The Peninsula
Local focus, Global vision





Qatar, Malta discuss trade relations

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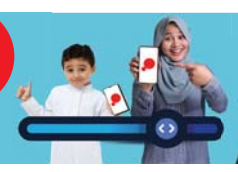
'Big step towards title' as Al Sadd thrash Al Khor 7-0



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Biden vows to heal divided nation

Amir congratulates US President

QNA — DOHA

Amir H H Sheikh Tamim bin Hamad Al Thani yesterday sent a cable of congratulations to H E President Joe Biden on the occasion of taking the oath as President of the United States of America, wishing him success in his duties and the relations of friendship and strategic cooperation between the two countries further development and growth.

Deputy Amir H H Sheikh Abdullah bin Hamad Al Thani and Prime Minister and Minister of Interior H E Sheikh Khalid bin Khalifa bin Abdulaziz Al Thani also sent cables of congratulations to H E President Joe Biden on the occasion of taking the oath as President of the United States of America.

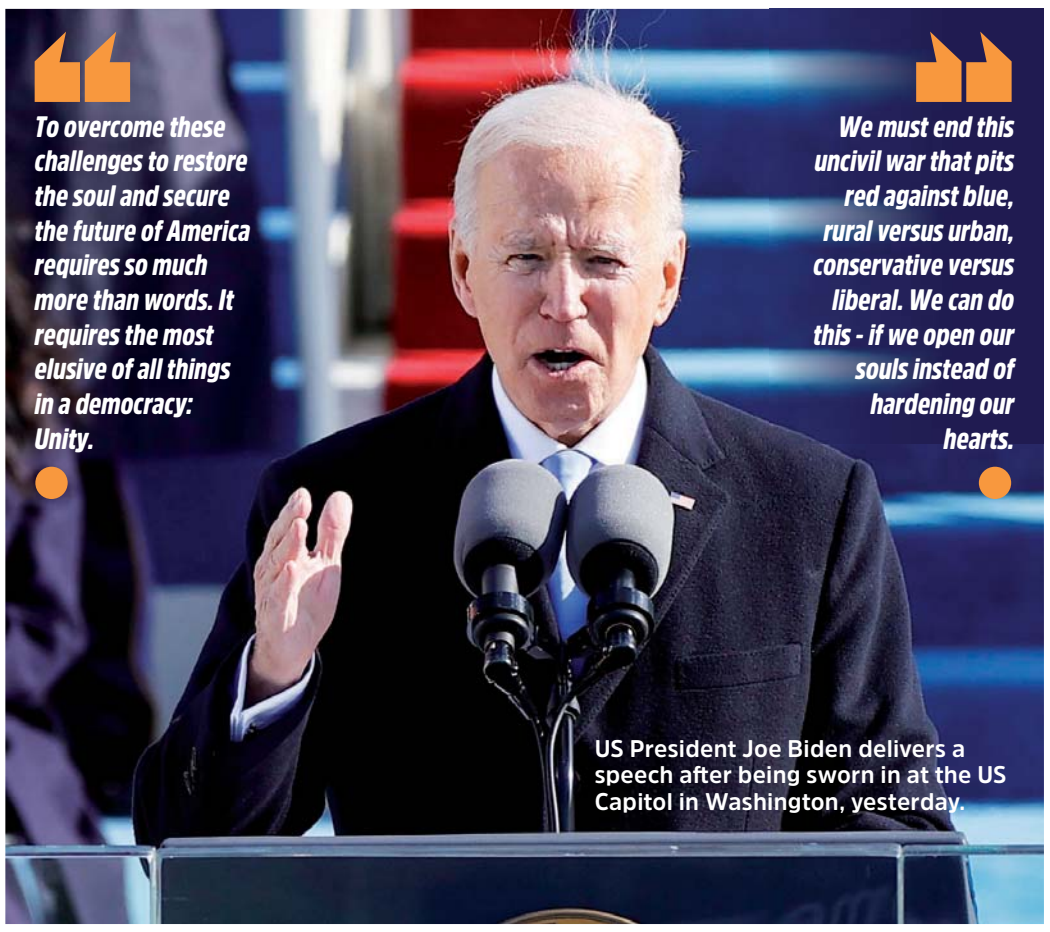


تميم بن حمد
@TamimBinHamad

Congratulations President @JoeBiden and Vice President @KamalaHarris. I wish you both continued success, and look forward to progressing Qatar-U.S. friendly relations to new heights.



