt, mean a more accessible country for everyone to thrive in and enjoy."

Global praise for progress in Afghan peace negotiations

FROM PAGE 1

A joint statement issued by the countries said that the achievement was an important step in a process that must have at its end point a durable and inclusive peace settlement in Afghanistan.

The countries encouraged both sides to build on the important milestone that was achieved yesterday by continuing to engage with each other in good faith, constructively and ready to find common ground. They also urged both sides to give priority to ending violence.

The Secretary-General of Nato, Jens Stoltenberg, welcomed the progress made in the agreement between the Afghan government and the Taliban.

He said that the agreement is one step towards a lasting, political and peaceful resolution of the conflict in Afghanistan. In a press statement, the Secretary-General stressed that all Nato allies strongly support the peace process, adding "now we would like to see more progress and we need to see rapid progress, both on establishing a political roadmap, but not least on the important issue of a comprehensive ceasefire."

The Secretary-General of Nato, Jens Stoltenberg, pointed out that the agreement which was announced demonstrates that the parties who are negotiating, are able to make progress, even on tough and difficult issues, stressing that this is important because Afghans want peace.

It is still a long way to go, many hurdles to be overcome, but this is an important first step and it is encouraging to see that it was possible to make that step today, he added.

Qatar hosted the intra-Afghan peace negotiations on September 12, in a step that was described as serious and important towards establishing sustainable peace in Afghanistan, especially after the United States and the Taliban signed the Agreement for Bringing Peace to Afghanistan at the beginning of this year.

Qatar-EU trade volume touches $7bn in 9 months

FROM PAGE 1

Minister of Commerce and Industry, H E Ali bin Ahmed Al Kuwari added that the State had adopted two-tier rapid measures that had been implemented: firstly, to support the private sector and maintain the integrity of the financial and banking markets and the Qatari riyal, and, secondly, to maintain the integrity of the State budget. H.E. referred in this regard to the measures adopted by Qatar to secure its economy, including declaring an economic stimulus package of QR75bn to support the private sector.

Since the pandemic's outbreak, Qatar has maintained its commitment to the multilateral trading system and strengthened international cooperation frameworks to ensure the continuity of trade as the engine for economic recovery, he said, noting that Qatar has stepped up efforts to enhance its advanced logistical networks and capitalize on its high-quality infrastructure to consolidate its position as a regional and global trade and investment hub.

In the context of discussing issues related to the World Trade Organization (WTO), he stated that Qatar shared EU countries' vision on the importance of the multilateral trading system, especially the issues of the WTO's Appellate Body, the Joint Statement on E-commerce, and the G-33 Initiative on Food Security.

Qatar sends aid to Philippines

QNA — DOHA

Upon the directives of Amir H H Sheikh Tamim bin Hamad Al Thani, medical aid was sent yesterday to support victims of the Vamco Typhoon that hit the Republic of the Philippines.

Qatar Fund for Development (QFFD) in cooperation with the Amiri Air Force transported the aid through an air bridge to reach the victims.

The aid includes 40 tons of food and non-food products, in addition to camping equipment such as tents, water, sanitation, electricity generators, and rescue boats.

Director-General of QFFD, Khalifa bin Jassem Al Kuwari said that the aid was sent based on the directives of Amir H H Sheikh Tamim bin Hamad Al Thani, noting that the aid was part of Qatar's continued efforts in aiding friends in the Republic of the Philippines. Al Kuwari stressed that Qatar moved with urgency to the aid of the victims in the Philippines. He said the quick engagement of the wise leadership reflected the commitment of Qatar to alleviating suffering and enhancing international efforts in the field of emergency aid.



A photo of aid sent by Qatar for typhoon-affected people in the Philippines.

Qatar reiterates support for UNHCR

QNA — GENEVA

The State of Qatar reiterated yesterday its commitment to supporting the efforts of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) in implementing its humanitarian programmes all over the world.

Qatar expressed its appreciation to the UN High Commissioner Filippo Grandi's efforts in protecting the rights of refugees. Qatar also expressed its appreciation to the efforts of all workers in that field. This came in the speech of Qatar read out by Second Secretary of the Permanent Mission of Qatar to the UN Office in Geneva Talal Al Naama during the annual pledging conference organised by UNHCR.

Al Naama stressed that Qatar believes in the importance of enhancing cooperation between international parties to face global crisis, and as a result has worked on enhancing the partnership with the UNHCR by providing different kinds of support.

He highlighted the strategic partnership signed between Education Above All and the UNHCR to meet the needs of children in the hardest to reach areas. He also highlighted the partnership signed between Qatar Airways and UNHCR to use the carrier's network in providing aid to refugees all over the world.

He noted that Qatar is close to formalising the financing plan of 2021, which includes all the UN agencies and programs. He added that the plan will be announced soon, and will include support for the UNHCR that would enhance Qatar's position in the $20m plus club that includes the most prominent donor countries.

'Qatar will stand by Lebanon against all challenges'

QNA — DOHA

Qatar affirmed that it will not hesitate to continue its efforts to stand by the brotherly Republic of Lebanon.

This came in the speech of the State of Qatar, delivered by Minister of State for Foreign Affairs, H E Sultan bin Saad Al Muraikhi via video conference at the international conference in support of the Lebanese people, which was held on Wednesday at the level of heads of states and governments.

The Minister of State for Foreign Affairs stressed in his speech that the State of Qatar has spared no effort at the official and popular levels and was one of the first countries that rushed to respond to the fraternal and humanitarian duty to stand by the brotherly Lebanese people by providing them with urgent relief aid of $50m as a contribution to relief operations and to alleviate the suffering of the Lebanese people.

Qatar also sent an equipped team from the Qatari International Search and Rescue Group to establish field hospitals.

> *The State of Qatar has spared no effort, and was one of the first countries that rushed to respond to the fraternal and humanitarian duty to stand by the brotherly Lebanese people by providing them with urgent relief aid of $50m as a contribution to relief operations and to alleviate the suffering of the Lebanese people.*
>
> ***H E Sultan bin Saad Al Muraikhi***
> Minister of State for Foreign Affairs



In this context, he pointed out that Qatar Fund for Development recently signed several agreements with the authorities concerned in Lebanon for the reconstruction of the old building of the Karantina Hospital in Beirut, and the rehabilitation of many educational buildings, including 55 schools, education and training centres, and three universities, in addition to financial aids from the Qatari people.

Today, Lebanon is facing difficult conditions especially the humanitarian, social, economic and financial crises and the coronavirus pandemic, Al Muraikhi said, stressing the need to reconstruct the areas affected by Beirut port blast in August.

He hailed the efforts of the Republic of France, as well as all countries and international and regional organisations that provided assistance to the brothers in Lebanon, calling on the international community to continue providing the necessary assistance to Lebanon so that the Lebanese people could overcome this critical stage.

Lebanon today is in dire need of political and economic reform to ensure the stability and growth of its economy, he said, pointing out that this requires all Lebanese factions to join hands and solidarity to achieve the supreme interest of the Lebanese people and strengthen state institutions to fulfil the aspirations of the Lebanese people for reconstruction and development.

The Minister of State for Foreign Affairs thanked President of the Republic of France, H E Emmanuel Macron and Secretary-General of the United Nations, H E Antonio Guterres for their invitation to hold this important conference, which comes in light of the continuing economic and political challenges facing brotherly Lebanon.

There is no doubt that holding this important conference indicates the sincerity of the international community in helping the Republic of Lebanon to face these challenges, he noted, expressing hopes that the conference would achieve its goals and meet the aspirations of the Lebanese people.

MoPH marks International Day for Persons with Disabilities

THE PENINSULA — DOHA

The Ministry of Public Health (MoPH) and health sector partners in Qatar participated in the celebrations of the International Day for Persons with Disabilities (IDPWD) yesterday.

The theme of this year's celebrations is 'Building Back Better: Towards a More Disability-Inclusive, Accessible and Sustainable Post-COVID World'.

The day aimed at promoting an understanding of disability issues and mobilising support for the dignity, rights and well-being of persons with disabilities. It also seeks to increase awareness of benefits to be derived from the integration of persons with disabilities in every aspect of political, social, economic and cultural life.

IDPWD was proclaimed by the United Nations in 1992 under the theme: 'A Day for All'. It has been celebrated ever since.

In connection with the occasion, the MoPH has stressed importance of enhancing collective efforts to secure health and social protection for the persons with disabilities, especially while facing the COVID-19 pandemic in order to ensure the smooth and continuous flow through the activation of a group of remote tele-health services and measures to ensure access to these health services for persons with disabilities.

The health services, the rehabilitation services, as well as the allied health services for persons with disabilities are delivered through the clinics and the virtual clinics using visual and telephone communication.

The lead of the National Health Strategy 2018-2022 priority area Health and Wellbeing for People with Special Needs, Dr. Khalid Abdul Hadi, said, "Work is ongoing through the strategy to improve the early detection of disability, promote diagnostic procedures and referrals to services, and develop early intervention programmes and services.

"In addition, registers for persons with disabilities have been established and easy access to general and specialised services have been provided without impediments. This priority shall focus on integrating persons with special needs to enable them to achieve a better future for themselves and others. A range of targets and schemes have been established to realise these objectives."

To mark the day, MoPH prepared a number of educational materials, and awareness videos to raise public awareness of the precautionary measures for the persons with disabilities during the COVID-19 pandemic. The MoPH also issued a guide-booklet, in both Arabic and English, for persons with disabilities as well as an awareness video, translated in sign language, addressing all types of disabilities in addition to issuing special medical standards and measures for the isolation of persons with disabilities infected with COVID-19.

The MoPH launched the call centre for the health sector to receive any inquiries related to COVID-19. HMC provided a hotline for the parents of children experiencing disabilities to receive consultations related to COVID-19 and disability. MoPH also launched the e-learning platform to help the families of the persons suffering autism spectrum. This platform comprises guidance videos as well as educational and training materials targeting families which are prepared by behaviour specialists, occupational therapists, speech therapists and mental professionals.

Qatar was one of the first states in world to ratify the convention of the rights of the persons with disabilities in 2008. Since then, Qatar has made remarkable and significant strides for promoting and protecting their rights, their integration in the society as well as involving them in the development process in line with the Qatar National Vision 2030, which stipulates the achievement of equality and justice for all.

"18" exhibition opens with diverse works by 18 artists

RAYNALD C RIVERA
THE PENINSULA

Fifteen days before Qatar National Day, Al Markhiya Gallery has unveiled "18" — a group exhibition which puts the spotlight on the work of 18 Qatar-based contemporary artists to mark the annual celebration which falls on December 18.

Curated by Qatari artists Fatima Mohammed and Shouq Al Mana, the exhibition, which launched yesterday at Al Markhiya Gallery at the Fire Station, is a stunning display of varied artworks and Qatar's wealth of unique talents.

""18" exhibition represents 18 artists and the National Day. We chose 18 artists showcasing different talents, young artists embarking together to exhibit their representation of National Day," Mohammed told *The Peninsula*, adding the selection was based on the artists' work pulled together from different mediums.

It is evident that the show has been well-curated with the meticulously chosen artworks included in the collection which displays diverse mediums, styles and subjects, though all unified in celebrating the historic occasion. In "The Celebration", Qatari independent filmmaker and visual artist Khalifa Al Thani created a movie poster on the National Day he calls "The Celebration of the Year." The 100cm by 150cm piece never fails to draw visitors' attention as the poster is placed in an LED frame complete with light bulbs like the ones displayed in cineplexes.

Versatile artist Mohammed Al Hammadi, provides a fascinating look into Qatar's fast-paced progress symbolized by Doha's breathtaking skyline. His work is a 200cm by 50cm digital pixel art titled "Doha Downtown."

Working in mixed media, printmaking and installation art focusing on the changing social anatomy of the Arabian Gulf, Fatima Mohammed is showcasing two paintings based on the fictional character she created she calls 'Anaj' which has been the subject of many of her works from paintings to installations to performance. The two paintings, which look opposite yet complementary in the use of maroon and white colours, "represent society and unity," she said.



Some of the artworks on show at "18" exhibition which opened yesterday at Al Markhiya Gallery at the Fire Station. PIC: RAYNALD C RIVERA/ THE PENINSULA

Other artists whose works are featured at the show are Aisha Al Fadhala, Alanoud bint Khalid, Almaha Nasser, Ameera Al Aji, Amira Natsheh, Ammar Alqamash, Anfal Al Kandari, Azzam Al Mannai, Bachir Mohamad, Ibrahim Al Baker, Maetha Alkhayarin, Manar Al Muftah, Mubarak Al Malik, Noor Al Thani, and Sumam Azzam.

Al Markhiya Gallery also launched this week the second instalment of "Process" exhibition which provides art enthusiasts a look into the development of an artistic concept or work. It features works by Wadha Al Sulaiti, Jameela Al Ansari, Salem Mathkour, and Haitham Al Hamad and runs until January 8 at Katara Art Centre.



Customs foils smuggling bid

The customs department at Hamad International Airport has foiled an attempt to smuggle prohibited pills, the General Authority of Customs (GAC) said on its website. It said 397 Lyrica pills and 46 Captagon pills were recovered from a passenger during search. A seizure report was filed accordingly.

Community College announces results of students' council elections

THE PENINSULA — DOHA

The Community College of Qatar (CCQ) has announced the results of the students' council elections that serve as a communication link between the students, on the one hand, and the College administration and faculty members, on the other hand.

This year's elections featured 25 male and female candidates, competing for 12 seats representing CCQ's academic divisions, namely the Sciences and Technology, the Management Science, and the Liberal Arts. Each division had four seats, divided equally between male and female students.

Commenting on this significant milestone, Dean of Student Affairs, Dr. Fatima Al Naemi, said, "The students' council is one of the most important communication channels between students and CCQ's management because it allows them to discuss the challenges they face in their academic journey. In other words, the council provides a platform for students' voices and suggestions, and surely no one can represent students better than their fellow students who share the same aspirations and challenges."

It is noteworthy to mention that the new council members will have regular meetings with CCQ President, Dr. Mohamed Ibrahim Al Naemi, and CCQ Vice President, Dr. Khalid Al Abdulqader, to discuss students' suggestions and concerns and to reach suitable solutions. The council members will also have the opportunity to participate in various committees and present their ideas and proposals to the deans of the academic divisions and represent the College in national and international events and attend the signing of agreements.

The winners representing all three academic divisions are Mohammad Hamad Alsuwadi, Salem Yousef Alkhater, Jawaher Abdulaziz Almaadeed, and Aisha Salem Al sheraim (Sciences and Technology Division); Taleb Rashed Almarri, Rashid Mohamed Bastaki, Aljohrh Safar Al-shafi, and Shaikha Khamis Ghabesh (Management Science Division); and Ali Hussain Murad, Mohamed Abdulghani Alsaffar, Amal Salem Raheel Al-ali, and Wadha Abdullah Al-ali (Liberal Arts Division).

Due to the COVID-19 precautionary measures, the election process was held electronically. CCQ adopted the two-vote system, where each student has two votes: one for a candidate from the same academic division and the other for a candidate from another division.

HBKU scientists ranked among world's top 2%

THE PENINSULA — DOHA

Faculty members and scientists at Hamad Bin Khalifa University (HBKU) have been named among the top two percent of the world's most-cited in the career achievement category, part of a global list compiled by Stanford University in the US.

Four scientists from HBKU's Qatar Computing Research institute made the list, which included Founding Executive Director, Dr. Ahmed Elmagarmid; Principal Scientists, Dr. Bernard Jansen, Dr. Issa Khalil and Dr. Preslav Nakov who were recognised for their contributions to their respective fields.

Other researchers from the Qatar Biomedical Research Institute (QBRI) were identified among the achievers, which honoured Scientific Director, Diabetes Research Center at QBRI, Dr. Paul Thornalley. Also listed among the awardees was Senior Scientist, Disruptive Technologies Program, Energy Center at the Qatar Environment and Energy Research Institute, Dr. Golibjon Berdiyorov.

Faculty members from HBKU's College of Science and Engineering were honoured in the same category.

Five arrested for violating home quarantine

QNA — DOHA

The competent authorities arrested yesterday five people who violated the requirements of the home quarantine they committed to following, which they are legally accountable for, in accordance with the procedures of the health authorities in the country.

The arrested persons being referred to the competent prosecution are, Noah Suleiman Mubarak Al Hosani; Muhammad Suleiman Mubarak Al Hosani; Sultan Mahawash Hamid Nasser Al Nasser; Nasser Jumaa Ghaith Ghaith Al Khwaiter and Aref Mahmoud.

MoPH: 221 new COVID-19 cases

THE PENINSULA — DOHA

The Ministry of Public Health (MoPH) yesterday announced the registration of 221 new confirmed COVID-19 cases. Among them 56 were travellers returning from abroad.

Another 228 people have recovered from the virus, bringing the total number of recovered cases in Qatar to 136,741.

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

Zarif rules out renegotiating nuclear deal with Biden

BLOOMBERG & REUTERS – TEHRAN/WASHINGTON

Iran will not renegotiate the nuclear accord it reached with world powers, its foreign minister said, drawing a line in the sand ahead of Joe Biden's assumption of the US presidency.

By walking out of an agreement anchored in a United Nations resolution, the US is not in a position to impose conditions, Mohammad Javad Zarif told a virtual Rome conference on foreign affairs yesterday.

"The United States must cease its violations of international law, it doesn't require any negotiations," Zarif said. "We will not renegotiate a deal which we negotiated. The deal was about give and take, it wasn't about one side asking and the other side giving."

President Donald Trump pulled the US out of the accord in 2018 and imposed crippling sanctions on Iran, in an unsuccessful attempt to force it to enter talks on a tougher pact. Biden has said he'll rejoin the deal if Iran also returns to full compliance, and then push to broaden it.

In addition to insisting on the removal of sanctions, Iran has demanded economic compensation for the devastation they've wrought on the country. Yesterday, Zarif signaled a price tag when he observed that the nuclear deal "is not a revolving door."

> *"We will not renegotiate a deal which we negotiated. The deal was about give and take, it wasn't about one side asking and the other side giving."*
>
> ***Mohammad Javad Zarif***
> Iran's Foreign Minister

"It's not that you can come in, impose restrictions on others, benefit from the privileges of membership and then all of a sudden decide to leave and inflict $250bn of damage on the Iranian people," he said.