Kamala Harris is sworn in as US Vice-President at the US Capitol in Washington, yesterday.



To overcome these challenges to restore the soul and secure the future of America requires so much more than words. It requires the most elusive of all things in a democracy: Unity.

We must end this uncivil war that pits red against blue, rural versus urban, conservative versus liberal. We can do this - if we open our souls instead of hardening our hearts.

US President Joe Biden delivers a speech after being sworn in at the US Capitol in Washington, yesterday.

REUTERS — WASHINGTON

Democrat Joe Biden was sworn in as President of the United States yesterday, vowing to end the 'uncivil war' in a deeply divided country reeling from a battered economy and a raging coronavirus pandemic that has killed more than 400,000 Americans.

With the US Capitol encircled by thousands of armed troops two weeks after a mob laid siege to it, Biden took the oath of office administered by US Chief Justice John Roberts and became the oldest US President in history at age 78.

"To overcome these challenges to restore the soul and secure the future of America requires so much more than words. It requires the most elusive of all things in a democracy: Unity," he said in his inauguration speech.

"We must end this uncivil war that pits red against blue, rural versus urban, conservative versus liberal. We can do this - if we open our souls instead of hardening our hearts."

The scaled-back inauguration ceremony was stripped of much of its usual celebratory spirit. The National Mall, typically packed with throngs of supporters, instead was filled with US flags in a reminder of the pandemic Biden will confront as chief executive.

Speaking on the steps of the Capitol, where supporters of then-President Donald Trump clashed with police in a chaotic assault that left five dead and stunned the world on January 6, Biden cast his ascension as proof that the attackers had failed to disrupt the underpinnings of American democracy.

The violence prompted the Democratic-controlled US House of Representatives to impeach Trump last week for an unprecedented second time, accusing him of incitement after he exhorted his backers to march on the building amid false claims of election fraud.

"Here we stand, just days after a riotous mob thought they could use violence to silence the will of the people, to stop the work on our democracy, to drive us from this sacred ground," Biden said. "It did not happen; it will never happen. Not today, not tomorrow, not ever."

Biden's running mate, Kamala Harris, the daughter of immigrants from Jamaica and India, became the first Black person, first woman and first Asian American to serve as Vice-President after she was sworn in by US Supreme Court Justice Sonia Sotomayor, the court's first Latina member.

The norm-defying Trump flouted one last convention on his way out of the White House when he refused to meet with Biden or attend his successor's inauguration, breaking with a political tradition seen as affirming the peaceful transfer of power.

Trump, who never conceded the November 3 election, did not mention Biden by name in his final remarks as president yesterday morning, when he touted his administration's record and promised to be back "in some form". He then boarded Air Force One for the last time and flew to his Mar-a-Lago retreat in Florida.

Top Republicans, including Mike Pence and the party's congressional leaders, attended Biden's inauguration, along with former Presidents Barack Obama, George W Bush and Bill Clinton.

➔ See also pages 8, 15

Travellers with chronic conditions told to register online

FAZEENA SALEEM
THE PENINSULA

The Ministry of Public Health (MoPH) has said that travellers with chronic health conditions are required to register online to get a medical report to be exempted from hotel quarantine. It also said that quarantine exemptions are not applicable for arrivals from some countries.

According to the Ministry, if a traveller has one of the conditions listed in the vulnerable groups under Qatar's Travel and Return Policy during COVID-19, citizens and residents must obtain a medical certificate by logging in to their account on 'My Health' portal that shows their health condition and entitlement for home quarantine when booking their flight before travelling abroad.

"Travelers with chronic health conditions must register themselves for the 'MyHealth' patient portal online to obtain a medical report and a COVID-19 test result from an approved health center within 72 hours prior departure, or apply for a chronic condition certificate online through Hamad Medical Corporation (HMC) or Primary Health Care Corporation (PHCC) websites," the Ministry said on its Twitter account.