On Wednesday, Iran gave the Biden administration just weeks to make a diplomatic breakthrough by giving final approval to a bill compelling President Hassan Rouhani to end international nuclear inspections unless the US lifts key sanctions by February.

The new legislation also says Iran will immediately take measures to start producing 20% enriched uranium for peaceful purposes and increase its stockpile of the fissile material, potentially reducing the time Iran needs to make preparations to acquire a weapon. It was promoted by hardliners who opposed the nuclear agreement with the West. Zarif—Iran's lead negotiator on the pact —said his government did not like the law. "We will implement it because it is the law of the land" but it is not "irreversible," he said.

The United States yesterday imposed fresh Iran-related sanctions, blacklisting an entity and an individual as Washington continues to ramp up pressure on Tehran during US President Donald Trump's final months in office.

The US Treasury Department in a statement said that it had slapped sanctions on Shahid Meisami Group and its director, accusing the entity of being involved in Iran's chemical weapons research and linked to the Iranian Organization of Defensive Innovation and Research, which is blacklisted by Washington.

The move comes days after the killing of the Islamic Republic's top nuclear scientist last week. Iran's supreme leader promised on Saturday to retaliate for the killing, raising the threat of a new confrontation with the West and Israel in the remaining weeks of Trump's presidency.

"Iran's development of weapons of mass destruction is a threat to the security of its neighbors and the world," Treasury Secretary Steven Mnuchin said in the statement.



Palestinians taking part in a wheelchair race during an event marking the International Day of Persons with Disabilities in Gaza City, yesterday.

Life 'extraordinarily difficult' for disabled in Gaza: HRW

AFP – GAZA CITY

People with disabilities can face an "extraordinarily difficult" life in the Gaza Strip due to the Israeli blockade and lack of assistance from Islamist rulers Hamas, Human Rights Watch warned yesterday.

Two million Palestinians live in the poverty and conflict-plagued enclave wedged between Israel, Egypt and the Mediterranean Sea.

In a report released on the International Day of Persons with Disabilities, HRW said the 2007 blockade Israel imposed on the territory following Hamas's rise to power had "robbed people with disabilities in Gaza of their freedom of movement".

Emina Cerimovic, senior researcher in HRW's disability rights division, said Israeli control of Gaza's eastern border had also impaired "access to the devices, electricity, and technology they need to communicate or leave their homes."

Israel limits the entry into Gaza of goods that could be used for military purposes and controls the flow of fuel needed to power the enclave's sole electricity plant. The report noted the impact of recurring power cuts on people with disabilities who need light to communicate through sign language, or electric lifts or scooters to get around.

"Israel's policies contribute to making life in Gaza extraordinarily difficult for many people with disabilities," the report said.

Iran surpasses one million cases of COVID-19

AFP – TEHRAN

Iran said its novel coronavirus caseload surpassed one million yesterday, as the authorities consider easing restrictions in many parts of the Middle East's hardest hit country.

The Islamic republic had recorded 49,348 COVID-19 deaths and 1,003,494 infections since announcing its first cases in February, health ministry spokeswoman Sima Sadat Lari said.

In the past 24 hours, the virus caused 358 new deaths in the country with a population of more than 80 million, and 13,922 cases of infection, Lari said.

The number of fatalities appears to have eased slightly in the past few days, however, after soaring to a daily average of more than 400 for much of November.

But some officials—including Health Minister Saeed Namaki—admit the government figures are much lower than the actual numbers.

COVID-19 first surfaced in Iran on February 19, when authorities said it claimed the lives of two elderly people in Qom, a Shiite holy city south of the capital.

They were the first confirmed deaths from the disease in the Middle East.

Since then, the authorities have responded by taking a series of measures aimed at halting the spread of the virus.

Faced with the dual challenge of US sanctions and the pandemic, however, they have never imposed full lockdowns, for fear they would cause further damage to Iran's economy. US President Donald Trump has imposed wave after wave of sanctions on the Islamic republic since 2018, when he unilaterally withdrew from the Iran nuclear deal. Despite not imposing lockdowns, non-essential businesses were closed for two weeks in areas at the highest risk on November 21, reinforcing restrictions President Hassan Rouhani said were needed to curb a "third wave" of the outbreak.

The measures apply to the vast majority of cities across Iran, including Tehran and the country's 30 other provincial capitals. Like most countries affected by the pandemic, Iran — which began developing its own vaccine in the spring—is awaiting the availability of a vaccine against the virus.

Namaki announced on Wednesday that an Iranian company had "obtained a licence to test a vaccine on humans". Minou Mohraz, a medical epidemiologist with the National Coronavirus Control Committee, announced this week that the animal testing phase had been completed.

They have yet to specify when testing will be carried out on humans. But Namaki said that if the step was successful, "we will be one of the major producers of COVID-19 vaccinations in the region by early next spring".

Iran had "pre-purchased" about 16.8 million vaccine doses "via Covax" — the World Health Organization's (WHO) mechanism for equitable access to vaccines —Namaki was quoted as saying on the ministry's website, though which vaccine was not specified.

Algeria news sites say blocked by authorities

AFP – ALGIERS

Several Algerian news outlets announced that their websites had been blocked, the latest in a series of alleged infringements of press freedom in the North African country.

"We vigorously denounce this arbitrary measure," the news team at *Twala*, a newcomer on the Algerian media scene and one of the affected outlets, said in a statement.

The online newspaper was not informed of the move and no explanation has been given for this "attack on press freedom", Twala added.

The Casbah Tribune, an established outlet, likewise said its site had been blocked, adding in a statement on its Facebook page that the blockage could be circumvented by using a VPN.

Twala, which launched six weeks ago, also said readers were able to access its site via a VPN, adding that its "team continues its work".

The two outlets, which both produce news in French and Arabic, are not the first to encounter difficulties in Algeria this year.

Radio M, *Maghreb Emergent*, *Interlignes*, *L'Avant-Garde* and *TSA* have all complained that the authorities have censored their output.

Maghreb Emergent and *Radio M also* said on Wednesday that they were again inaccessible, after being partially unblocked in October.

The communications ministry has not provided any explanation.

Almost half of Yemenis in acute food insecurity

REUTERS – DUBAI

Famine-like conditions have re-appeared in parts of Yemen and almost half the population is experiencing high levels of food insecurity, new United Nations data showed yesterday, with aid agencies warning time is running out to prevent mass starvation.

Around 45% of Yemen's population is facing high levels of acute food insecurity, according to the UN's Integrated Food Security Phase Classification (IPC) analysis.

Within this number, 33% of the population are in crisis, 12% are in emergency and 16,500 people are in a catastrophic, famine-like, situation, the worst level of the IPC classifications. The outlook for next year is worse, the IPC analysis said. Between January and June 2021 54% of Yemenis – 16.2 million people – are likely to experience high levels of acute food insecurity. Those in a catastrophic state will likely increase to 47,000 people.

"These alarming numbers must be a wake-up call to the world," said David Beasley, executive director of the UN's World Food Programme (WFP). IPC data analyses for south Yemen, which is under the control of the internationally recognised Yemeni government, were released in July and October.

Yesterday's analysis now includes IPC data for north Yemen, where the majority live and which is controlled by Houthi authorities.

Turkey announces Chinese vaccine plan

AP – ISTANBUL

Turkey's health minister has announced a plan to start using an experimental Chinese COVID-19 vaccine later this month amid a surge in infections and deaths.

Fahrettin Koca had previously announced an agreement with China's Sinovac Biotech for 50 million doses of CoronaVac, which is currently in late stage trials. Koca said in a statement late Wednesday that the first shipment of the vaccine will arrive in Turkey after Dec. 11.

The minister said early use authorization would be granted after Turkish labs confirm the shots are safe and after assessment of initial results from the latest trials.

"If developments continue positively as we expect, Turkey would be among the first countries in the world to begin vaccinations in the early phase," Koca said.

In November, The Lancet published a study about the efficacy of Sinovac's vaccine candidate based on initial clinical trials.

The study said the efficacy was determined to be moderate, and that the vaccine produced lower levels of antibodies than those that have been found in recovered COVID-19 patients.

"The protective efficacy of CoronaVac remains to be determined," the study said.

Candidates from Pfizer-BioNTech and Moderna have said that they have more than 90% efficacy rates. The U.K.'s AstraZeneca have an efficacy rate of 70-90%, again based on limited clinical trials.

Vaccination efforts would be rolled out in four stages, the minister said.

The first group includes health care workers, citizens above age 65, and people living in homes for the elderly, disabled or other protective care homes.

Next would be essential workers and people above 50 with at least one chronic disease. Third, people younger than 50 with at least one chronic illness, young adults and other workers would be vaccinated. The fourth and final phase would be for the rest of the population.

Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan said on Monday the vaccine would be administered free of charge. Other COVID-19 vaccines would be sold at pharmacies, according to the health minister.



Janez Lenarcic, European Commissioner for Crisis Management, visits a warehouse erected by the World Food Programme (WFP) at Um Raquba reception camp for Ethiopian refugees who fled the Tigray conflict, in Sudan's Gedaref province, yesterday.

Ethiopian forces block refugees from entering Sudan

AP – HAMDAYET, SUDAN

Ethiopian forces yesterday blocked people from the country's embattled Tigray region from crossing into Sudan at the busiest border crossing point for refugees, Sudanese forces said.

Their account follows allegations by refugees in previous days of Ethiopian forces stopping people from fleeing the month-old deadly conflict in Tigray between Ethiopian forces and Tigray regional forces.

Members of the Sudanese forces, speaking on condition of anonymity because they weren't authorized to discuss the events, said people tried to cross from Ethiopia around 6 a.m. to Hamdayet in Sudan but were stopped, and refugees waiting on the Sudan side became upset and began throwing rocks.

The Sudanese forces then cleared the area, and on Thursday evening they confirmed that the border crossing remained closed. The *AP* around midday saw more than a dozen people waiting on the Ethiopian side of the border.

Tensions have been rising at the border in recent days as the flow of Ethiopians crossing has slowed to hundreds per day from several thousand.

A senior Ethiopian government official who has served as spokesman during the conflict did not immediately respond to a request for comment.

Asked over the weekend about refugees' allegations blocked crossings, United Nations refugee chief Filippo Grandi told reporters that his team had not raised the issue with Ethiopia's government. But refugees told him about the "many checkpoints" and pockets of insecurity they faced as they fled.

"We have not heard of any systematic sealing-off," Grandi said. "But certainly there are growing difficulties."

More than 45,000 Ethiopians have fled into the remote area of Sudan, first straining the generosity of local communities and then challenging the capacity of humanitarian groups that have hurried to set up a system to feed, shelter and care for them from scratch.

Nearly half the refugees are children, the UN has said, and many people came with nothing. Refugees have recounted horrific journeys of fleeing attacks and arriving on foot after two or three days of walking in the heat.

Authorities have said they are preparing for as many as 100,000 refugees. But Ethiopia's government has said it welcomes the refugees to come home for reintegration and has vowed their protection.

Many of the refugees, mainly ethnic Tigrayans, have said it was Ethiopian forces they were fleeing.

Allah enjoins us to be kind on earth

ABDULRAHMAN AL SHEHA

Justice and fairness are commanded and required in all situations, when one is happy and satisfied, and when one is upset and unsatisfied, with Muslims and with non-Muslims alike. Allah, the Almighty, says: "O ye who believe! Stand out firmly for Allah, as witnesses to fair dealing, and let not the hatred of others to you make you swerve to wrong and depart from justice. Be just, that is, next to Piety; and fear Allah. For Allah is well-acquainted with all that ye do." (Quran, 5:8)

Islam enjoins altruism and urges Muslims to practice it. Philanthropy and benevolence are some of the results of altruism, if practiced by the members of the society. Allah, the Almighty says:

"But those who, before them, had homes (in Madinah) and had adopted the faith, show their affection to such as came to them for refuge, and entertain no desire in their hearts for things given to the (latter); but give them preference over themselves, even though poverty was their (own lot). And those saved from the covetousness of their own souls; they are the ones that achieve prosperity." (Quran, 59:9)

Islam urges to maintain righteous company. Muslims are advised to stay aloof from bad company. Allah's Messenger (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) is reported to have said:

The example of good and evil companions is like that of a person who is carrying musk and the blacksmith who is blowing his blower over the fire to get it going. A musk carrier would either give you a bit of it, or you may buy a little from him or at the least, you would smell good perfume from him. As for the blacksmith who is blowing his blower over the fire you may either burn your clothes (if you sit by him), or else you would be disturbed with the sparkles of his fire, or the least (harm you may get) is to get disturbed with the bad odor coming from him and his place. (Bukhari and Muslim)

Islam enjoins to assist people in making up better relationships. This is especially so when there is a rift in the relationship between people. Allah, the Almighty says: "In most of their secret talks there is no good; but if one exhorts to a deed of charity or justice or conciliation between men, (secrecy is permissible): To him who does this, seeking the good pleasure of Allah, We shall soon give a reward of the highest value." (Quran, 4:114)

Islam suggests maintaining a good character and morals. Good morals and virtues are essential for a better society. Allah's Messenger (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) is reported to have said:

Among the best believers are the persons with the best of morals and characteristics and those who are most kind to their family members. (Tirmidhi)

Islam enjoins on Muslims to offer their help and assistance to others free of charge and for the pleasure of Allah Almighty. Allah's Messenger (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) is reported to have said:

Do favours for those who deserve to be done for them, and also for those who do not deserve to be done for them. If the doer did the favour for those who deserve it (and they are worthy of it) it is fine and good, and if not, the doer of the favour himself is one of those who are worthy for favours. (Tirmidhi)

Islam enjoins on Muslims to be generous. Generosity brings people closer to each other and enables the generous to gain the love and affection of others. Allah's Messenger (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) is reported to have said, "Allah, the Almighty, loves two traits: To be good to others and to be generous to them." Similarly, Allah, the Almighty, hates two traits: To be mean to others and to be miser to people. On the other hand, If Allah, the Almighty, favours a person, He would employ him to assist others achieve their goals and fulfil their needs.

There is criterion, however, for generosity in Islam. Allah says: "Make not thy hand tied like a niggard's to thy neck, nor stretch it forth to its utmost reach, so that thou become blameworthy and destitute." (Quran, 17:29)

On being generous towards others, Allah, the Almighty, says: "And render to the kindred their due rights, as (also) to those in want, and to the wayfarer; but squander not (your wealth) in the manner of a spendthrift. Verily spendthrifts are brothers of the evil ones; and the evil one is to his Lord (Himself) ungrateful." (Quran, 17:26–27)

Muslims to be kind and benevolent to others. The Prophet (peace be upon him) is reported to have said:

"Allah, the Almighty, would be (extremely) kind and merciful to those who are kind and merciful to others. Be kind to those on earth, the One in Heaven would be kind and merciful to you." (Tirmidhi and Abu Dawood)

Islam commands Muslims to be kind and accommodating to others and encourages people to do so. Allah's Messenger (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) is reported to have said: Being kind to others is good in every matter and if kindness is removed from the hearts of people, the situation becomes worst. (Muslim)

Islam enjoins on Muslims to hide omissions of others, and help each other to achieve their decent and honest goals.

Allah's Messenger (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) is reported to have said: "Whosoever alleviates a believer's hardship of this world, Allah, the Almighty, would alleviate his hardship and difficulty of the Day of Judgment. Whosoever eases the terms on (a financially) stranded person, Allah, the Almighty, would ease his difficulties in both this world and the Hereafter. Whosoever hides the defects of a Muslim in this world, Allah, the Almighty, would hide the defects of that person both in this world and in the Hereafter. Allah, the Almighty, would continue to assist a slave-servant so long as such person is extending his help and assistance to his Muslim brethren. (Muslim)

Islam enjoins upon patience. People are encouraged to be patient in order to perform their religious duties. People are equally urged and encouraged to practice patience in order to avoid all evils. Allah, the Almighty, says: "Now await in patience the command of thy Lord; for verily thou art in Our eyes; and celebrate the praises of thy Lord the while thou standest forth." (Quran, 52:48)

Islam also urges and encourages Muslims to be patient on what they have been predestined for such as poverty, hunger, lack of resources, terminal illness or else, and fear.

In fact, Allah, the Almighty, illustrates the reward of the patient people as follows: "Say: O ye My servants who believe! Fear your Lord. Good is (the reward) for those who do good in this world. Spacious is Allah's earth! Those who patiently persevere will truly receive a reward without measure!" (Quran, 39:10)

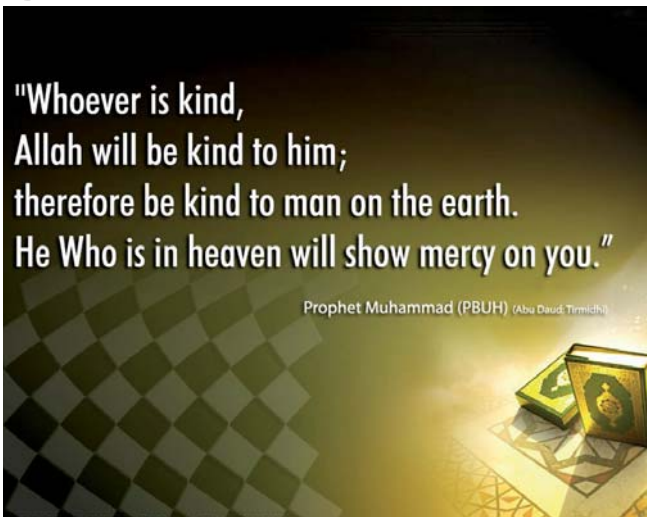
Islam enjoins Muslims to control their temper and forgive others, though one is capable to take revenge. Such attitudes, of course, strengthen the relationships and ties among people and create a better atmosphere within the society. Islam promised a great reward for controlling one's temper. Allah Almighty says:

"Be quick in the race for forgiveness from your Lord, and for a garden whose width is that of the whole of the heavens and of the earth, prepared for the righteous. Those who spend freely, whether in prosperity, or in adversity; who restrain anger, and pardon all men; for Allah loves those who do good." (Quran, 3:133-134)

Also, Allah Almighty commands to do well, even though they have done unwell and were mistreated with evil acts. All this is done with the hope that people would get closer to each other and mane forge affection towards to each other. Allah, the Almighty, says:

"Nor can goodness and evil be equal. Repel evil with what is better: Then will he, between whom and thee was hatred, become as it were thy friend and intimate!" (Quran, 41:34)

www.muslimummah.org



Islam enjoins to assist people in making up better relationships. This is especially so when there is a rift in the relationship between people. Allah, the Almighty says: "In most of their secret talks there is no good; but if one exhorts to a deed of charity or justice or conciliation between men, (secrecy is permissible): To him who does this, seeking the good pleasure of Allah, We shall soon give a reward of the highest value." (Quran, 4:114)

Islam urges its followers to control their temper and forgive others, though one is capable to take revenge. Such attitudes, of course, strengthen the relationships and ties among people and create a better atmosphere within the society. Islam promised a great reward for controlling one's temper Allah, the Almighty, says: "Nor can goodness and evil be equal. Repel evil with what is better: Then will he, between whom and thee was hatred, become as it were thy friend and intimate!" (Quran, 41:34)

How to be a VIP on the Day of Judgment

MUZAMMIL H SIDDIQ

Abu Hurairah (may Allah be pleased with him) reported that the Prophet (peace and blessings be upon him) said:

"Allah will cover seven people with His shade, on the Day when there will be no shade but His: a just ruler, a youth who has grown up in the worship of Allah, a man whose heart is attached to the mosques, two persons who love each other only for Allah's sake and they meet and part in Allah's cause only, a man who refuses the call of a beautiful and influential woman for illicit relation with her and says: I am afraid of Allah, a man who gives charitable gifts so secretly that his left hand does not know what his right hand has given, and a person who remembers Allah while he is alone and his eyes are flooded with tears." (Al Bukhari)

We all need Allah's shade. To be under Allah's shade is to be protected by Him and be blessed by Him. We need His shade in this life and in the Hereafter. It is mentioned that the Day of Judgment will be a very hard and difficult Day. On that day everyone will be worried and will try to find some protection and shade; but there will be no shade on that Day except the special shade of Allah. This shade will be granted to seven special types of people:

1. A just ruler or a just leader:

It could be any person who has some authority and he/she uses this authority with justice and fairness without any favoritism or prejudice. Justice is the command of God for all people; but the most critical is the doing of justice when one has power and authority. More difficult is, of course, dealing justly with those who show hate and animosity towards you. A just person, especially a just leader or ruler, is given number one place in this list of seven.