However, the hotel quarantine exception based on age and health conditions is not applicable to arrivals from the UK, South Africa, the Netherlands and Denmark, according to the Ministry.

The Ministry has updated the list of vulnerable groups returning from travel (citizens and residents) and their immediate family members, including their domestic helpers who share the same national address, who are eligible for home quarantine. The new amendments will be implemented from 2pm Doha time on January 24.

Health authorities have announced an update to the list of chronic diseases that are eligible for the issuance of medical certificates for patients who are at high risk of developing complications if they contract COVID-19. ➔P3

Qatar and Egypt agree to resume diplomatic ties

REUTERS — CAIRO

Qatar and Egypt have agreed to resume diplomatic relations, the Egyptian foreign ministry said yesterday.

The move follows an agreement between Saudi Arabia, the United Arab Emirates, Bahrain and Egypt earlier this month to end their dispute with Qatar which continued for more than three years.

"Arab Republic of Egypt and the State of Qatar exchanged, today, January 20, 2021, two official memoranda, in virtue of which the two countries agreed to resume diplomatic relations," a foreign ministry statement said. However, there was no comment form the Qatari side on the development.

Egypt reopened its airspace to Qatari flights on January 12 and flights between the two countries have also resumed.



Qatar's mobile Internet speed fastest in world

SACHIN KUMAR
THE PENINSULA

Mobile Internet speed in Qatar was the fastest in the world in December 2020, according to the Speedtest Global Index results released yesterday.

In the Ookla's Speedtest Global Index, Qatar was ranked first in the world in terms of mobile internet speed in December. The average download speed in Qatar was 178.01 Mbps last month while the average upload speed was 29.74 Mbps.

Qatar, which has one of the highest internet penetrations in the world, has improved its performance by two places in the index compared to last month.

"On mobile, Qatar climbed two spots to land in first place for mobile. While the country has ranked among the top five for the past year, this is the first time the country has reached the top spot," noted Ookla in its report.

The average download speed in Qatar was 77.07 Mbps in November while the upload speed was 21.49 Mbps.

The global average download speed in December was 47.20Mbps while the upload speed was 12.67Mbps. In the global ranking, the United Arab Emirates stood second with an average download speed of 177.52 Mbps while South Korea was placed third with average download speed of 169.03 Mbps in December. China came fourth in the index, followed by Australia with an average download speed of 155.89 Mbps and 112.68, respectively.

The record of Qatar in internet speed has remained impressive throughout the year. The country has been ranked among the top five countries in the global ranking in 2020. Qatar has won several laurels in the field of Information and Communications Technology (ICT) in 2020. One of the main highlights was the recognition by the World Economic Forum. In December last year, the country was ranked second in the Arab world and ninth globally in ICT adoption as per the Global Competitiveness Report Special Edition 2020 report by the World Economic Forum. The Ookla Speed Test Index compares Internet speed data from around the world on a monthly basis. Data for the Index comes from the hundreds of millions of tests taken by real people using Speedtest every month.

Qatar has invested substantially in 5G technology which allows peak Internet connection speed to reach 1 Gbps. ➔P3

Cabinet briefed on work progress of unified site for government tenders

QNA — DOHA

The Cabinet yesterday listened to the presentation made by H E Minister of Finance on the progress of work on the unified site for government tenders.

Prime Minister and Minister of Interior H E Sheikh Khalid bin Khalifa bin Abdulaziz Al Thani chaired the Cabinet's regular meeting held at its seat at the Amiri Diwan.

The Prime Minister and Minister of Interior instructed the necessity of the commitment of government agencies and the bodies that fund their budget from the State to announce the tenders and auctions on the site, with the aim of achieving justice, transparency and equal opportunities, and providing information to investors on the needs of government agencies.

Minister of Justice and Acting Minister of State for Cabinet Affairs H E Dr. Issa bin Saad Al Jafali Al Nuaimi said that at the beginning of the meeting, the Cabinet listened to the explanation provided by H E Minister of Public Health on the latest developments to limit the spread of the coronavirus (COVID-19), and the council affirmed the continuation of work with regard to the precautionary measures that have been taken in order to combat this pandemic.

After that, the Cabinet gave approval of a draft memorandum of understanding in the field of diplomatic training between the Diplomatic Institute of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs in the State of Qatar and the Levan Mikeladze Diplomatic Training and Research Institute at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs in Georgia.