2. A young person growing up in the worship of Allah:

Worship of Allah is good for all people at any age and time; but the worship of Allah from the tender young age has special blessings. Many people become devoted to Allah when they grow old. In the old age when the body becomes weak, people start paying attention to the spirit. However, to be conscious of one's spirit and growing up as a youth in the obedience of Allah bring a special honor and blessings.

3. A person whose heart is connected to the mosque:

Literally it says that the heart is hanging (mu'allaq) in the mosque. Imam Malik explained that it was a person who when he leaves the mosque, looks forward to coming back again soon. Normally people's hearts are attached to their jobs, business and home. Mosque is not the priority for many people. However, those who love the House of Allah and keep it as their priority are the blessed people and they shall receive the special favor of Allah. It requires a lot of moral strength to refuse temptation when the other partner is attractive, rich, and not only consenting but persuasive.

4. Two people loving each other for the sake of Allah:

One should be friendly to all people and deal with all people in a kind and courteous manner. However, the friendship for the sake of Allah, for the reasons of piety and goodness is a very blessed friendship. This is a sincere friendship and when two or more people become attached to each other for Allah's sake they bring a lot of good to themselves and to those around them. This is a kind of friendship that generates goodness in the world and is especially blessed by Allah.

5. A person of solid moral character:

The Prophet gave an example of this solid character. He said a man tempted for illicit relationship by a woman who is beautiful and rich, influential or of a prestigious family (the word "mansib" means all these things in Arabic) and he refuses. Imam Ibn Hajar says that this is not limited to a man only who is tempted by a woman; it equally applies to a woman who may be tempted by a man who is very beautiful, powerful and rich and she refuses and says "I fear Allah." It requires a lot of moral strength to refuse temptation when the other partner is attractive, rich, and not only consenting but persuasive. Those who have such a strong character are indeed under the protection of Allah.

6. A person of charity who does not show off charity:

A person gives charity in such a way that even his left hand does not know what his right hand has done. This is a very powerful and beautiful way to say that a person gives quietly, discreetly and with sincerity. His/her purpose is not to show off, seek publicity, name or fame; but only to please Allah. This is the highest kind of charity and it has a special reward and blessing from Allah.

7. A person who remembers Allah privately:

Thinking of Allah, repeating His Beautiful Names, thanking Him and praising Him, these are the ways to remember (dhikr) Allah. Doing the "dhikr" alone in one's privacy, when no one is watching, with moving heart and tearful eyes is a sign of sincere faith and deep love of Allah. Those who have the love of Allah, they are indeed under His shade and protection.

All these seven characters are deeply moral and spiritual characters. They indicate a person's faith and sincere commitment. They are related to feeling, thinking, speaking and action. These are true characters of sincere believers. We pray to Allah to bless us with these characters and with his shade in this world and also in the Hereafter. Ameen. *www.islam.ru*



We all need Allah's shade. We need His shade in this life and in the Hereafter. It is mentioned that on the Day of Judgment everyone will be worried and will try to find some protection and shade; but there will be no shade on that Day except the special shade of Allah. This shade will be granted to seven special types of people.



NATIONAL DAY ITEMS

مجموعة دار الشرق DAR AL-SHARQ

الشرق للإدارة الإعلامية Al Sharq Media Management

BANNERS, OUTDOOR BUILDING GLASS STICKERS & FLAGS

OUTDOOR FLAGS & FLAG POLE



Flag Size: 100X380 cm, Pole Size: 6 mtrs

INDOOR DOUBLE FLAGS & FLAG POLE



Flags with Tassel - Satin Cloth
Flag Size: 46X150 cm
Pole Size: 2.8 mtrs

INDOOR FLAG WITH POLE



Flags with Tassel - Satin Cloth
Flag Size: 100x200 cm
Pole Size: 2.8 mtrs

INDOOR / OUTDOOR FLAG



Size - 50x120 cm

FLAG (100 x 200 cm)



Flags with Tassel - Satin Cloth
Flags - Satin Cloth
Flags - 100g Knitted Polyester

CAR FLAG



(SATIN CLOTH)
Flag Size - 45 X 30 cm

HAND FLAG



(SATIN CLOTH)
Flag Size - 30 X 20 cm

SOFAS & COFFEE TABLES



EVENT SETUP



DRAWSTRING BAG



Size - 30 X 40 cm

TABLE FLAG



Flag: 45 x 30 cm
Pole Height: 53 cm

T SHIRT

Printed QND Logo

CAP



Printed QND Logo

PIN (QND Logo)



QND Logo Color with magnet & acrylic box

GOLD STAND STRAIGHT



Size - 81 x 61 x 140 cm

GOLD STAND INCLINED



Size - 80 x 60 x 120 cm

GOLD STAND



Size - 80 x 60 x 120 cm

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Rohingya 'coerced' into going to remote island

REUTERS — DHAKA

Refugees and humanitarian workers said yesterday some of the thousands of Rohingya being shipped to a remote island had been coerced, despite government assertions that none would be forced to go.

Two Rohingya said their names appeared on lists compiled by government-appointed local leaders without their consent, while aid workers said officials used threats and enticements to pressure people into going.

Some refugees named as willing to go to the island were in hiding yesterday, amid a heavy security presence at the sprawling camps.

Mohammad Shamsud Douza, the deputy Bangladesh government official in charge of refugees, said the relocation was voluntary. "They are going there happily. No one is forced. The government has taken all measures to deal with disasters, including their comfortable living and livelihood."

Police escorted the first group of 1,000 refugees in buses from Ukhiya in Cox's Bazar for the journey to Chittagong port and then on to Bhasan Char — a flood-prone Bay of Bengal island that emerged from the sea 20 years ago.

"They have taken us here forcefully," a 31-year-old man told Reuters tearfully by phone as he boarded a bus.

Human Rights Watch said it had interviewed 12 families whose names were on the lists, but had not volunteered to go, while Refugees International said the move was "nothing short of a dangerous mass detention of the Rohingya".

"Three days ago, when I heard that my family is on the list, I ran away from the block, but yesterday I was caught and taken here," he said.

An 18-year-old woman said her husband had put their names on the list thinking it was for food rations. He fled when they were told to go to Bhasan Char, she said, adding that she is also hiding in the camp.

She was among more than 730,000 Rohingya who fled Myanmar in 2017 following a military-led crackdown that the United Nations said was executed with genocidal intent. Myanmar denies genocide and says its forces were targeting Rohingya militants who attacked police posts.

"We came here to save our lives facing different kinds of troubles and difficulties," she said. "Why would we go to that risky island?" '

Bangladesh says moving refugees who agree to go to the island will ease chronic overcrowding in its camps, which are home to more than 1 million Rohingya, members of a Muslim minority who have fled neighbouring Myanmar.

A Bangladesh naval official said the first 1,500 refugees would today morning leave from the port to cross to the island. The journey takes several hours.

Human Rights Watch said it had interviewed 12 families whose names were on the lists, but had not volunteered to go, while Refugees International said the move was "nothing short of a dangerous mass detention of the Rohingya people in violation of international human rights obligations".

Two aid workers, who spoke on condition of anonymity, said refugees had come under pressure from government officials who used threats and offers of cash and other enticements to persuade them to go to the island.

A briefing note by a humanitarian organisation, seen by Reuters, said refugees were promised to be given priority to go back to Myanmar when repatriation took place, priority to be resettled in third countries, and access to education.

"We're deeply concerned about how this is unfolding, particularly in terms of continuity of care for some of our patients," one of the aid workers said.

The worker cited a case of a refugee with a mental health condition in a "state of panic" after being told he had to move and his concerns over where he would get his medication on the island.

A senior foreign ministry official, who asked not to be named because he was not authorised to speak to the media, said the refugees were being moved because there was little prospect of repatriating them to Myanmar.

The United Nations said in a statement it had been given "limited information" about the relocations and was not involved in preparations.

More than 300 refugees were brought to the island earlier this year after several months at sea in an attempt to flee Bangladesh. Rights groups say they are being held against their will and have complained of human rights violations.



Buses wait to carry Rohingyas from a refugee camp of Cox's Bazar to Chattogram, from where they will eventually be shifted to Bhasan Char island in, Bangladesh, yesterday.

South Indian action hero Rajinikanth enters politics

AFP — CHENNAI

Indian film superstar Rajinikanth yesterday became the latest in a long line of big-name actors to enter politics, vowing to bring in "corruption-free" government to his home state.

The action hero, one of Asia's best-paid actors, said on Twitter that with "huge support from people" he would be launching a political party in January that is expected to contest elections scheduled in Tamil Nadu state next year.

The 69-year-old former bus conductor said the public wanted "honest, transparent, corruption-free, caste-less, secular and spiritual politics" in the state.

"Wonderful and amazing things will happen!" he added without stating explicitly that he would stand himself.

The actor enjoys a cult-like following across India where he is called "The Superstar" or "Thalaivar" (leader).

Every new film sends Tamil Nadu into a frenzy, with fans getting haircuts like his most recent character or having his face tattooed on their bodies.

Rajnikanth, who worked on buses in the southern city of Bengaluru before moving into acting in 1973, proved his political muscle in 1996 when he called on fans to oppose the Tamil Nadu government, which was then voted out of power.

Rajinikanth said in 2017 that he wanted to enter politics to bring "change in Tamil Nadu". His fans set off fireworks in celebration but have been waiting since for the formal moves.

He launched his own movement, Rajini Makkal Mandram (RMM), which has since been putting in place the political launchpad for the film hero. He has carried on making films and had health scares which led some to believe that he would give up his political ambitions.

Rajinikanth is following a well-worn path from the cinema into Indian politics.

Hindi star Sunny Deol is a member of parliament and another Tamil star, Kamal Haasan, formed his own party in 2018 but failed to win a seat in a national election last year.

Jaya Bachchan, the actor wife of Bollywood's best-known star Amitabh Bachchan, has served four terms as a member of the Rjya Sabha.

Australian PM seeks conciliation in dispute with China

AP — WELLINGTON

A diplomatic war of words between Australia and China over a graphic tweet seemed to finally cool yesterday as Australian Prime Minister Scott Morrison struck a much more conciliatory tone.

Morrison's change in approach came even after he was thwarted in getting his views out directly to Chinese people over the messaging app WeChat, after the Chinese company deleted his post on the grounds it could distort historical events and confuse the public.

China has angrily rejected Morrison's complaints, but its foreign ministry on Thursday declined to comment further on the controversy.

Spokesperson Hua Chunying told reporters at a daily briefing that WeChat's management had their "own rules and regulations, and they have the right to handle business concerning WeChat according to their own rules." Earlier this week,

Morrison expressed indignation and anger at the tweet posted by a Chinese official that showed a fake image of a grinning Australian soldier holding a bloodied knife to a child's throat.

The post took aim at alleged unlawful killings and abuses by Australian soldiers during the conflict in Afghanistan.

Morrison called the tweet "truly repugnant" and "deeply offensive" and demanded an apology from China.

But China did not back down, saying that Australia should be the one examining its actions.

On Thursday, Morrison took a much different approach, telling reporters in Canberra that his aim was for the two countries to have a "happy coexistence."

"My position and my government's position is to seek constructive engagement," he said. "The relationship with China is a mutually beneficial one. It supports both our countries, it is good for both of our countries." China is Australia's largest trading partner.

Morrison said Australia had made its views very clear on both the tweet and the WeChat message.

WeChat is ubiquitous in China and is used for everything from getting news to making electronic payments. The company is held responsible for ensuring content doesn't attract negative attention, and censorship is relatively common.

Australian Treasurer Josh Frydenberg said he was disappointed about both the tweet and the deleted post.

"What the prime minister did in his WeChat message before it was disappointingly deleted was he made it very clear Australia is proud of its servicemen and women who wear the uniform," Frydenberg said.

The rift between the two nations has grown since the Australian government called for an independent inquiry into the origins of the coronavirus pandemic. China has since imposed tariffs and other restrictions on a number of Australian exports.

No breakthrough in talks with Indian farmers

IANS — NEW DELHI

The over seven-hour long talks between the representatives of the farmers' bodies and the Union government ended without any breakthrough on Thursday and the next round of talks has been scheduled for December 5. As per sources, the farmers have given their suggestions to the government in writing.

Earlier in the day, a group of more than 34 farmer leaders put out a five-point set of demands that seeks to frame a specific law on minimum support price (MSP) and end the punishment provision for stubble burning, during the fourth round of talks with the Central government yesterday.

In the written five-point set of demands, one of the key demands is repealing the three contentious farm laws passed in September during the Monsoon Session of the Parliament. It also raised objections about the upcoming Electricity (Amendment) Act, 2020.

The farmers emphasised that the provision to register a case for stubble burning should be ended, and asked why the government wasn't ready to give them "written assurance" on MSP despite its earlier statements that MSP will continue.

The farmers' union representatives emphasised that a new law on MSP be framed in a special session of Parliament, demanding that it must guarantee them MSP, not just now, but in the future as well.

The farmer leaders said: "Let us assume that MSP will continue but the procurement would stop. The MSP will have no meaning then." The farmers' union representatives said that the government said the three farm laws were brought in keeping the interests of the farmers in mind. However, they had never kept these in mind. The farmers feel the farm laws have been passed to benefit big businesses and corporate houses.



A Nihang (Sikh warrior) shouts slogans as he arrives to take part in a protest against the newly passed farm bills at Singhu border near Delhi, India, yesterday.

Great Barrier Reef status lowered to critical, deteriorating

REUTERS — MELBOURNE

The health of Australia's Great Barrier Reef, the world's most extensive and spectacular coral reef ecosystem, is in a critical state and deteriorating as climate change warms up the waters in which it lies, an international conservation group said.

The World Heritage-listed site off Australia's north-eastern coast has lost more than half its coral in the past three decades.

Coral-bleaching in 2016, 2017 and 2020 has further damaged it health and affected its animal, bird and marine population, the International Union for Conservation of Nature said in a report.

Such bleaching occurs when hotter water destroys the algae which the coral feeds on, causing it to turn white.

The union moved the reef's status to critical and deteriorating on its watchlist.

Some activities which threaten it, like fishing and coastal development, can be tackled by the management authorities, the union said.

Cyclone hits Sri Lanka as southern India hunkers down

AFP — COLOMBO

Cyclone Burevi hit Sri Lanka overnight, rattling the island nation but leaving it relatively unscathed on its way to southern India, officials said yesterday.

Burevi, the second cyclone in the southern Bay of Bengal in a week, slammed into north-eastern Sri Lanka just before midnight (1830 GMT).

Packing winds up to 100km an hour, it soaked parts of the country but caused no casualties and less devastation than feared. "There was rain and strong winds, but the cyclone did not cause any major damage in our area," Mangalanath Liyanarachchi, a local reporter in Trincomalee, 260km from Colombo, said by telephone.

Thousands of people living along the coast had been asked to seek temporary shelter inland, but they have now moved back to their homes, Liyanarachchi said.

Sri Lanka's Disaster Management Centre (DMC) had issued a red alert and asked fishermen not to venture out to sea.

Sri Lanka also ordered the closure of schools along the path of the cyclone for three days.

However, DMC officials said there were no reports of casualties and the damage was minimal as the cyclone weakened on its way through sparsely populated areas.

The weather system was expected to make landfall in the southern Indian state of Tamil Nadu overnight yesterday to Friday and move westwards into Kerala, Indian forecasters said.

India's National Disaster Response Force said Wednesday that they had deployed around two dozen relief and rescue teams for the two states, for any emergency response after the cyclone.

Kerala's Chief Minister Pinari Vijayan said around 2,500 relief camps had been identified to relocate people from coastal and low lying areas.

Prime Minister Narendra Modi tweeted that the central government was ready to provide "all possible support".

"Praying for the safety and well-being of those staying in affected areas," Modi said.

Last week, a more powerful cyclone skirted northern Sri Lanka but hit Tamil Nadu with full force, uprooting trees and delivering 30 centimetres of rain in some areas.

But more accurate forecasting and the timely evacuation of several hundred thousand people were credited with keeping the number of people reported killed to three, a fraction of the death tolls in previous years.