The Cabinet listened to the explanation provided by H E Minister of Public Health on the latest developments to limit the spread of the coronavirus (COVID-19), and the council affirmed the continuation of work with regard to the precautionary measures that have been taken in order to combat this pandemic.

The Cabinet also reviewed the Ministry of Transport and Communications' letter on the policy framework document for cloud computing. The cloud computing policy framework has been developed to provide high-quality services to individuals, companies and institutions, significantly increase efficiency and growth, and to ensure reliable access to all local and international users alike, based on the TRAs strategy to support the goals of Qatar National Vision 2030 and the Second National Development Strategy.

The Cabinet reviewed the results of the 17th meeting of the Ministerial Committee of Civil Service and Administrative Development of the GCC; results of the 340th session of the International Labour Organisation (ILO) Governing Body; and results of the 7th Iran-Qatar Joint Economic Commission meeting.

Minister of State for Foreign Affairs meets Malta Minister



Minister of State for Foreign Affairs H E Sultan bin Saad Al Muraikhi met yesterday with Minister of Foreign and European Affairs of the Republic of Malta H E Evarist Bartolo. They reviewed bilateral relations and issues of common concern. Minister of State for Foreign Affairs also met with Ambassador of Kingdom of Jordan H E Zaid Mufleh Al Lawzi and reviewed bilateral relations and issues of joint interest.

Qatar participates in 148th session of WHO Executive Board

QNA — DOHA

The State of Qatar is participating in the meetings of the 148th Session of the Executive Board of the World Health Organization (WHO), which commenced its work via videoconferencing and will be held until january 26. Qatar's delegation is chaired by Minister of Public Health, H E Dr. Hanan Mohammed Al Kuwari.

The Executive Board's meetings discuss many key topics, including the first three pillars: one billion more people benefiting from universal health coverage, one billion more people better protected from health emergencies and one billion more people enjoying better health and well-being.

The meetings review global action on patient safety, the political declaration of the third high-level meeting of the General Assembly on the prevention and control of non-communicable diseases, oral health, and the expansion of access to treatment for cancer and rare or neglected diseases, including medicines, vaccines, medical devices, diagnostics, supporting products, cellular and genetic therapy and other medical technologies.

The meetings will also review global strategy and action plan on public health, innovation and intellectual property, antimicrobial resistance, low-quality and counterfeit medical products, as well as standardization of medical device naming, immunization plan 2030, integrated and individual-focused eye health care services, including preventable blindness and visual impairment. The meetings also discuss public health emergencies: preparedness and response, response to COVID-19, WHO's work in strengthening health emergency preparedness including implementation of global health emergencies (2005), strengthening WHO preparedness and response to global emergencies.

Minister of Public Health meets WHO Regional Director for Eastern Mediterranean

QNA — DOHA

Minister of Public Health, H E Dr. Hanan Mohammed Al Kuwari met with the WHO Regional Director for the Eastern Mediterranean H E Dr. Ahmed Salim Saif Al Mandhari.They discussed cooperation between the State of Qatar and the World Health Organization (WHO), especially in the health field. The WHO Regional Director praised the rapid response of the health system in Qatar to address COVID-19 pandemic, appreciating the distinguished cooperation and coordination between Qatar and the World Health Organization in various fields.

Qatar Airways to resume UAE flights next week

THE PENINSULA — DOHA

Qatar Airways will resume direct flights to Dubai and Abu Dhabi in the coming week. Starting from January 27 and January 28, Qatar Airways will fly to Dubai International Airport and Abu Dhabi International Airport respectively. The booking for the same are open on the airline's website.

Starting January 27, Qatar Airways will operate its flight, QR 1018, in an Airbus A320, which will depart Hamad International Airport, Doha, at 7pm and will arrive at Dubai International Airport at 9:10pm (UAE time).

A day later, Qatar Airways will also resume its service to Abu Dhabi on Thursday, January 28. The flight, QR 1054 Airbus A320 will depart Hamad International Airport at 7:50pm and arrive at Abu Dhabi International Airport at 9:55pm(UAE time).