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EDITORIAL

Breakthrough in Afghan talks

THE State of Qatar has welcomed a preliminary agreement reached by the Afghan government and the Taliban in the ongoing Afghan Peace Negotiations in Doha. The agreement, which Doha termed a milestone, is the first written agreement between the two sides in 19 years of Afghan conflict. The Ministry of Foreign Affairs said this significant progress shows that the Afghan parties are serious and able to overcome differences and address difficult issues in the way to achieve lasting peace.

Qatar said what has been achieved in the talks so far raises hope that both parties will succeed in reaching a political settlement to the conflict. Doha has been hosting Afghan Peace Negotiations since September 12, 2020, and has reiterated to continue, in collaboration with the international community and its strategic allies, to support the peace process in pursuit of reaching permanent and comprehensive peace in Afghanistan. The intra-Afghan talks followed a peace deal between the Taliban and the US signed in Doha in February 2020. That agreement envisages withdrawal of foreign forces from Afghanistan by May 2021 in exchange for counter-terrorism guarantees from the Taliban.

The US has also welcomed the progress made in the intra-Afghan talks, expressing gratitude to the State of Qatar for its role as a host and facilitator of the Afghan peace talks. The US State Department said rapid progress on a political roadmap and a ceasefire is what the people of Afghanistan want more than anything else. Nato, which has thousands of troops in Afghanistan, also welcomed the progress towards a peaceful political settlement. Nato secretary general said all Nato allies strongly support the peace process, adding: "Now we would like to see more progress and we need to see rapid progress, both on establishing a political roadmap, but not least on the important issue of a comprehensive ceasefire." Neighbouring Pakistan also welcomed the development.

More than 100,000 Afghans have been killed or wounded since 2009 when the UN Assistance Mission in Afghanistan began documenting casualties. Thousands of troops from the US, the UK and other countries have also died in the conflict, which has left hundreds of thousands of Afghans displaced from their homes.

Over the years, Qatar has played a key role in seeking an end to the conflict in Afghanistan by bringing together the warring sides and facilitating the talks. The progress achieved by the Afghan negotiators shows that an end to the long conflict and lasting peace in the country is in sight.

The Peninsula

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Palestinians gather to protest against Israel's annexation plan towards some areas of West Bank, at Jabalia camp in Gaza City.

Qatar reaffirms international legitimacy resolutions, two-state solution to Palestine issue

QNA

The State of Qatar reaffirmed the peaceful settlement of the Palestine cause through negotiations between the two parties on the basis of the agreed references, the resolutions of the international legitimacy, the land for peace principle, the road map and the Arab peace initiative, as well as the achievement of the two-state solution that guarantees establishing a viable Palestinian state on the basis of June 4, 1967 borders with East Jerusalem as its capital, ending the Israeli occupation of the Arab territories, including the Syrian Golan, ensuring the rights of the Palestinian people and fining fair solution for the refugees issue.

This came in the State of Qatar's statement delivered by the Permanent Representative of the State of Qatar to the United Nations Ambassador H E Sheikha Alya Ahmed bin Saif Al Thani before the United Nations General Assembly in its 75th session to discuss the Palestinian cause.

She affirmed that the State of Qatar supports all the efforts aim at solving the Palestinian issue and achieving peace in the middle east. She also reaffirmed that the State of Qatar supports all the annual General Assembly resolutions on the issue of Palestine and the Middle East as it based on the principles of the international laws, the purposes enshrined in the UN charter, the international norms, the respect of human rights and the maintenance of international peace and security.

Sheikha Alya also reaffirmed that Qatar will continue to provide political and humanitarian support for the benefit of the Palestinians, explaining that the State of Qatar's support exceed $1 billion through the Qatar Fund for Development and the Gaza Reconstruction Committee, in addition to the contributions provided by the institutions of civil community, as aid was provided in areas including education, electricity supply, infrastructure, housing maintenance and construction, and employment financing.

The Permanent Representative pointed out that the Amir H H Sheikh Tamim bin Hamad Al Thani directed, this year, to provide $150 million to cover humanitarian needs, including addressing the Coronavirus pandemic and its effects.

She indicated that the State of Qatar has recently raised its contribution to the benefit of UNRWA, stressing that the role played by the agency is very important and indispensable in order to meet the basic needs of millions of Palestinian refugees and ensure stability.

The deterioration of the economic situation in the occupied Palestinian territory is a worrisome issue, especially in the Gaza Strip, which is still under siege the matter that caused great human suffering, she said, stressing on the importance of the economic stability in realizing security and stability.

The deterioration of the economic situation in the occupied Palestinian territory is a worrisome issue, especially in the Gaza Strip, which is still under siege the matter that caused great human suffering, H E Sheikha Alya said, stressing on the importance of the economic stability in realizing security and stability.

Israel's occupation of Arab lands, attempts to annex Palestinian lands illegally, settlement activity in the occupied territory, measures aimed at changing the character, legal status and demographic composition of Jerusalem, the siege of the Gaza Strip, the use of excessive violence against civilians, arbitrary detention, and obstruction of freedom of movement, the demolition of Palestinian homes, the exploitation of their natural resources, and other violations are all practices that constitute a flagrant violation of international law and United Nations resolutions, she explained.

The ambassador renewed the State of Qatar's commitment to provide all the political and development support for the Palestinian brothers, and its firm position in solidarity with the Palestinian people to obtain their just and legitimate rights.

These COVID-19 vaccines are safe, right?

SAM FAZELI
BLOOMBERG

Pfizer Inc. and BioNTech SE's coronavirus vaccine was cleared for use by the UK after trial data indicated it works well at preventing Covid-19. Their shot, as well as one from Moderna Inc. - both based on new technology - are on the verge of gaining similar approval in the US and Europe. Other inoculations in the works from AstraZeneca Plc and the University of Oxford, Novavax Inc. and Johnson & Johnson are in the late stage of trials, with approval likely within months. This is extraodinary. These vaccines appear to have been developed at breakneck speed. How is this possible when it typically takes years to develop an effective inoculation?

The Pfizer-BioNTech and Moderna vaccines may seem brand new, but they are the culmination of more than a decade of work that started during the SARS and MERS outbreaks. Vaccines were even developed against MERS but were never needed. Nevertheless, scientists learned a huge amount from working with that virus, which is from the same family as the one that causes COVID-19. Remember also that technology has evolved rapidly - for example, we're now about able to sequence the genomes of every mutant version of the virus in less than a day. That helps in speeding up vaccine development. Here's something else that's different: In the past, drugmakers would be sure that they had a potential viable product before ramping up manufacturing. With COVID-19 vaccines, as regulators from around the world got involved right at the beginning, companies took financial risks at stages of vaccine development that they would never have done before. All this explains why we're seeing vaccines arrive so quickly.

If the US Food and Drug Administration approves these vaccines as soon as this month, how much safety data will we have on them by the time they start getting distributed?

We usually know if a vaccine is going to cause serious side effects within about two months of vaccination. Using that time frame, we will have oodles of data. Just thinking about the Pfizer-BioNTech and Moderna vaccines, close to 40,000 people will have received two shots of the vaccine by the time they are potentially released into the general population early next year. And many of these will be at the fourth or fifth month after their first dose. By way of comparison, GlaxoSmithKline Plc's star shingles vaccine, Shingrix, was tested in about 28,000 subjects, half of whom received the vaccine. None of the side effects reported for the vaccine - which were the usual fever, chills and aches after a shot - occurred later than three months after vaccination.

The vaccines made by Pfizer-BioNTech and Moderna use new technology that harnesses messenger RNA. Unlike traditional inoculations, which typically inject a weakened strain of a virus to trigger an immune response, the "mRNA" creates the response by actually instructing cells in the body to develop virus proteins. Isn't this risky? Does it change the nature of those cells and could it trigger our immune systems to attack them?

There is nothing odd or dodgy about using messenger RNA as a vaccine. It doesn't genetically modify your cells and it is a short-lived molecule. When the mRNA carrying the "instructions" for making the virus protein gets inside a human cell, it joins the thousands of other RNA molecules there. As soon as the cell creates the virus protein, the body recognises it as a foreign agent, just as if we had injected the protein directly (which is what most vaccines do). The immune reaction is focused against the protein and not the human cell that is making it. Nothing has changed about that cell.

Results from different vaccine trials suggest different levels of efficacy. Are some vaccines better than others? Should I be worried about which one I get?

What we know is that two of the mRNA vaccines in development, Pfizer-BioNTech and Moderna, have shown more than 90% efficacy - levels that no one dared imagine before they reported their results. AstraZeneca and Oxford's vaccine has shown potentially less efficacy, but we need to see more data on that. It is not a completely unexpected outcome given their earlier data, complex trial and the way the vaccine was designed. But, even with 62% efficacy - and it could be higher in younger individuals - the Astra vaccine can still have major utility in helping us get out of the pandemic. Still, are they totally safe? There have been side effects, right?

Yes, there have been side effects. But they have been the type that are totally expected after a vaccination, such as fever, headaches and muscle or joint aches, which only last for a couple of days. I have to say, I am glad I see side effects. They are the results of an immune reaction, and you get them with the aformentioned Shingrix vaccine and many others as well. It is a sign that the vaccine is doing its job. Frankly, I can't wait to get two days of side effects so that I can regain my freedom. And they won't all be the same. We already know, from the little data provided, that the Pfizer-BioNTech vaccine seems much better tolerated, but more complete details will come out when the FDA meets to review the early use applications. For Pfizer-BioNTech, that's December 10; for Moderna, it's December 17.

The author is Bloomberg opinion contributor who covers the pharmaceutical industry for Bloomberg Intelligence.



Quote of the day

The average global temperature in 2020 is set to be about 1.2 C above the pre-industrial (1850-1900) level. There is at least a one in five chance of it temporarily exceeding 1.5 C by 2024.

Petteri Taalas, WMO Secretary-General

US to keep two larger Afghan bases after pullout

Army General Mark Milley said that in addition to the two larger bases, the United States would also keep "several satellite bases." He said the US military will also continue its two core missions.

REUTERS — WASHINGTON

The Pentagon has approved drawdown plans in Afghanistan that will still keep two larger bases in the country as officials carry out President Donald Trump's orders to slash troop levels to 2,500 by January 15, the top US general said on Wednesday.

Trump's post-election decision last month to cut nearly half of the roughly 4,500 troops currently in Afghanistan came before military leaders could devise plans to execute a drawdown, leaving many questions unanswered about the future US military mission after Trump leaves office on January 20.

Army General Mark Milley, chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, offered the first details about the drawdown at an event hosted by the Brookings Institution think tank. He said that in addition to the two larger bases, the United States would also keep "several satellite bases."

He said the US military will also continue its two core missions: aiding Afghan security forces who are locked in a grinding conflict with Taliban insurgents and carrying out counterterrorism operations against Islamic State and Al Qaeda militants.

However, Milley did not disclose which bases in Afghanistan would be shuttered or say what capabilities would be lost as the United States removes 2,000 troops from the country. He declined to speculate about what President-elect Joe Biden may decide.

"What comes after that, that will be up to a new administration," Milley said.

As the United States prepares to withdraw more troops, the US-backed Afghan government and Taliban representatives reached a preliminary deal on Wednesday to press on with peace talks.

It was their first written agreement in 19 years of war that Milley said has long been stalemated, with neither side able to defeat the other on the battlefield.

Looking back, Milley said the United States had "achieved a modicum of success" in Afghanistan. He stressed the importance of peace talks, even as he acknowledged that the idea of sitting down with Taliban representatives was "odious" to some people.



Local restaurants employees and staff stage a protest against the restrictions imposed by the authorities after indoor dining was banned following a rise in COVID-19 cases in Karachi, Pakistan, yesterday.

Over 50,000 active virus cases in Pakistan

INTERNEWS — ISLAMABAD

The number of active coronavirus cases in Pakistan has crossed the 50,000 mark, reaching yet another grim milestone as the second wave of COVID-19 infections surge across the country, according to the National Command and Operations Centre (NCOC) tally.

The country reported 3,499 new infections in the past 24 hours, raising the total tally to 406,810 as active cases climb to 51,654. The NCOC data shows the pandemic's pace in Pakistan has quickened as the tally crossed 400,000 on December 1 with at least 29,881 new cases reported in the last 10 days only.

The highest number of coronavirus cases in the past 24 hours was reported in Sindh with 1,983 infections. Punjab came second with 727 new cases, Islamabad recorded 417, Khyber Pakhtunkhwa 218, Azad Jammu and Kashmir 85, Balochistan 53, and Gilgit Baltistan 16.

With the virus claiming 39 lives, the country's death toll climbed to 8,205 — 3,091 of which are recorded in Punjab, 2,968 in Sindh, KP has reported 1,378 deaths, AJK 173, Balochistan 169 and GB 97.

The NCOC data showed 346,951 people have recovered from the virus up until now — 1,586 in the past 24 hours.

The COVID-19 pandemic progressively getting worse in Pakistan, the government has placed fresh restrictions across the country to prevent the spread of the virus during its second wave.

Following recommendations by the NCOC, the federal government has made face masks mandatory in public spaces, limited large public gatherings to 300, banned indoor weddings, closed shrines, cinemas, and theatres, and instructed public and private offices to adopt work-from-home policy and 50 per cent occupancy.

The federal government also announced that educational institutes will remain closed from November 26 to January 10.

The students will study at home or get weekly homework till December 24 and winter vacations will start December 25. The schools will reopen on January 11 — which is subject to coronavirus situation then.

All examinations have been postponed except admission and recruitment tests.

Former Pakistan PM Jamali, who served after coup, dies

AFP — ISLAMABAD

Pakistan's former prime minister Mir Zafarullah Khan Jamali, who served under military leader Pervez Musharraf, has died, his family announced.

The 76-year-old died in the city of Rawalpindi outside Islamabad on Wednesday after recently suffering a heart attack, his son Mir Muhammad Khan Jamali said.

Jamali was elected prime minister but with limited powers in November 2002, when president Musharraf allowed parliamentary elections to take place after he took power in a bloodless 1999 coup.

Musharraf went on to rule the country until 2008 but was forced to resign the same year after pro-military parties lost parliamentary elections and the country transitioned back to a democracy.

Jamali stepped down in the summer of 2004 after developing differences with the party leadership and Musharraf, paving the way for one of his cabinet ministers, Shaukat Aziz, to fill the post until the next parliamentary election in 2008.

Hailing from an influential political family, Jamali was the first and only prime minister to come from the oil-and-gas-rich province of Balochistan, which has seen several long-running Islamist and separatist insurgencies.

He was to be buried Thursday in his ancestral town of Rojhan Jamali.

Ex-Hong Kong lawmaker goes into exile, plans to travel to UK

AP — COPENHAGEN

A Hong Kong pro-democracy activist and former lawmaker who is visiting Denmark said yesterday he is going into exile and will soon move to Britain.

"I hereby announce that I will go into exile and will withdraw my membership in the Democratic Party of Hong Kong to leave Hong Kong," Ted Hui said in a statement. "There is no word to explain my pain and it's hard to hold back tears."

It was not clear when he would travel to Britain which, in response to a crackdown on opposition in Hong Kong, has extended residency rights for up to three million Hong Kongers eligible for British National Overseas passports, allowing them to live and work there for five years.

"My personal determination is that my exile will not be a migration. My only home is Hong Kong which is why I will not apply for asylum in any country," Hui said. "I will wait for the day that I can go home with the bells of freedom ringing in a free Hong Kong. Until my last breath I will fight to the end. Revive Hong Kong, revolution now!"

In July, another democracy activist, Nathan Law, left Hong Kong after testifying in a US congressional hearing about a tough new security law imposed by mainland China on the semi-autonomous territory. At first, he declined to disclose his whereabouts for safety but later appeared in London.

"I will continue to fight on aboard and will make it my life mission to widen Hong Kong's international battle front with people like Nathan Law in the UK," Hui said.

Hui was arrested in Hong Kong in May over an incident in the Legislative Council in which he dropped a rotten plant and attempted to kick it at the body's president. He was able to get his passport back from the government and a visa after receiving an invitation from Danish lawmakers to travel to Denmark, where he arrived on Tuesday.

China hits out at US after report of new visa restrictions

AP — BEIJING

China yesterday accused critics in the US government of "an escalation of political suppression" against Beijing following a report of new visa restrictions on members of China's ruling Communist Party and their immediate family members.

Foreign ministry spokesperson Hua Chunying said China would "make representations" to the US following the report yesterday in the *New York Times* that such people would be limited to one-month, single-entry visas.

Hua called Washington's approach "totally inconsistent with the US' own interests," and said it would damage America's global image.

"I think it is obvious to all that this is an escalation of political suppression by some extreme anti-China forces in the US out of strong ideological prejudice and deep-rooted Cold War mentality against China," Hua said at a daily briefing.

The Times report could not immediately be confirmed, but follows earlier hints that Washington was planning such a move, possibly even including a total ban on all 92 million Communist Party members. It wasn't clear how the restrictions would be enforced since many members do not play active public roles in the party's institutions.

The restrictions would be the latest punitive measure taken against China's leadership and economy amid sharpening disputes over human rights, the coronavirus pandemic, trade, technology, Taiwan and a host of other issues.

On Wednesday, the US said it would block imports from a major Chinese producer of cotton goods because of its reliance on workers detained as part of a crackdown on ethnic minorities in China's northwest.

Washington has already slapped travel bans and financial sanctions on officials connected to the crackdown on Uighurs and other Chinese Muslim groups in Xinjiang, as well as on Chinese and Hong Kong officials it accuses of restricting social and political rights in the semi-autonomous Chinese city through the implementation of a harsh new national security law.

Diplomatic ties hit a low point over the summer when the US ordered the closure of the Chinese consulate in Houston and China responded by demanding the US vacate its consulate in the southwestern city of Chengdu.

Washington had been loosening restrictions on travel by Chinese to the US, seeking to take advantage of the lavish spending habits of China's newly wealthy. Beginning in 2014, Chinese travellers — whether party members or not — became eligible for multiple-entry visas valid for 10 years, with stays of 180 days allowed for each entry, while students were permitted visas good for five years. China reciprocated with similar treatment for US citizens.

Chinese who make up the single largest group of foreign students at American universities have already complained of tougher conditions for obtaining or extending visas. Chinese academics have also faced greater scrutiny, while dozens of journalists with state media have been forced to return home and visa restrictions placed on those remaining, prompting retaliation from Beijing.



Protest against abduction of democracy activist

Demonstrators hold signs and masks as they protest yesterday against pro-democracy activist Wanchalearm Satsaksit's abduction six months before, in front of the Cambodian embassy in Bangkok, Thailand.

Japan prosecutors seek to question Abe

AFP — TOKYO

Japanese prosecutors are seeking to question former prime minister Shinzo Abe over a scandal involving the cost of events held for his supporters, local media said yesterday.

Under Japanese law, spending on political events must be reported, but prosecutors allege that Abe's office failed to do so for dinners his political group organised on the eve of government-sponsored cherry blossom viewing parties.

Public broadcaster NHK said the group paid more than eight million yen ($76,000) for the events over five years until 2019.

The Tokyo Prosecutors Office, which declined to comment on the story, has already questioned Abe's secretaries for allegedly failing to properly report the cost of the dinners. NHK and Jiji Press agency said prosecutors wanted to question Abe about his knowledge of the payments.

Abe, who has not yet responded to the prosecutors' request, has already denied any wrongdoing, saying guests, including voters in his constituency, attended at their own expense.

S Koreans take entrance exam amid virus surge

AP — SEOUL

Hundreds of thousands of masked students in South Korea, including 41 confirmed COVID-19 patients, took the highly competitive university entrance exam yesterday despite a viral resurgence that forced authorities to toughen social distancing rules.

About 426,340 students were taking the one-day exam at about 1,380 sites across the nation, including hospitals and other medical facilities where the 41 virus patients and hundreds of other test-takers in self-quarantine sat separately from others, according to the Education Ministry.

The annual exam, called "Suneung," or College Scholastic Ability Test, is crucial in the education-obsessed country, where job prospects, social standing and even who you marry can often depend on which university you attend.

Defence and land ministries said they temporarily banned military exercises and stopped air traffic to reduce noise during the English-language listening parts of Thursday's exam, as they did in past years. Government offices and many private companies asked their employees to come in late, and the country's stock market delayed its opening to clear roads for test-takers.

This year's exam had been originally scheduled for November but was delayed due to the virus outbreak. Experts say on-and-off online classes have widened the gap between high achievers and low performing students due to reduced interaction with teachers, digital distractions and technical difficulties.

"If the exam had been delayed again, our kids would have felt much more psychological pressure... I think it's fortunate the exam is taking place now," said Kim Sun-wha, the mother of a test-taker. "I hope everyone will avoid making mistakes, do their best and get good results."

Mothers hugged their children and patted their backs before they entered a temporary exam site set up at a high school in Seoul. One shouted, "Don't be nervous! Do Well!" and another screamed "Cheer up!"

Students were required to have their temperature taken before entering the test sites, wear masks throughout the exam and maintain their distance from each other. They had to bring their own water and lunch because they weren't allowed to use water purifiers or drinking fountains at the sites or go outside to get meals.

Ex-French President Giscard dies from COVID-19 at 94

AFP — PARIS

Tributes poured in yesterday after the death of former French president Valery Giscard d'Estaing from COVID-19 aged 94, with French and European leaders hailing him as an ambitious reformer and great statesman.

Giscard, who had been in hospital several times in the last months for heart problems, died surrounded by his family on Wednesday at the family estate, the family said in a statement.

He governed for a single seven-year term from 1974-1981, when France made great strides in nuclear power and high-speed train travel.

He ensured that Paris was at the heart of Europe in a post-war partnership with Germany and also played a key role in what would become the G7 group of major world powers.

In contrast to his predecessors Georges Pompidou and Charles de Gaulle, he was an accessible and media-savvy politician who enjoyed meeting voters. But he also never shook off a sometimes haughty demeanour linked to his aristocratic background.

His ambition to go down as one of France's greatest leaders was derailed in 1981 when he lost his bid for a second term to Socialist rival Francois Mitterrand.

He governed for a single seven-year term from 1974-1981, when France made great strides in nuclear power and high-speed train travel.

"His seven-year mandate transformed France," President Emmanuel Macron said in a statement.

"The direction he set for France still guides our way... his death has plunged the French nation into mourning," Macron, who has sometimes been compared to Giscard, said.

Macron was due to address the nation to pay tribute to Giscard later yesterday.

German Chancellor Angela Merkel mourned the loss of a "great European" and said Germany had lost "a friend." Tweeting in French and English, British Prime Minister Boris Johnson called Giscard a "hugely important figure in modernising France".

Former European Commission president Jean-Claude Juncker recalled Giscard's "great ambition for the continent".

Giscard launched a radical reform drive that included making it easier for couples to divorce and lowering the voting age to 18.

In Europe, Giscard helped the push towards a monetary union in cooperation with German chancellor Helmut Schmidt, launching a European exchange rate system that was a precursor to the euro.

The europhile president was born in the German city of Koblenz while it was under French occupation in the aftermath of World War I.

It was at his initiative that leaders of the world's richest countries first met in 1975, an event that evolved into the annual summits of the Group of Seven (G7) club.

Some commentators have compared Macron to the centre-right Giscard, who until the incumbent president arrived at the Elysee aged just 39 in 2017 was modern France's youngest head of state having won office aged 48.

French Prime Minister Jean Castex hailed a "man of progress" whose social reforms remained "deeply relevant" for young people and women.

He "succeeded in modernising political life in France", added former president Nicolas Sarkozy. Tall and slender with an elegant, aristocratic manner, he studied at elite schools — Ecole Polytechnique and Ecole Nationale d'Administration.

Aged just 18, he joined the French Resistance and took part in the World War II liberation of Paris from its Nazi occupiers in 1944. He then served for eight months in Germany and Austria in the run-up to the capitulation of the Third Reich.

He launched his political career in 1959, becoming finance minister in 1969.

With a more relaxed presidential style than his predecessors, "VGE" was sometimes seen in public playing football, or the accordion.

Giscard involved his family in his political appearances, and had the blue and red of France's tricolour flag toned down.



Former French president Valery Giscard d'Estaing (centre) displays his prize, as former German chancellor Helmut Schmidt (left) and then German Foreign Minister Frank-Walter Steinmeier look on, at an award ceremony, during which Schmidt and Giscard d'Estaing were both awarded the Adenauer-de Gaulle prize, at the foreign ministry in Berlin, on January 24, 2006.

EU takes Bulgaria, Greece to court over air pollution

REUTERS — BRUSSELS

The European Commission will take Bulgaria and Greece to the EU Court of Justice after both countries breached air pollution limits for years despite multiple warnings, the Commission said yesterday.

The two cases are the latest in a string of EU legal actions over poor air quality in countries including France, Italy and Romania, as Brussels seeks to clamp down on violations that threaten human health and the bloc's pollution targets.

The Commission said it will refer Bulgaria to the EU's top court for exceeding legal limits on particulate matter from 2015-2019 even after the court ordered the country's government to address the issue in 2017. Bulgaria could face financial penalties for flouting the earlier ruling.

Bulgaria is one of the heaviest offenders in the European Union in terms of exceeding both annual and daily limits on particulate matter, the Commission said.

EU laws have required countries to limit particulate matter pollution since 2005. However, most of the bloc's 27 members are set to miss targets this year to tackle dirty air.

The Commission also referred Greece to the court for exceeding particulate matter limits in the city of Thessaloniki for all but one year since 2005.

"Efforts by the Greek authorities have to date been unsatisfactory and insufficient," it said.

Air pollution is the biggest environmental health risk in Europe. Particulate matter contributed to around 379,000 premature deaths in 2018 in the EU, although this was 13% lower than in 2009, the European Environment Agency said in a recent report.

The Commission also referred Poland to the EU's top court yesterday for failing to protect forests and the wildlife that live there.

Four die in UK chemical tank blast

AFP — LONDON

Four people died yesterday when a chemical tank exploded at a waste water treatment plant in western England.

"We can confirm there have been four fatalities," Avon and Somerset Police Chief Inspector Mark Runacres said after the explosion at the plant at Avonmouth, near Bristol.

A fifth person was injured but their injuries were not said to be life-threatening, he added.

Police said they would not be speculating on the cause of the explosion but added it was not being treated as terror related.

Prime Minister Boris Johnson tweeted that he was "deeply saddened to learn that four people have lost their lives".

"Our hearts go out to the victims and their families. Thank you to the emergency services who attended the scene," he added.

The explosion at the plant operated by Wessex Water occurred in a silo that holds treated bio-solids before they are recycled as organic soil conditioners, added Runacres.



Police block the entrance to the scene of the explosion near Bristol, Britain, yesterday.

Witness Jawad Burhan said there was a "helicopter looking for missing people" and police closed a nearby road leading up to the plant.

"I heard the sound, I'm working beside the building in another warehouse. After 10 minutes I saw the helicopter coming and the police," he said.

Another witness, Kieran Jenkins, told the *BBC* he was in a nearby warehouse when the explosion occurred. "Next thing you know we looked out of the windows and all we could see was people running."

An investigation has been launched into the blast.

Italy curbs travel to avoid virus 'third wave'

AFP — ROME

Italy yesterday announced national travel restrictions for the Christmas holidays designed to limit the spread of COVID-19 in the European country first hit by the pandemic.

The new rules, together with an existing curfew and other regulations already in place, seek to curb circulation throughout the country during the festive period by limiting the number of gatherings.

Earlier this year, a punishing lockdown of all Italy's 60 million residents helped bring the outbreak under control, but the government is trying to avoid missteps made over the summer after the lockdown lifted, when the return of vacationers fuelled a new rise in cases.

"If we let down our guard now, the third wave is just around the corner," Health Minister Roberto Speranza told parliament on Wednesday.

Travel between Italy's regions will be prohibited from December 21 through January 6, with people barred from travelling outside their own towns on December 25, 26 and January 1. The decree includes the "strong recommendation" to avoid hosting those who do not live together.

Other regulations are expected to mandate a 10-day quarantine for those arriving in Italy from foreign countries, beginning on December 20.

Catalonia keeps virus restrictions

REUTERS — BARCELONA

The Spanish region of Catalonia will not relax coronavirus restrictions on Monday as originally planned because of worsening infection rates, officials said, prompting some ski slopes to postpone their planned opening next week.

The winter skiing season has become a source of tension among European countries, with some allowing resorts to open and others, like Spain's neighbour France, banning it and planning border checks to stop people from crossing the border to ski.

In Catalonia, a north-eastern Spanish region that borders France, public ski resorts had planned to open after a December 8 bank holiday.

But these ski slopes will not open until Catalonia relaxes its coronavirus restrictions, among other conditions, said a spokeswoman from FGC, the public company that operates the resorts.

Privately-owned ski slopes in Catalonia have not yet decided whether to open, said a spokeswoman from the regional federation of ski resorts.

Baqueira Beret, Spain's largest ski station, is sticking to its plan to open on December 11 but that is subject to change awaiting clarification from the Catalan government, a spokesman said.

Spain government studying four-day work week

BLOOMBERG

Spain's government is analysing shortening working hours as well as cutting the working-week to four days.

According to Deputy Prime Minister Pablo Iglesias, leader of the left-wing Unidas Podemos, the government is considering proposing shorter working hours to boost employment. The comments to state-broadcaster RTVE came days after consumer-goods giant Unilever announced it will trial a four-day working week in New Zealand to enhance worker wellbeing and boost productivity.

The idea of a shorter working week has been around for years across the world, but the pandemic this year, and its impact on work, wellbeing and inequality, has led to a new push to think about economies and social structures. In particular, the huge use of furlough programs to keep workers in employment during lockdowns has spurred calls for greater support for low earners or those in vulnerable industries.

Any proposal for a change to Spain's working week would be presented by the government within the so-called social dialogue framework with labour unions and industry groups.



British Museum reopens

A general view shows the glass roof over the Great Court after the British Museum reopened in London yesterday, as England emerges from a month-long lockdown to combat the spread of the novel coronavirus. England on Wednesday exited a month-long lockdown into a new 3-tiered system of curbs with non-essential retail, leisure centres and salons all reopening but with some sectors, including hospitality, seeing tighter restrictions.

UN experts say France must overhaul security bill

AFP — GENEVA

A group of independent United Nations experts yesterday urged France to revise its controversial proposed security law, branding it "incompatible" with international human rights legislation.

The five UN special rapporteurs, who do not speak for the global body but report their findings to the Human Rights Council, said the draft law "should be comprehensively revised".

The bill's Article 22 would allow drone surveillance for security purposes, while Article 24 would criminalise publishing images of on-duty police with the intent of harming their "physical or psychological integrity".

The French government has come under increasing pressure to scrap or revise the bill as outrage has grown over a highly publicised case of police violence.

Four French police officers were charged this week after being caught on camera beating black music producer Michel Zecler and showering him with racial abuse.

Thousands meanwhile demonstrated against the proposals at the weekend, some rallies turning violent and leaving dozens injured.

Though the UN experts welcomed a planned rewrite of Article 24, they urged the French government to undertake a comprehensive evaluation of the entire bill's compatibility with international law. "Images of police abuse captured by the public play a vital role in oversight of public institutions, which is fundamental to the rule of law," said the special rapporteurs, including the UN's top experts on freedom of expression, and the protection of human rights while countering terrorism.

Moldova MPs reduce presidential powers

AFP — CHISINAU

President-elect Maia Sandu called for the resignation of incumbent Dodon's government, which she said had "supported his corrupt schemes", and for early parliamentary polls.



Moldovan lawmakers passed a bill yesterday reducing presidential powers despite more than 5,000 people rallying in support of the country's newly elected pro-European leader.

Maia Sandu **(pictured)** is due to take office in late December as leader of the ex-Soviet republic after winning a surprise victory over pro-Russian incumbent Igor Dodon last month.

The new legislation transfers control of the the country's intelligence agency from the president to parliament.

Sandu and her supporters say the goal is to reduce the role of the presidency before she takes office and to boost parliament, where the opposition is outnumbered by Dodon's supporters.

Opposition lawmakers did not participate in the voting, chanting "Shame!" and "Down with the mafia!" inside parliament.

Images from inside showed lawmakers coming to blows after the legislation passed.

Lawmakers passed several other bills, including one granting official language status to Russian. Moldova has close historical ties with neighbouring Romania and they share a common language.

Earlier, protesters gathered outside parliament after Sandu called for supporters to rally against the bills tabled by Dodon's Party of Socialists, which she branded a "usurpation of power".

Sandu's supporters chanted "Down with the traitors!" and demanded the dissolution of parliament.

Police cordoned off the building but did not interfere with the rally.

At the protest, Sandu called for the resignation of Dodon's government, which she said had "supported his corrupt schemes", and for early parliamentary polls.

"We need a good country for all decent people. We need snap elections to kick the thieves out of power," Sandu said.

The last parliamentary election was held in 2019 with Dodon's party securing a third of the seats.

During his four years in power, Dodon enjoyed the strong backing of Moscow and supported closer ties with Russia.

Sandu promised during the campaign to battle corruption in the country of 3.5 million people, which is one the poorest in Europe.

2nd body recovered off Lesbos after migrant boat sank

AP — ATHENS

The body of a woman was recovered yesterday on the Greek island of Lesbos and identified as that of a woman reported missing after a migrant boat sank the previous day.

The coast guard said the body was recovered from a rocky part of the coast, bringing the death toll from the sinking to two.

Another 32 people, all from Somalia and including three children, had been rescued from the sea after the dinghy they had been traveling in from the nearby Turkish coast sank off Lesbos Wednesday morning, Greek authorities said.

Government spokesman Stelios Petsas accused the Turkish coast guard of refusing to help the migrants when they issued a distress call.

"It is clear that the Turkish vessel, despite the request for help, didn't help, didn't rescue the passengers of the fatal boat while they were in Turkish territorial waters," Petsas said yesterday. "On the contrary, it urged them to move forward, it carried out maneuvers against the boat so that it would continue its course toward Greek shores."

Petsas said smuggling gangs were knowingly endangering people's lives by sending them out to illegally cross the EU's borders in unseaworthy vessels.

Greece remains one of the most popular routes into the European Union for people fleeing poverty and conflict in the Mideast, Africa and Asia.



Daily commuters arrive with the metro at Stockholm's central station amid the novel coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic, in Sweden, yesterday.

Mother in Sweden no longer suspected of locking up son

AP — STOCKHOLM

A woman in her 70s is no longer suspected of having kept her son locked up in an apartment south of Stockholm for as long as 28 years, a prosecutor said yesterday.

Prosecutor Emma Olsson, who headed the preliminary investigation, told Swedish media that investigators found no evidence that the woman's son, who is in his 40s, had been kept in the apartment against his will.

The mother had been held on suspicion of unlawful deprivation of liberty and grievous bodily harm.

"We have not been able to find any evidence that any crime has been committed by the woman," Olsson said.

Swedish daily newspaper *Expressen* reported this week that the man was found Sunday by a relative who had learned that his mother had been admitted to a hospital. The relative went to the flat, found the door unlocked and entered.

The relative told the newspaper there was "urine, dirt and dust" all over the place and the apartment "smelled rotten." She heard a noise from the kitchen and found the man sitting on blankets and pillows.

The investigation has not yet been formally closed, but the mother is no longer suspected of any crime and has been released.

Masks not mandatory in Sweden as virus toll rises

REUTERS — STOCKHOLM

Sweden has not needed face masks yet, a top health official said yesterday, as deaths from the pandemic climbed above 7,000 and a day after the World Health Organization (WHO) expanded recommendations for when masks should be used.

The WHO said on Wednesday that, where the epidemic was spreading, people - including children and students aged 12 or over — should always wear masks in shops, workplaces and schools that lack adequate ventilation, and when receiving visitors at home in poorly ventilated rooms.

However, the Swedish Health Agency, largely behind Sweden's no-lockdown strategy, has refrained from recommending masks, citing poor evidence of their effectiveness and fears that masks might be used as an excuse to not isolate when experiencing symptoms.

"Face masks may be needed in some situations. Those situations have not arisen in Sweden yet, according to our dialogue with the (healthcare) regions," Anders Tegnell, Sweden's chief epidemiologist, told a news conference yesteday.

"WHO is clear that the state of evidence for masks is weak. All studies so far suggest that it is much more important to keep your distance than to have a face mask," he said.

In a bid to stem a severe second wave, Prime minister Stefan Lofven announced yesterday that high schools would switch to distance learning for the rest of the year.

Sweden registered 35 new COVID-19 related deaths yesterday, taking the total to 7,007.

The country also registered 6,485 new coronavirus cases. That compared with a high of 7,240 daily cases recorded two weeks ago.