Three arrested for violating home quarantine rules

QNA — DOHA

The designated authorities arrested yesterday three persons 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 arrest of the violators came in implementation of the precautionary measures in force in the country, approved by health authorities represented in the Ministry of Public Health, to curb the spread of COVID-19. The violators, who are currently being referred to the designate prosecution, are Abdullah Hassan Mohammed Hassan Al Rashid, Ahmed Imam Mohammed Abdulaziz and Abdoul Matin Fairouz Kalbaskar.



Digital Incubation Center names 25 winners; celebrates graduation of 17 startups

THE PENINSULA — DOHA

The Digital Incubation Center of the Ministry of Transport and Communications (MoTC) has announced the 25 winners of the fourth edition of IdeaCamp, which was held virtually for the first time, in line with the precautionary measures for COVID-19.

The announcement was made at a virtual ceremony attended by Reem Mohamed Al Mansouri, Assistant Undersecretary of Digital Society Development Sector at MoTC. The ceremony was also organised to celebrate the graduation of 17 startups that completed their incubation in 2020.

The announcement of the 25 IdeaCamp winners comes after a round of pitching by 40 shortlisted startups in front of a distinguished jury panel that included experts in the field from Ooredoo, Qatar Development Bank, Tasmu Smart Qatar, QRDI, Bedaya Center and AppLab

The winning startups for the fourth edition of IdeaCamp are: eHaris, Spendwisor, PayWise, NARR, PickUp, Tailory, Short-term load forecasting, ElevateMe, Endrogn, Turismo, Farha, VastumLab, ValApp, BizPlanner, Ceena Lab, Karty, Tahado, Qreceipt, Storimart, Keyrism, Info Tech Hive, Aljadwal, Telerehab, Traff-Easy, and Almachla.

> *The announcement of the 25 IdeaCamp winners comes after a round of pitching by 40 shortlisted startups in front of a distinguished jury panel that included experts in the field from Ooredoo, Qatar Development Bank, Tasmu Smart Qatar, QRDI, Bedaya Center and AppLab.*

The winners ideas harnesses emerging technologies such as artificial intelligence, advanced analytics and the Internet of things to serve the sectors of education, health care, sports tourism, agriculture, environment and transportation.

On this occasion, Reem Al Mansoori said: "The Digital Society sector has an integrated strategic vision that aims to support digital innovations that harness emerging technologies and create a fostering environment for them to continue their success in the Qatari market."

Duha Ali Al-Buhendi, Digital Incubation Center Acting Manager, said: "DIC is committed to providing support to digital entrepreneurs in Qatar. We are proud of the success of the virtual edition of IdeaCamp and our incubation of 25 new digital startups, which brings the total number of incubated startups to 57. Our incubated entrepreneurs benefit from operational and technical support, working office spaces, as well as regular training and mentorship sessions to accelerate the growth of their enterprises."

In order to ensure that entrepreneurs have easy access to DIC and get answers to their pressing questions about IdeaCamp, the Digital Incubation Center organized 9 orientation sessions before the start of IdeaCamp, through which entrepreneurs were encouraged to register for IdeaCamp.

A total of 150 ideas were selected. The entrepreneurs behind these ideas have met DIC's criteria to attend IdeasCamp training workshops, over the course of 6 weeks with over 33 training hours and mentoring sessions for entrepreneurs to build and integrate their business models.

The virtual ceremony also celebrated the graduation of 17 startups that have completed their incubation period at DIC in 2020, which brings the total of graduated startups to 100, these startups are: Raeyi, Baqaala, Tomoh, Qertas, Saakin, EButler, PMOBytes, Bonocle, Spas Go, Medline Arabia, Xpander, ESmart Academy, Greenhat, Skilancer Solar Solar, NewsAmp, The Real Estate CRM and Artist Qatar.



Morocco envoy participates in 'Plant Million Tree' initiative



Ambassador of Morocco to Qatar H E Mohamed Setri; Head of Project Section at Public Parks Department, Khalid Al Sindi, and Nasser Salem Al Darwish from Public Parks Section at Doha Municipality during a tree plantation event. held under 'Plant Million Tree' initiative. The event was organised by Public Parks Department at the Ministry of Municipality and Environment (MME) at Ljbelat Park yesterday.