Sweden's death rate per capita is several times higher than that of its Nordic neighbours, but lower than several European countries that opted for lockdowns.

EU steps up fight against disinformation

AFP — BRUSSELS

The EU yesterday announced plans to step up the fight against disinformation in Europe at a time when anti-vaccine content is spreading, fuelled by the coronavirus pandemic.

The European Commission also plans to regulate political advertising and to better protect journalists as part of its Democracy Action Plan.

"Disinformation is not a trivial thing... We are speaking about really dangerous attacks," EU commission vice-president Vera Jourova said.

The plan by the EU executive intends to strengthen its existing code of conduct against disinformation, which was launched in 2018.

It was signed by Google, Facebook, Twitter, Microsoft and in June 2020 by TikTok, as well as players in the advertising sector.

But the EU believes self-regulation is no longer adequate and the new measures will coincide with the much-anticipated Digital Services Act, to be proposed by the commission on December 15.

The commission, which has already denounced campaigns allegedly launched by Russia and China linked to the pandemic, is seeking the power to impose financial penalties on foreign agents.

It also wants to have a role in helping member states coordinate their response to disinformation attacks by foreign actors.

The EU executive also wants more transparency from the platforms on the sources of disinformation, their algorithms and more access to data for researchers.

Campaign group Avaaz said the plan could be groundbreaking if the platforms are held accountable with clear objectives and oversight.

"Or it could remain an ineffective declaration of intent," warned Avaaz campaign manager Luca Nicotra, if the platforms continue to report based on indicators they choose themselves.

The commission also said it would propose new legislation to regulate political advertising next year.

Mexico president says Trump helped him get vaccine

AP — MEXICO CITY

Mexico's president said yesterday he plans to give the military a role in distributing coronavirus vaccines, which he says US President Donald Trump helped him get.

President Andrés Manuel López Obrador said that on his visit to Washington in July he spoke with Trump and Vice President Mike Pence and they "helped facilitate so that Mexico was taken into account and could get the vaccine."

López Obrador suggested Mexico will probably wait until US regulators approve the Pfizer vaccine later this month before giving it the go-ahead in Mexico.

On Wednesday, Mexico's Health Department signed a contract for 34.4 million doses of that vaccine, and said it hoped to receive 250,000 doses in December. Each person requires two doses.

The president said the government is discussing with "the army and the navy, and we are defining the whole operation" to distribute the vaccine. López Obrador has given the military an unprecedented array of responsibilities in his two years in office, including distributing medical supplies and guarding hospitals.

López Obrador is one of the few world leaders who has yet to congratulate President-elect Joe Biden.



Sao Paulo and Butantan Institute officials pose for photos next to a container carrying doses of the CoronaVac vaccine after it was unloaded from a cargo plane at Guarulhos International Airport in Guarulhos, near Sao Paulo, Brazil, yesterday.

Sao Paulo gets 1 million doses of Chinese vaccine

REUTERS — SAO PAULO

Brazil's Butantan Institute biomedical centre yesterday received 1 million doses of a Chinese vaccine developed by Sinovac Biotech that is undergoing late-stage testing by the institute in Sao Paulo state.

The consignment of CoronaVac vaccine, which will be packaged and labeled at Butantan's facilities, arrived at Sao Paulo's Guarulhos airport.

It is the second shipment of the vaccine, which still needs approval from federal health regulator Anvisa before it can be used, to arrive in Brazil, after 120,000 doses landed from China on November 19. Butantan said it expected Sinovac to publish efficacy results for the treatment by December 15.

"By the end of this month of December, we will be receiving 6 million doses," and another 40 million by January 15, Sao Paulo Governor João Doria said.

President Jair Bolsonaro, who many expect to be challenged by Doria in the 2022 presidential election, has long criticised the Sinovac vaccine.

Doria, meanwhile, has accused Anvisa of or becoming overly politicized after a surprise suspension of the Sinovac trial due to the suicide of a volunteer. The trial was restarted but the president called the halt a "victory" for Bolsonaro.

Anvisa said on Wednesday it was open to approving COVID-19 vaccines for emergency use, that authorisations would be analysed on a case-by-case basis and that to be considered the vaccine must be in late-stage trials in Brazil.

Austin mayor travels to Mexico while urging people to stay home

AP — AUSTIN

Austin Mayor Steve Adler went on vacation to Mexico with family in November as he urged people to stay home amid worsening coronavirus caseloads in Texas, at one point recording a video during the trip in which he told residents back home that now was "not the time to relax."

The trip revealed on Wednesday by the Austin American-Statesman is the latest example of a public official who has pleaded for vigilance in the face of rising cases and hospitalisations across the US seeming to not heed their own guidance.

Hours after the story was published, Adler issued a statement apologising for the trip.

"While I violated no orders or guidelines, I regret this travel," Adler said. "I wouldn't travel now, didn't over Thanksgiving and won't over Christmas. But my fear is that this travel, even having happened during a safer period, could be used by some as justification for risky behaviour. In hindsight, it set a bad example, for which I apologise."

Last month, California Gov Gavin Newsom came under scrutiny for attending a birthday party at a posh restaurant near San Francisco as he urged people to stay within their own households. Denver Mayor Michael Hancock also flew to Mississippi to visit family for Thanksgiving despite sending messages on social media and to city staff asking them to avoid traveling for the holiday.

"There was no recommendation for people not to travel during that period of time," Adler said. "Someone could look at me and say, 'He traveled.' But what they could not say is that I traveled at a time when I was telling other people not to travel."

Texas surpassed 9,000 hospitalised virus patients this week for the first time since a deadly summer outbreak. More than 15,000 new cases were reported Tuesday, smashing a single-day record, though state health officials attributed some of that spike to a backlog of results from the long Thanksgiving holiday weekend.

Wisconsin court declines to hear Trump lawsuit

AP — MADISON

Trump had asked the Wisconsin Supreme Court to disqualify more than 221,000 ballots in the state's two biggest Democratic counties, alleging irregularities in the way absentee ballots were administered.

The Wisconsin Supreme Court yesterday refused to hear President Donald Trump's lawsuit attempting to overturn his loss to Democrat Joe Biden in the battleground state, saying the case must first wind its way through lower courts.

The legal defeat was the latest in a string of losses for Trump's post-election lawsuits. Judges in multiple battleground states have rejected his claims of fraud or irregularities.

Trump had asked the Wisconsin Supreme Court to disqualify more than 221,000 ballots in the state's two biggest Democratic counties, alleging irregularities in the way absentee ballots were administered.

His lawsuit echoed claims that were earlier rejected by election officials in those counties during a recount that barely affected Biden's winning margin of about 20,700 votes.

Trump had wanted the conservative-controlled Wisconsin Supreme Court to take the case directly, saying there wasn't enough time to wage the legal battle by starting first with a lower court given the looming December 14 date when presidential electors cast their votes. But attorneys for Governor Tony Evers and the state Department of Justice argued the law required the lawsuit to start with lower courts.

It was not immediately known if Trump would still pursue the case through lower courts. He filed a similar lawsuit in federal court on Wednesday.

In Wisconsin, Trump challenged procedures that have been in place for years and never been found to be illegal.

He claimed there were thousands of absentee ballots without a written application on file. He argued that the electronic log created when a voter requests a ballot online – the way the vast majority are requested – doesn't meet the letter of the law.

He also challenged more ballots where election clerks filled in missing address information on the certification envelope where the ballot is inserted, even though the practice has long been accepted in Wisconsin and the state elections commission told clerks it was OK.

And Trump challenged absentee ballots where voters declared themselves to be "indefinitely confined," a status that exempts them from having to show photo identification to cast a ballot, and one that was used much more heavily this year due to the pandemic. The Wisconsin Supreme Court in March ruled that it was up to individual voters to determine their status.



US President Donald Trump awards the Presidential Medal of Freedom to retired football coach Lou Holtz in the Oval Office at the White House in Washington, yesterday.

Attorneys for Democratic Governor Tony Evers called the lawsuit an "assault on democracy" and urged the court not to accept original jurisdiction of the case.

"President Trump's (lawsuit) seeks nothing less than to overturn the will of nearly 3.3 million Wisconsin voters," Evers' attorneys said in filings with the court. "It is a shocking and outrageous assault on our democracy.... He is simply trying to seize Wisconsin's electoral votes, even though he lost the statewide election." Two other lawsuits filed by conservatives are still pending with the Wisconsin Supreme Court seeking to invalidate ballots cast in the presidential election. In addition to Trump's federal lawsuit, there is a another one in federal court with similar claims from Sidney Powell, a conservative attorney who was removed from Trump's legal team.

Wisconsin this week certified Biden's victory, setting the stage for a Democratic slate of electors chosen earlier to cast the state's 10 electoral votes for him.

US virus deaths top 3,100 in a single day for first time

AP — WASHINGTON

The US recorded over 3,100 COVID-19 deaths in a single day, obliterating the record set last spring, while the number of Americans hospitalized with the virus has eclipsed 100,000 for the first time and new cases has begun topping 200,000 a day, according to figures released yesterday.

The three benchmarks altogether showed a country slipping deeper into crisis, with perhaps the worst yet to come, in part because of the delayed effects from Thanksgiving, when millions of Americans disregarded warnings to stay home and celebrate only with members of their household.

Across the US, the surge has swamped hospitals and left nurses and other health care workers shorthanded and burned out.

"The reality is December and January and February are going to be rough times. I actually believe they are going to be the most difficult time in the public health history of this nation," Dr. Robert Redfield, head of the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, said on Wednesday.

Health authorities had warned that the numbers could fluctuate strongly before and after Thanksgiving, as they often do around holidays and weekends, when because of reporting delays, figures often drop, then rise sharply a few days later as state and local agencies catch up with the backlog.

Still, deaths, hospitalizations and cases in the US have been on a fairly steady rise for weeks, sometimes breaking records for days on end. Nationwide the coronavirus is blamed for over 270,000 deaths and about 14 million confirmed infections.

The US recorded 3,157 deaths on Wednesday, according to the tally kept by Johns Hopkins University. That's more than the number of people killed on 9/11, and it shattered the old mark of 2,603, set on April 15, when the New York metropolitan area was the epicenter of the US outbreak.

The number of people in the hospital likewise set an all-time high Wednesday, according to the COVID Tracking Project. It has more than doubled over the past month.

Also, the number of newly confirmed infections climbed just over 200,000 on Wednesday for the second time in less than a week.

Harris names all-female team of senior staff

BLOOMBERG — SACRAMENTO

For the first time, the top three positions in the office of the vice president will be held by women — and all serving under the first woman to hold the office.

Vice President-elect Kamala Harris announced her top aides yesterday, including Tina Flournoy as chief of staff, in addition to naming her domestic policy adviser and national security adviser.

"Together with the rest of my team, today's appointees will work to get this virus under control, open our economy responsibly and make sure it lifts up all Americans, and restore and advance our country's leadership around the world," Harris said in a statement.

President-elect Joe Biden and Harris have made a point of making historic appointments to staff jobs and cabinet positions, pledging to build a team "that looks like America."

It stands in contrast to the cabinet and staff for President Donald Trump and Vice President Mike Pence, which is largely White.

Biden has chosen Janet Yellen, who would be the first female Treasury secretary, and a diverse group for national security and economic jobs as well as White House staff. Earlier this week, Biden announced his senior communications team, all of whom are women, including two —Ashley Etienne and Symone Sanders — assigned to Harris.

Nevertheless, Biden is already facing some criticism for not choosing enough African Americans or Latinos for key jobs, as he continues to build out his cabinet.

Representative Jim Clyburn, the highest-ranking Black member of Congress and who is credited with turning the primary campaign in Biden's favor, has expressed concern about the number of Black appointees.

Harris is expected to continue to build out her roster of aides. Flournoy is former President Bill Clinton's chief of staff. She had also worked as assistant to the president for public policy at the American Federation of Teachers.

Flournoy served various roles in the Clinton administration, beginning with his 1992 campaign.

The last woman to hold the position of chief of staff to the vice president was Ann Whitman under Vice-President Nelson Rockefeller beginning in 1974.

Rohini Kosoglu will serve as domestic policy adviser to the vice president. Kosoglu currently is a senior adviser to Harris. She was the first South Asian-American woman to serve as chief of staff in the US Senate, having worked for Harris's Senate office as well for her primary presidential campaign.

Nancy McEldowney, the former US ambassador to Bulgaria, will serve as Harris's national security adviser. McEldowney was director of European affairs on the National Security Council staff in the Clinton administration as well as the principal deputy assistant secretary of State in the Bureau of European and Eurasian Affairs.

Californians flee as winds push fire through canyons

AP — LOS ANGELES

Powerful winds pushed flames through Southern California canyons early yesterday as an out-of-control wildfire burned near homes and forced residents to flee.

The blaze in Orange County's Silverado Canyon began late Wednesday as a house fire that quickly spread to tinder-dry brush as gusts topped 70mph.

It exploded in size throughout the night and as the sun came up, an enormous plume of smoke was visible for miles.

Firefighters struggled in steep terrain amid unpredictable Santa Ana winds that have raised fire danger for much of the region.

Orange County Fire Authority Captain Thanh Nguyen said crews were scrambling to stay ahead of flames that jumped major roads.

"We've seen the wind change also drastically, so that's what we're telling all our personnel to be aware of – that constantly changing wind," he told CBS LA TV.

Evacuations were ordered for several canyon neighborhoods near the city of Lake Forest and residents of other nearby areas were told to be ready to get out. It was not immediately known how many people were affected or if any homes were damaged.



Firefighters extinguishing a house partially destroyed by a brush fire, along Wind River Road in El Cajon, California, yesterday.

Numerous studies have linked bigger wildfires in America to climate change from the burning of coal, oil and gas.

Canada could approve Pfizer's vaccine within next week

REUTERS — OTTAWA

Canadian health authorities could approve Pfizer Inc's coronavirus vaccine within the next week, allowing distribution to start in early 2021, medical officials indicated yesterday.

Although Canada has signed supply deals with seven manufacturers, officials say the first decision is set to be on the vaccine Pfizer developed with German partner BioNTech SE.

"Things have been progressing really well, and we're expecting within the next week to 10 days to be making a final decision," Supriya Sharma, chief medical adviser to the top official at the federal health ministry, told the Canadian Broadcasting Corp.

Canada's deputy chief public health officer, Howard Njoo, later told reporters that "certainly we expect it to be a favorable one".

A second wave is sweeping Canada, setting daily records for the number of new cases. So far, Canada has reported a total of 389,778 cases of COVID-19 and 12,325 deaths.

Njoo said authorities were planning for a total of six million doses of vaccines made by Pfizer and Moderna Inc to be administered in the first quarter of 2021. This is enough for three million of Canada's 38 million population.

Prime Minister Justin Trudeau told members of his ruling Liberal Party on Tuesday that priority would be given to first responders, workers in long-term care homes, the elderly and members of remote aboriginal communities.

World leaders meet to forge path to end pandemic

AP — UNITED NATIONS

The UN General Assembly president opened the world body's first special session on COVID-19 yesterday, calling it a historic and overdue moment of reckoning to forge a path to end the pandemic that not only ensures people everywhere have access to vaccines but mobilizes financial resources for "an inclusive and resilient recovery."

Volkan Bozkir said the world is looking to the United Nations for leadership and action "to address the greatest challenge our world is facing today." "This is not a time to point fingers," he said. "We have convened here to forge a path forward and to end the suffering of the people we serve."

Nearly 100 world leaders and several dozen government ministers are scheduled to speak during the mainly virtual special session that began with Bozkir asking masked ambassadors and diplomats from the UN's 193 member nations in the assembly hall to stand in silent tribute to the 1.5 million people who have lost their lives to COVID-19.

The assembly president called the session "a test for multilateralism" and said what the world must do is clear — ensure fair and equitable access to COVID-19 vaccines, work together "to protect the most vulnerable countries," ensure adequate resources for an economic recovery that goes beyond pre-pandemic levels, and ensure that policies adopted ensure human rights and don't undermine democratic institutions.

UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres said that from the start of the COVID-19 crisis early this year, the World Health Organization provided factual information and recommendations that should have been the basis for a coordinated global response. But unfortunately, many recommendations weren't followed, and some countries ignored or rejected the guidance.

"And when countries go in their own direction, the virus goes in every direction," he reiterated.

"Nearly a year into the pandemic, we face a human tragedy, and a public health, humanitarian and development emergency," Guterres said. "For the first time since 1945, the entire world is confronted by a common threat, regardless of nationality, ethnicity or faith.... The social and economic impact of the pandemic is enormous and growing."

While vaccines may become available in the next weeks and months, the UN chief stressed that "a vaccine cannot undo damage that will stress across years, even decades to come."

He pointed to rising numbers of people facing extreme poverty, the looming threat of famine and the prospect of "the biggest global recession in eight decades."

Guterres said these impacts aren't due to COVID-19 alone but are the result of long-term inequalities and injustices exposed by the pandemic that must be addressed.

He welcomed steps to help developing countries but said "they are totally insufficient for the scale of this crisis," noting that many low- and middle-income countries are being forced to choose between providing basic services to their people or servicing debts. They need immediate support "to avert a liquidity crisis," he said.





Brexit broken record: Trade deal close but big issues remain

We are close, very close, maybe even on the red lines we set in some instances but we have not crossed it.

Michel Barnier
EU chief negotiator

Business | 14



QSE 10,465.64 +73.78 (+0.71%)↑ FTSE 100 6,482.05 +18.66 (0.29%)↑ DOW 30,026.09 +142.30 (0.48%)↑ BRENT $45.19 (-0.20)↓







Al Kaabi: Stronger collaboration of producer-consumer needed

THE PENINSULA – DOHA

In remarks at the 7th Ministerial Gas Forum that was inaugurated and attended by the Prime Minster of Malaysia, H E Tan Sri Muhyidden Yassin, the Minister of State for Energy Affairs, the President and CEO of Qatar Petroleum, H E Saad Sherida Al Kaabi, said energy will continue to be key to global growth and development on the road to recovery in the post-COVID world, and that natural gas will continue to be a cornerstone in the low-carbon energy transition.

The Minister made the remarks during a virtual Ministerial Roundtable held under the title, "Opportunities in Growing Gas Markets: Producer-Consumer Perspectives on New Realities" as part of the 7th Ministerial Gas Forum, which was organized by the Government of Malaysia in cooperation with the International Energy Forum (IEF) and the International Gas Union (IGU).

In his remarks at the roundtable, Minister Al Kaabi highlighted the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic and its heavy toll on world economies, which has disrupted many aspects of life with an agonizing human toll, and an unprecedented disruption to the growth and prosperity many countries had hoped to achieve.

The Minister said: "While we mark one year of life with COVID-19, we are still coming to terms with its short and long-term impacts on the global economy, and are trying to assess the over-reaching brunt on the energy sector – and particularly on the gas industry."

The Minister of State for Energy Affairs told the ministerial roundtable that "with challenges often come opportunities," stressing the need for stronger producer-consumer collaboration as an important path to recovery.

He noted that a post-COVID world will be different, and that it will require a new way of thinking on how to manage our economies and our relationship with the environment. "This is where, I believe, natural gas plays a pivotal role and displays its most important economic and environmental qualities," he added.

The Minister of State for Energy Affairs told the ministerial roundtable that "with challenges often come opportunities," stressing the need for stronger producer-consumer collaboration as an important path to recovery.

The Minister also highlighted Qatar's efforts to keep the environment front and center across the whole LNG value chain.

Al Kaabi said: "Lower CO2 emissions and carbon capture and sequestration are part of the basic design of our new LNG facilities being built as part of the North Filed Expansion projects, which will raise our production to 126 million tons per annum by 2027. Qatar Petroleum is implementing a series of projects and initiatives to reduce gas emissions, and to capture and sequester more than 7 million tons of CO2 per annum by 2027, placing us firmly on the road to becoming a leader in the de-carbonization of the LNG value chain."



Minister of State for Energy Affairs, the President and CEO of Qatar Petroleum, H E Saad Sherida Al Kaabi and other dignitaries during the 7th Ministerial Gas Forum, organised by the Government of Malaysia in cooperation with the International Energy Forum (IEF) and the International Gas Union (IGU).

Minister Al Kaabi voiced a positive note on the future of the LNG industry, saying: "I believe that the economic and environmental realities of the post COVID-19 era will help increase the competitiveness of LNG. And I have no doubt that the best for the LNG industry is yet to come."

The Ministerial Gas Forum is an important platform for dialogue between Ministers, CEOs and Industry experts focusing on relevant issues revolving around the role of natural gas in emerging markets, where Asia is the main driver of demand. It aims to identify and advance energy policies and business strategies that support the dynamic evolution of global gas markets.

Opec and Russia agree modest oil output increase from January 2021

REUTERS – LONDON/MOSCOW

Opec and Russia yesterday agreed to a modest oil output increase from January by 500,000 barrels per day but failed to find a compromise on a broader and longer term policy for the rest of next year, four Opec+ sources told Reuters.

The increase means the Organization of the Petroleum Exporting Countries (Opec) and Russia, a group known as Opec+, would move to cutting production by 7.2 million bpd, or 7 percent of global demand from January, compared with current cuts of 7.7 million bpd.

The curbs are being implemented to tackle weak oil demand amid a second coronavirus wave.

Opec+ had previously been expected to extend existing cuts until at least March.

But after hopes for a speedy approval of anti-virus vaccines spurred an oil price rally at the end of November, several producers started questioning the need to keep such a tight rein on oil policy, as advocated by Opec leader Saudi Arabia.

Opec+ sources have said Russia, Iraq, Nigeria and the United Arab Emirates have all to a certain extent expressed interest in supplying the market with more oil in 2021.

Four Opec+ sources said the group would now gather every month to decide on output policies beyond January and monthly increases are unlikely to exceed 500,000 bpd.

Opec+ has to strike a delicate balance between pushing up oil prices enough to help their budgets but not by so much that rival US output surges. US shale production tends to climb above $50 a barrel. Monthly meetings by Opec+ will make price moves more volatile and complicate hedging by US oil producers.

Crude prices were little changed after the Opec+ decision at around $48 a barrel.

QLM to list shares on QSE

THE PENINSULA – DOHA

QLM Life & Medical Insurance Company QPSC yesterday announced its plans to list shares on Qatar Stock Exchange. The company plans to raise around QR659.4m through the Initial Public Offering (IPO). The IPO by Qatar's leading provider of life and medical insurance will make it the 48th company to list share on Qatar Stock Exchange.

The subscription for its IPO opens from December 10 and will close on December 23. Eligible investors include Qatari citizens and legal entities incorporated in Qatar. QLM's implied total market capitalisation at IPO is QR1.099bn.

The IPO by Qatar's leading provider of life and medical insurance will make it the 48th company to list share on QSE.

The Offering Price consists of the nominal value per share of QR1, a premium of QR2.14 and Offering and Listing Fee of QR0.01 per Offer Share. The share capital of QLM is QR350m divided into 350 million shares of QR1 each. The Offering Price consists of the nominal value per share of QR1, a premium of QR2.14 and Offering and Listing Fee of QR0.01 per Offer Share.

The company said that prior commitments have been obtained from several anchor investors to subscribe for 15 percent of QLM's share capital during the IPO.

EU aims 30 million electric cars by 2030

BLOOMBERG

The European Commission seeks to have at least 30 million electric vehicles on the region's roads by the end of the decade under a plan that would require the auto industry to massively accelerate its transformation.

The target for zero-emission cars is included in a draft strategy document obtained by Bloomberg News that is scheduled to be published next week. The goal is ambitious considering some 1.4 million EVs are being driven in Europe now, according to BloombergNEF. The researcher is forecasting there will be 28 million plug-in hybrid and battery-electric vehicles on the road by 2028.

The plan maps out targets for the broader transport sector, calling for high-speed rail traffic to double by 2030 and for scheduled travel between cities of under 300 kilometers (186 miles) to become carbon-neutral. Zero-emission large aircraft and vessels should be "ready for market" by 2035, it says.

Looking further ahead, the goals include doubling rail-freight traffic and tripling high-speed train traffic by the middle of the century. The road map is expected to lead to draft legislation in the coming months.

The proposals for the transport industry come amid a brewing spat between European Union members over a plan to toughen its 2030 emissions-reduction target to at least 55% by the end of the next decade from 1990 levels. Raising that goal from the existing 40% is a key element of the European Green Deal and would require more spending on energy production and infrastructure.

BlackRock's Deese to lead Biden's NEC team

BLOOMBERG



President-elect Joe Biden announced yesterday he has selected Brian Deese **(pictured)**, a BlackRock Inc executive and former Obama administration official, to lead his National Economic Council.

Deese is "among the most tested and accomplished public servants in the country -- a trusted voice I can count on to help us end the ongoing economic crisis, build a better economy that deals everybody in, and take on the existential threat of climate change in a way that creates good-paying American jobs," Biden said in a written statement.

In a video accompanying the statement, Biden said he chose Deese in part for his experience on climate issues, which includes serving as a senior adviser to President Barack Obama on energy and climate.

"If we're going to tackle the climate challenge, we need to make sure that solutions are woven into every output of our policy making," Biden said.

Deese also worked on Obama's 2008 campaign and joined his administration in 2009. He was part of the task force charged with restructuring the automobile industry following the financial crisis and later became deputy director of the Office of Management and Budget. Deese's selection to be director of the NEC, which is part of the White House, had already been confirmed by people familiar with the decision, but the transition waited until Thursday to announce the move.

Deese joins Biden's growing economic team. On Tuesday, Biden announced his first selections, including Janet Yellen to be Treasury secretary, Adewale Adeyemo to be deputy Treasury secretary, Neera Tanden to lead the Office of Management and Budget, and Cecilia Rouse to head the Council of Economic Advisers -- all of which require Senate confirmation. As a White House staff position, the NEC role doesn't need Senate approval.

Biden's selection of Deese comes as the president-elect's transition office faces pressure to build a diverse senior team, as well as to satisfy various ideological constituencies within the Democratic Party. Some Black groups had hoped that Biden would choose TIAA chief executive officer Roger Ferguson or former American Express CEO Ken Chenault for the job.

Progressive groups have meanwhile criticized Deese, arguing that his experience at BlackRock may make him too sympathetic to the financial industry. They're also unimpressed by his record on climate and have pointed to work he did during the Obama years on deficit reduction as a warning sign that he may not support the significant stimulus spending the left is pushing.

"Any BlackRock executives that move into the Biden administration need to prove that they are willing to take bold, proactive action to stop climate change," said Moira Birss, climate and finance director at Amazon Watch, a non-profit environmental group that has criticized BlackRock's track record on sustainability.

"This includes regulating their friends and former colleagues on Wall Street in order to rapidly and justly decarbonize the economy and the financial system," she said.

Vodafone opens new retail store in Doha Festival City

THE PENINSULA - DOHA

Vodafone Qatar has officially opened its new retail store in Doha Festival City that gives customers the opportunity to experience the power of 5G.

The new retail store in the country's most popular mall is the first to feature an exclusive experience area which showcases the latest 5G devices, Gaming console and Smart Home solutions such as Smart Lock, Door sensor, Motion sensor and Smart remote.

Inaugurating the store, Vodafone Qatar's Chief Operating Officer, Diego Camberos, said: "On top of offering customers a premium customer service, Vodafone's Doha Festival City store was meticulously designed to deliver an engaging experience that truly brings to life the 5G difference for your device, for your home and for your business. Vodafone is 100 percent 5G Ready- we have built a GigaFast 5G network, offer a large range of 5G devices and have fantastic 5G plans. We're excited to help customers make the 5G move!"

The store also reflects Vodafone's world-class look and feel and offers customers a vibrant and delightful retail ambience besides the ease and simplicity.

The store also reflects Vodafone's world-class look and feel and offers customers a vibrant and delightful retail ambience besides the ease and simplicity that is in line with any other store Vodafone customers will visit. Vodafone's Doha Festival City Store is located on Level 1 near the north food court.



Vodafone Qatar's Chief Operating Officer, Diego Camberos during the opening of Vodafone's Doha Festival City store.

Microsoft aims to help businesses get handle on data with new tool

REUTERS - SAN FRANCISCO

Microsoft Corp yesterday announced a new cloud-based tool designed to help corporate customers understand where data is scattered throughout their operations and whether they are in compliance with data privacy regulations.

Once known for its Windows operating system and applications such as Office, Microsoft has built a large business in cloud computing, helping store and process huge amounts of data for corporate customers.

Last year, it introduced a tool called Azure Synapse that is being used by companies such as FedEx Corp to analyze the flow of its 16 million daily packages.

But for large companies, stores of data have become so large, and distributed across so many countries, that Microsoft is rolling out a tool called Azure Purview to help companies better understand precisely what information they have and where it resides.

In particular, the tool is designed to help data privacy and risk management officials ensure their companies are in compliance with rules such as the European Union's General Data Protection Regulation, John "JG" Chirapurath, vice president of Azure data, artificial intelligence and edge, told Reuters in an interview.

The new tool uses artificial intelligence to detect sensitive or regulated data and can automatically mask it out, for example by redacting data on European customers from a sales report to US employees who are not authorized to access it.

"It's one thing to generate insights from data, but it's another thing to ask questions about the data itself. Can we use this data? Are we being responsible with the fair use of this data?" Chirapurath said. "These might seem like esoteric terms, but they are vital to how we run modern businesses. You have to be able to trust your data." Microsoft said yesterday.

Nestle plans to invest $3.6bn in climate change fight

BLOOMBERG

Nestle SA, the world's largest food company, said it will invest 3.2 billion Swiss francs ($3.6bn) over the next five years in an effort to fight climate change.

The company will plant 200 million trees during the next decade and help farmers and suppliers shift toward regenerative agriculture, the KitKat maker said yesterday. Nespresso, Perrier and San Pellegrino will become carbon-neutral by 2022, with the rest of its bottled water portfolio doing so by 2025.

The food industry is stepping up attempts to burnish its reputation amid criticism for environmental damage and packaging waste. Nestle is already spending as much as 2 billion francs in an attempt to promote more food-safe recycled plastics.

PepsiCo Inc pledged Wednesday to only use recycled plastic in its namesake brand's bottles in nine European markets by 2022. And Danone, which bottles Evian, has announced a €2bn ($2.4bn) sustainability investment over the next three years, and will expand its offering of plant-based food and beverages.



The company will start linking executive board members' remuneration to climate targets from next year as well as the CEO bonus package, Schneider told journalists.

"Business leaders can no longer afford to be skeptical and interminably patient," Nestle Chief Executive Officer Mark Schneider **(pictured)** said in an op-ed in Fortune magazine. "We should not expect comprehensive public policy and unanimity to do the job for us."

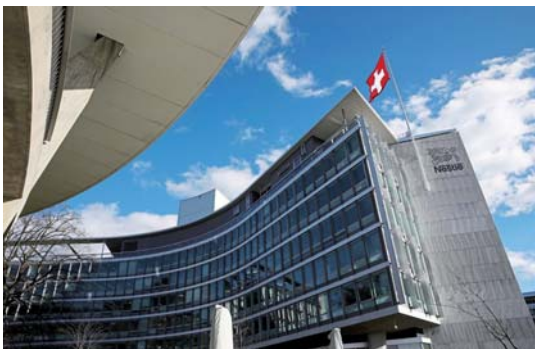
Schneider compared the situation to what executives in the car industry faced in the 1970s and 1980s, choosing to invest billions of dollars to make smaller, more fuel-efficient cars that were less profitable.

Nestle aims for all of the electricity at its 800 factories to come from renewable sources within the next five years.

When Nestle set a target last year to reach zero net greenhouse-gas emissions by 2050, Schneider said climate change was one of the greatest risks to the business. The company also aims to reach net-zero in its supply chain, known as Scope 3.

Nestle will offset emissions it can't reduce at source, using third-party certified and traceable carbon credits, said Magdi Batato, head of operations.

The company said the measures it's taking will help reduce emissions by a fifth in the next five years, and cut them in half by 2030.



A file photo of Nestle SA headquarters building in Vevey, Switzerland.

Service industries in US expand at a more moderate pace

BLOOMBERG

US service industries expanded at a more moderate, yet healthy pace in November, tempered by softer growth in orders and business activity that remain constrained by the coronavirus.

The Institute for Supply Management's services index fell to 55.9 during the month from 56.6 in October, according to data released yesterday. Readings above 50 indicate expansion, and the November figure was in line with the 55.8 median estimate in a *Bloomberg* survey of economists.

Consecutive monthly declines in the gauge underscore the pandemic-related challenges faced by service industries that include leisure and hospitality, travel, dining and retail. While still robust, odds of an acceleration of growth at service providers are diminished by a resurgence of Covid-19 and the onset of cooler temperatures.

"Respondents' comments are mixed about business conditions and the economy," Anthony Nieves, chair of the ISM's Business Survey Committee, said in a statement. "Most companies are cautious as they navigate operations amid the pandemic and the aftermath of the US presidential election."

At the same time, sectors such as information and finance have remained strong throughout the pandemic. A consumer shift to online purchases also indicates retailers and transportation companies will continue expanding during the holiday-shopping season.

Fourteen service industries reported growth in November, led by transportation and warehousing. Health care, food services, construction and retail also expanded.

The ISM's index of new orders at service providers eased 1.6 points to 57.2. The measure of service-related business activity, which parallels the ISM's factory production index, fell to 58 from 61.2 a month earlier.

The group's measure of services employment increased 1.4 points to 51.5, marking the third straight month in which respondents indicated payrolls gains. The government's monthly jobs report, to be released today, is projected to show employment rose 475,000 in November, indicating the economy was still adding workers but at a slower pace.

ISM's gauge of prices paid by service providers rose to an eight-year high of 66.1, indicating accelerating costs for materials and services, partially due to shortages of personal protective equipment.

Meanwhile, a measure of inventory sentiment dropped to 49.9 from 51.1, the second-lowest in records back to 1997 and indicating more service providers see their stockpiles as being too low.

A separate ISM report Tuesday showed factory activity also cooled in November but remained robust. Difficulties of hiring workers and temporary shutdowns for sanitation will likely limit manufacturing growth potential, the ISM said.



A file photo of a passenger boarding a New York City Subway train in USA.

Brexit broken record: Trade deal close but big issues remain

AP - LONDON

Much like a broken record, Brexit trade talks are rumored to be poised for success on the cusp of a deadline, only to face the same old fundamental differences on fishing rights, legal oversight and fair competition that have dogged the European Union and Britain for months.

It was no different yesterday when EU officials said that the remaining differences couldn't be bridged in "a matter of hours" despite swirling excitement that a decisive breakthrough was imminent.

Irish Foreign Minister Simon Coveney urged EU negotiators holed up with their UK counterparts in London on a diet of legal texts and takeout pizza: Let's "hold our nerve," he said.

"If we do that, there's a good chance that we can get a deal across the line in the next few days," Coveney said.

In Brussels though, some EU delegations are already thinking about ignoring the super-stringent January 1 deadline that the UK imposed on the talks, and simply negotiate through it for weeks to come if need.

Any fallout of chaos on borders and in trade could simply be blamed on the British, who insisted on a 11-month timeframe since officially leaving the EU on Jan. 31, instead of the half dozen years such talks traditionally take.

"If it doesn't work out for January 1, that doesn't mean that it won't work for January 15, or April 1 or July 1. What it does mean is that it would create a huge mess, but that would be totally blamed on London," a diplomat from an EU nation said on condition of anonymity because the talks were in a critical stage.



Though the UK left the EU on January 31, it remains within the bloc's tariff-free single market and customs union until the end of this year. A trade deal by then would ensure there are no tariffs and quotas on trade in goods between the two sides, but there would still be technical costs, partly associated with customs checks and non-tariff barriers on services.

If a trade deal came later than January 1, it would make for two massive adaptations of customs and border rules within a short time.

Though both sides would suffer economically from a failure to secure a trade deal, most economists think the British economy would take a greater hit, at least in the near-term, as it is relatively more reliant on trade with the EU than vice versa.

EU chief negotiator Michel Barnier **(pictured)** has been briefing the EU delegations over the last couple of days on any progress in an attempt to assuage itchy member states with most at stake that he will remain within their mandate.

"We are close, very close, maybe even on the red lines we set in some instances but we have not crossed it," the high-level diplomat said. He indicated any compromise would now need to come from London.

With less than four weeks to go before the possibility of tariffs being imposed on an array of products, businesses in the UK are showing their frustration at the ongoing uncertainty.