Heart Hospital performs over 500 cardiac surgical procedures in 2020

THE PENINSULA — DOHA

Heart Hospital, a member of Hamad Medical Corporation (HMC), safely performed 527 cardiac surgical procedures in 2020 amid the COVID-19 pandemic. Since 2012, surgical teams at the hospital have performed more than 3,000 procedures.

Heart Hospital is a specialist tertiary hospital committed to delivering high quality care in cardiology and cardiothoracic surgery for the adult population of Qatar. This care couldn't be provided without the assistance of highly trained and certified perfusionists.

A team of highly trained professionals, perfusionists, are key members of the surgical team at the Heart Hospital and play a vital role providing support and critical care during any procedure where a patient's circulatory or respiratory system needs to be supported or replaced.

Cardiovascular perfusionists are healthcare professionals responsible for maintaining blood circulation, homeostasis and oxygenation to tissues, and to ensure the adequate monitoring of vital signs during open heart operations and other types of treatment requiring artificial heart-lung support, (cardiopulmonary bypass).

While consultants carry out a wide range of cardiac procedures including elective and emergency cardiac procedures or emergency resuscitation in the Cardiac Intensive Care Unit, the perfusionist supports the patient during this critical time. Perfusionists are a dedicated team, dealing with state-of-the-art equipment and pride themselves for being active members and an integral part of the professional perfusion community.

Chief Clinical Perfusionist and Mechanical Circulatory Support lead at the Heart Hospital Perfusion Service, Abeer Al Jaja said: "At HMC's Heart Hospital we have nine clinical perfusionists who play a significant role in controlling mechanical cardiac assist devices in patients with end-stage heart failure and in running extracorporeal circulation in patients requiring this support for other interventions, such as lung transplantation, organ perfusion or oncological treatments. They are the main allied healthcare professional to run the cell saver blood salvage machines that help reduce and avoid blood transfusion during surgery. They also 'run' the Intra-Aortic balloon pump counter pulsation devices that support the very sick heart whether pre, during or post cardiac surgery".

Jaja stressed on the significant role of the perfusionists within the team, she explained: "The perfusionists are vital members of the cardiac surgical team due to the increased sophistication of technical interventions requiring assisted circulation. During the early development of perfusion technology, specialized life support equipment was developed and operated by physicians and scientists interested in extracorporeal circulation. Gradually, the operation and maintenance of these devices has been assigned to the Clinical Perfusionist, who provides direct patient care, accountable to the surgeon and physicians."

Qatar wins L'Oréal-Unesco For Women In Science 2020 prize for Middle East

SANAULLAH ATAULLAH
THE PENINSULA

A woman from Qatar Dr. Isra Yousef Marei has won $100,000 L'Oréal-Unesco For Women In Science prize for Middle East Young Talent Programme 2020.

Dr. Isra from Weill Cornell Medicine-Qatar has been recognised for her post-doctoral research in the field of health biotechnology, titled 'towards the development of 3D vascular drug screening platforms based on endothelial progenitor cells'.

The announcement was made in a press conference organised by Qatar National Commission for Education, Culture and Science (QNCECS) at the headquarters of the Ministry of Education and Higher Education yesterday.

The press conference was attended by Secretary-General of QNCECS, Dr. Hamda Al Sulaiti; Director of Unesco Regional Office in Doha, Dr. Anna Paolini and Senior Associate Dean (Research, Innovations, and Commercialisation) at Weill Cornell Medicine-Qatar (WCM-Q), Dr. Khaled Machaca.

Dr. Hamda Al Sulaiti said obtaining prize of L'Oréal-Unesco Programme for Women in Science came within the framework of joint efforts, cooperation and partnership between WCM-Q and Unesco.

She said this aims at benefiting from the capabilities of the international organisation in supporting and strengthening national capabilities, and preparing Qatari cadres capable of managing development projects in the next phase.

"We encourage qualified candidates to apply for Unesco prizes and other regional and international organisations in order to highlight and raise the name of our beloved country, Qatar," said Dr. Hamda Al Sulaiti.

"Dr. Isra Yousef Marei has become amongst the six winners of the 2020 L'Oréal-Unesco Middle East Regional Young Talent Programme," said Dr. Anna Paolini. She said Dr. Isra is only the second winner from Qatar of this programme since its establishment in the region seven years ago.