Ken Murphy, chief executive of Britain's biggest supermarket chain Tesco, told Sky News that the company is preparing for a no-deal outcome.

"We have been doing everything in our power to make sure that we are well placed to continue trading, to continue to supply our customers regardless of whether there is or isn't a no-deal Brexit," he said.

On Wednesday, British Prime Minister Boris Johnson said he is "absolutely committed" to trying to secure a deal "if we can." The discussions for months have failed to make much headway on three key issues. These relate to fishing rights in British waters, business regulations and state aid.

The bloc has accused Britain of wanting to retain access to the EU's lucrative markets, much like any EU country, without agreeing to follow its rules. The EU fears Britain will slash social and environmental standards and pump state money into UK industries, becoming a low-regulation economic rival on the bloc's doorstep.

Britain says the EU is making unreasonable demands and is failing to treat it as an independent, sovereign state.

Faleh Bughanaim and Seeyoubyme beat strong field to corner Ras Laffan Cup glory





Riders take the final bend during the Ras Laffan Cup, a 2000m turf race, at the Qatar Racing and Equestrian Club (QREC) in Al Rayyan Racecourse yesterday. CENTRE: Faleh Bughanaim, astride Seeyoubyme, on way to winning the Ras Laffan Cup, the feature race. RIGHT: The Seeyoubyme family is seen during the prize distribution ceremony.

SCOREBOARD

New Zealand 1st innings
T. Latham b Roach 86
W. Young b Gabriel 5
K. Williamson not out 97
R. Taylor not out 31
Extras (b6, lb10, nb7, w1) 24
Total (2 wkts, 78 overs) 243
To bat: H. Nicholls, T. Blundell, D. Mitchell, K. Jamieson, T. Southee, N. Wagner, T. Boult
Fall of wickets: 1-14 (Young), 2-168 (Latham)
Bowling: Roach 15-3-53-1, Gabriel, 17-5-62-1 (6nb), Holder 19-8-25-0 (1nb), Joseph 17-6-43-0 (1w), Chase 9-0-42-0, Brathwaite 1-0-2-0
West Indies: Kraigg Brathwaite, John Campbell, Darren Bravo, Jermaine Blackwood, Shamarh Brooks, Roston Chase, Shane Dowrich, Jason Holder (capt), Kemar Roach, Alzarri Joseph, Shannon Gabriel.
Toss: West Indies
Umpires: Chris Gaffaney (NZL), Wayne Knights (NZL)
TV umpire: Chris Brown (NZL)
Match referee: Jeff Crowe (NZL)

Maxwell defends 'switch-hit', asks bowlers to evolve

REUTERS - MELBOURNE

Glenn Maxwell defended the switch-hit after the audacious stroke once again drew criticism from pundits, the Australian all-rounder saying the onus was on bowlers to evolve and counter batsmen in the shorter formats of the game.

Right-handed Maxwell switches stance in a flash to transform into a left-hander with the bowler well into the delivery stride, making field setting impossible against the shot.

Maverick England batsman Kevin Pietersen was a regular proponent of the shot, which involves a combination of skill and risk and was deemed legal in 2008 by the MCC, which acts as the custodian of cricket's laws.

Maxwell smashed 59 from 38 balls at the Manuka Oval in Canberra during Australia's 13-run loss in the third and final ODI against India on Wednesday and his innings included a massive switch-hit against spinner Kuldeep Yadav that went 100 meters long.

"It's within the laws of the game," Maxwell told reporters. "I suppose it's up to the bowlers to try and combat that, and the skills of bowlers are being tested every day.

"They're having to come up with different change-ups and different ways to stop batters, and with the way they shut down one side of the ground and what-not. I suppose the way that batting is evolving, I think bowling has got to evolve to the same stage."



Australia's Glenn Maxwell plays a shot as India's wicketkeeper Kannaur Rahul (left) looks on during the third One-Day International cricket match between Australia and India at Manuka Oval in Canberra on Wednesday.

Former Australian captain and commentator Ian Chappell feels batsmen take unfair advantage of field placements by switching stance at the last moment.

"It is very skilful, some of it's amazingly skilful - but it's not fair," Chappell told ***Wide World of Sports***. "I'd love the administrators who made those laws to explain to me how that's fair."

Meanwhile Australia duo Adam Zampa and Ashleigh Gardner were among several men's and women's players yesterday to commit to the Birmingham Phoenix franchise for next year's inaugural edition of English cricket's The Hundred.

This year's competition was postponed when it became clear the coronavirus pandemic meant fans would not be allowed into grounds, with one of the key aims of the 100 balls per side format to attract new spectators to cricket.

Zampa had already been signed up by the Phoenix in a televised draft and the leg-spinner is now set to honour that commitment by playing for the Phoenix in 2021, with Gardner joining the franchise women's team.

"I'm over the moon to know that I'm staying with Birmingham Phoenix and to help this new team mount a serious challenge in this first year of The Hundred," Zampa said in an England and Wales Cricket Board statement. "Birmingham is a fantastic city and I'm really looking forward to calling Edgbaston home. Hopefully we can welcome crowds and our new fans to the ground because, having played against England at Edgbaston, I know that the atmosphere there is awesome."

Gardner added: "We've got the makings of an excellent Birmingham Phoenix squad and I can't wait to get going in next year's competition."

Birmingham-born England all-rounder Moeen Ali is set to captain the men's team in 2021 while New Zealand all-rounder Sophie Devine will skipper the women's team.

Williamson's bat puts NZ in charge on green strip

AFP - HAMILTON

A masterful innings from Kane Williamson, who was 97 not out at stumps, put New Zealand in charge on a day one of the first Test that should have belonged to the West Indies quicks in Hamilton yesterday.

New Zealand closed the day at 243 for two after Williamson and Tom Latham (86) laid the platform with a 158-run second wicket partnership.

Williamson will resume day two requiring just three runs to register his 22nd Test century, with Ross Taylor 31 not out.

The lush, green Seddon Park wicket had both sides dropping specialist spin in favour of all-out pace, and when Jason Holder won the toss there was no doubt he would make New Zealand bat.

But after a two-hour rain delay at the start of the day, getting maximum use from the pace, bounce and swing that were potentially on offer eluded the West Indies, who toiled for nearly six hours for little reward.

The day was further worsened for the tourists just before stumps when form batsman Darren Bravo was stretchered from the field after injuring an ankle.

It started well for the West Indies when Shannon Gabriel removed New Zealand debutant Will Young for five on the last ball of the fourth over with the score at 14.

BCCI to discuss adding 2 new teams to IPL

REUTERS NEW DELHI

India's cricket board will consider adding two new teams to the popular Indian Premier League (IPL) franchise-based tournament, according to the agenda of the governing body's annual general meeting scheduled to be held later this month.

The IPL, which has an estimated brand value of $6.8bn, drew record television and digital viewership during its 2020 season amid the turmoil of the COVID-19 pandemic.

"Approval on inclusion of 2 (two) new teams to the Indian Premier League" was listed on the agenda.

BCCI treasurer Arun Singh Dhumal said that the AGM will be held at the end of December with Indian media reports saying the date of the meeting has been fixed for Dec. 24.

The IPL currently has eight franchises and its latest edition was held in the United Arab Emirates without fans due to the COVID-19 pandemic.

"We have been thinking in terms of a 10-team IPL for some time now, and we'd like to have two new teams from 2021, if possible," an IPL governing council member requesting anonymity told Reuters.

Local media has reported in the past that Indian conglomerates Adani Group and RP-Sanjiv Goenka Group, which owned the Rising Pune Supergiant franchise for two IPL seasons, have shown interest in buying new teams.

Both companies did not immediately respond to a request for comment.

During the AGM, the BCCI will also discuss its stand on the possible inclusion of cricket in the 2028 Los Angeles Olympics. Cricket featured at the 1900 Olympics and was played in the 1998 Commonwealth Games but has largely been absent from multi-sport events, which critics say has restricted the sport's growth beyond its traditional pockets.

F1: Grosjean hails crash heroes as FIA launches investigation

REUTERS - LONDON

Formula One's governing body said it had opened an investigation into Romain Grosjean's **(pictured)** Bahrain Grand Prix crash yesterday as the French driver hailed those who helped him escape the fireball.

Grosjean suffered burns to his hands after his Haas car split in two, penetrating a metal barrier and erupting in flames, in Sunday's race.

The Frenchman left hospital on Wednesday and in an Instagram post accompanying video footage pointed to "the moment I realized I was going to live'.

He highlighted the 'professionalism' of the marshal with the extinguisher and FIA doctor Ian Roberts.

"I told him he was a hero, he went into the fire as much as he could to save me," he said of Roberts.

"I felt Ian's hands pulling me over the barrier and knew I was safe. I remember every second of it and life will never be the same again, but I'm sure for the best," added the driver.

"I met with death and that is the worst feeling I ever had. But I'm alive and will enjoy every second of life and every small win in a much better way from now on."

The International Automobile Federation (FIA) expected its investigation to take six to eight weeks.

It will look at all safety devices, how the safety barrier performed and the role of track marshals and medical intervention team.

The body said it would work with Formula One, Haas and the Grand Prix Drivers' Association (GPDA), who had already been contacted for input.

Grosjean is one of the three GPDA directors.

Researchers also have data from a driver-facing high speed camera, the in-car Accident Data Recorder and in-ear accelerometers that measure head movement.

The FIA said immediately after Sunday's accident that the impact measured more than 50G, while Haas said the car's last recorded speed was 221kph.

"With so much data available in Formula One, it allows us to accurately determine every element of what occurred and this work has already begun," said FIA safety director Adam Baker.



Vet check at QEF's Outdoor Arena





Trainers take their horses for vet checks ahead of the fifth round of the Qatar Equestrian Tour - Longines Hathab Supported By The Social and Sport Contribution Fund. The fifth round will be held at QEF's Indoor Arena today and tomorrow.

The Peninsula Local focus, Global vision
Sport
FRIDAY 4 DECEMBER 2020





Williamson makes hay on green top as West Indies rue decision to bowl first

A masterful innings from Kane Williamson, who was 97 not out at stumps, put New Zealand in charge on a day one of the first Test that should have belonged to the West Indies quicks in Hamilton.

Kane Williamson
New Zealand captain

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AFC CHAMPIONS LEAGUE (EAST) Tokyo bt Perth 1-0; Ulsan bt Shanghai 4-1; Beijing draw with Chiangrai 1-1; Melbourne bt Seoul 2-1





Qatar ready to take on Bangladesh

FAWAD HUSSAIN
THE PENINSULA

Asian champions Qatar are favourites against Bangladesh in today's Asian Qualifiers Group E clash at home but coach Felix Sanchez is not taking things for granted as Al Annabi returns to competitive football after a year's break.

Qatar, who will host their continental opponents at Doha's Abdullah bin Khalifa Stadium, are seeking to consolidate top position in the group in today's match.

Ranked 59th on the FIFA computer, the 2019 AFC Asian Cup champions are leading Group E with 13 points and will confirm their berth at the AFC Asian Cup China 2023 by winning the group.

Bangladesh, who are ranked 184, are at the bottom of the group.

Sanchez yesterday shrugged off the favourite tag, saying his team will go into today's match completely focused .

"We prepare for all matches by focusing on our goals on the pitch only and we do not care what is said on social media platforms or even the words of other coaches," Sanchez said at a pre-match press conference yesterday.

Qatar are leading Group E with 13 points and will confirm their berth at the AFC Asian Cup China 2023 by winning the group.

The match will be played at Doha's Abdullah bin Khalifa Stadium with kick off set for 7pm.

"Bangladeshi team is organised and plays collectively and therefore we have to be disciplined and beware of conceding goals and avoid counter-attacks," the Spaniard added.

Qatar last played a competitive match against Saudi Arabia in the semi-final of Gulf Cup in December 2019 before coronavirus pandemic disrupted international football action.

"We are happy to play the first official match after a long time. Our players are excited for the competition to return again and we are all eagerly waiting for tomorrow's match," the coach said yesterday.

Both the teams last met in Dhaka with Qatar winning the game 2-0 after a thrilling match. Today's game is also expected to be an absorbing battle as Bangladesh are seeking to give a strong fight against the hosts.

All the 1,800 tickets, which were made available for the tie, were sold out in quick time. The match will kick off at 7:00pm today.

Fans will be able to see top Qatar stars including reigning AFC Player of the year Akram Afif, his predecessor Abdel Karim Hassan and Almoez Ali, the leading scorer at the 2019 AFC Asian Cup in action, as Sanchez named a strong squad for today's match.

Accompanying Sanchez in yesterday's press conference, Muhammad Waad, who is expected to make his international debut today, said he is 'ready to give his best' for Qatar.

"I am ready to give my best for the national team. Our team is very well prepared and we will give our best to achieve victory in the match and live up to expectations of our fans," he said.

Meanwhile, Bangladesh assistant coach Stuart Watkiss said his team is going into the game with lack of competitive match practice. "You only get truly match-fit by playing competitive matches, but unfortunately we have still not played nearly enough," Watkiss told *The Daily Star*.


A Qatari player in action during training session.


Qatar coach Felix Sanchez watches team's training session on the eve of the match against Bangladesh.


A glimpse of team's training session.

Adailton fires Tokyo into Asian Champions League Round of 16

AFP — DOHA

Brazilian midfielder Adailton scored a brilliant solo goal in the first half as FC Tokyo edged past Perth Glory 1-0 to seal the second Round of 16 spot from Group F in the Asian Champions League yesterday.

South Korean giants Ulsan Hyundai had already made the cut as guaranteed group winners, leaving FC Tokyo and Shanghai Shenhua scrapping for second place with both teams on seven points from five matches.

But Shanghai Shenhua fell to a crushing 4-1 defeat by Ulsan yesterday to exit the tournament, while FC Tokyo's narrow win over Perth Glory helped them maintain their record of qualifying for the knockout phase every year since their continental debut in 2012.

Adailton was in the thick of the action in the very first minute at the Education City Stadium when he went for a spectacular bicycle kick off a cross from Takuya Uchida only to see the ball sail over the goalpost.

But he compensated for that miss in style seven minutes later with a brilliant 30-yard burst down the left flank, scoring with a curling shot past Perth goalkeeper Liam Reddy.

Two minutes later, Adailton found himself in a great position to strike again but his powerful effort from outside the penalty area saw Reddy producing a fine save.

Perth Glory took control of the match in the second half but could not get past the Tokyo defence, ending up at the bottom of the table with just one point from six matches.

FC Tokyo coach Kente Hasegawa said he always had confidence in his team's abilities.


Tokyo's forward Adailton celebrates his goal during the AFC Champions League match against Australia's Perth Glory at the Education City Stadium, yesterday.

"Today we are very happy about qualifying for the next round. Some players who didn't play much before played today and Adailton scored a very good goal," said Hasegawa.

"We tried to score more goals in the second half but also we knew the result of the other game (Ulsan were leading 2-0 against Shenhua at half time), so we were more comfortable."

Perth Glory's Cristian Ola said fatigue was a big factor for his team's poor show.

"Not happy with the result but happy with our boys' efforts and display considering it was their fifth game in a short space of time which is not something we are used to," said Ola.

"Fatigue was our biggest opponent today but congratulations to FC Tokyo."

– Shanghai crash out –

Shanghai Shenhua's defeat by Ulsan Hyundai meant they failed to make the last 16 for the first time since 2006. Having booked their knockout berth earlier, Ulsan made several changes to their line-up but Park Jeong-in and Lee Sang-heon put them 2-0 ahead at the break.

Bjorn Johnsen then added a second-half brace as the Koreans recorded their fifth straight win.

"After we qualified for the round of 16, I expected a few players might lose concentration but all the players concentrated and played well," said Ulsan coach Kim Do-hoon.

"We had a lot of young players and they did their job. I asked them to play aggressively with combination play and high press, and they did it all very well." Shanghai Shenhua's Choi Kang-hee said the Covid-19 pandemic meant they faced a number of difficulties in playing the competition.

"We understand it's a pandemic. It's a special time, and we have to play in this kind of way, but we hope in the future the tournament won't be played with such a tight fixture list."


Ulsan's defender Jung Seung-Hyun (right) vies for the header with Shanghai's forward Bi Jinhao during their match at the Jassim Bin Hamad Stadium, yesterday.

Premier League, EFL agree £250m virus rescue package

AFP — LONDON

The Premier League and the English Football League agreed a £250m rescue package yesterday, ending months of uncertainty for lower-league clubs struggling financially during the coronavirus pandemic.

The EFL said clubs in Leagues One and Two -- the third and fourth tiers -- would receive grants worth £50m ($67m). The Premier League will provide a further financial commitment to help the EFL secure a £200m loan facility for clubs in the second-tier Championship.

It follows months of negotiations between the two governing bodies, who had been criticised for their failure to reach an agreement.

The government has consistently said that the Premier League, rather than the taxpayer, must help the EFL.

"Our over-arching aim throughout this process has been to ensure that all EFL clubs survive the financial impact of the pandemic," said EFL chairman Rick Parry.

"I am pleased that we have now reached a resolution on behalf of our clubs and as we have maintained throughout this will provide much-needed support and clarity following months of uncertainty."

Premier League chief executive Richard Masters said: "The Premier League is a huge supporter of the football pyramid and is well aware of the important role clubs play in their communities.

"Our commitment is that no EFL club need go out of business due to Covid-19.

"All football clubs continue to suffer significant financial losses as a result of the pandemic, but Premier League shareholders today unanimously agreed to provide additional funding and support for EFL clubs in real financial distress."

The EFL says clubs in Leagues One and Two -- the third and fourth tiers -- would receive grants worth £50m ($67m). The Premier League will provide a further financial commitment to help the EFL secure a £200m loan facility for clubs in the second-tier Championship.

The package for Leagues One and Two is understood to be £30 million to be split between the 48 clubs in those divisions, plus access to a further £20 million package of monitored grants.

The £30m will be paid immediately from the Premier League to help cover lost matchday revenue.

The monitored grants can be applied for by clubs in need, with a joint EFL and Premier League panel ruling on eligibility.

The Premier League has committed to cover up to £15 million in interest and arrangement fees to enable a £200m loan to be secured for Championship clubs.

Culture Secretary Oliver Dowden said: "I warmly welcome this deal between the Premier League and the EFL, which provides up to £250m support to help clubs through Covid.

"I'm glad that football has come together to agree this substantial package. Fans are starting to return and we look forward to building on this as soon as it's safe."