"The L'Oréal-Unesco For Women in Science Middle East Young Talents, in partnership with Khalifa University of Science and Technology in UAE, continues to recognise Arab female scientists for their outstanding research in the fields of life sciences, physics, mathematics and computer science. Each year, three Post-doctorate Researchers each receive €20,000 and three PhD Students each receive €8,000 to assist them with their progress in their career," said Dr. Paolini.



Dr. Hamda Al Sulaiti (second right), Secretary-General, Qatar National Commission for Education, Culture and Science, presenting the L'Oréal-Unesco For Women in Science Middle East Young Talent award to Dr. Isra Yousef Marei. Dr. Anna Paolini (right), Director, Unesco Regional Office in Doha; and Dr. Khaled Machaca, Senior Associate Dean, Research and Commercialization at the Weill Cornell Medicine, Qatar, were also present at the event held at the Ministry of Education and Higher Education in Doha yesterday. PIC: SALIM MATRAMKOT/THE PENINSULA

Dr. Khaled Machaca said L'Oréal-Unesco For Women In Science programme is very important in term of tough completion among the contestants.

"The achievement of Dr. Isra reflects the maturity of scientific research in Qatar after it was launched more than ten years ago thanks to the tireless efforts of the Qatar Foundation, and the generous research funding from the Qatar National Research Fund (QNRF), as well as the training and support provided by WCM-Q," said Dr. Machaca.

Dr. Isra Yousef Marei said that she feel proud of obtaining this prize and representing Qatar. "Qatar attached great importance in the development of scientific research through its schools and universities notably Qatar Foundation and QNRF and WCM-Q which provided great support in my research work," said Dr. Isra.

The research of Dr. Isra Yousef Marei focuses on the use of primary endothelial blood cells to study diabetes and cardiovascular diseases, and the possibility of using these cells to repair damage to blood vessels because of its effective regenerative power and restorative functions.

Cardiovascular disease is one of the main causes of death for women, although the rate of these diseases is lower in women compared to men however, the disease is worse and the death rates are higher for them. The Improving drug discovery methods and treatment and preventive measures will help reduce cases of cardiovascular disease.

It can be used as a platform for drug screening, and working with primary endothelial blood cells will help create new approaches to customized treatment of cardiovascular disease and pharmaceutical research.

This research will also contribute to enriching knowledge of primary endothelial blood cells and their relationship to disease, and their use in drug development and therapies.

Shura Council participates in panel discussion on UNSC reforms

QNA — DOHA

The Shura Council took part in a panel discussion entitled "Reforming the Security Council: When", organized virtually yesterday by the Inter-Parliamentary Union (IPU) in cooperation with the UN Office.

The discussions focused on the way to enlarge the Security Council to face the political instability and conflicts between countries and make it make work more effectively in the best interest of the people. The Shura Council was represented by HE Mohammed bin Abdullah Al Abdul Ghani, member of the Council.

MoPH reports 132 more recoveries, 271 new cases

THE PENINSULA — DOHA

The Ministry of Public Health (MoPH) yesterday announced the registration of 271 new confirmed COVID-19. Among them 40 were travellers returning from abroad.

Also 132 people have recovered from the virus, bringing the total number of recovered cases in Qatar to 144,350.

Qatar's mobile Internet speed fastest in world

FROM PAGE 1

The roll-out of 5G has also accelerated the development of wider communications infrastructure in Qatar.

Adoption of new technology in Qatar is also high as the use of Internet and new devices has increased significantly over the last 10 years.

Travellers with chronic conditions told to register online

FROM PAGE 1

According to Medical Director of HMC's Hamad General Hospital, Dr. Yousuf Al Maslamani, the update has been made as a result of recent medical developments concerning the COVID-19 pandemic.

Also people aged 65 years and above; pregnant women (any trimester); nursing mothers with children aged 0-5 years; people with disabilities who depend on others for their activities of daily living; children with disabilities and their mothers; people with deceased first-degree relatives in the last ten days; and minor travellers (under 18 years old) travelling without an accompanied guardian are also eligible for home quarantine upon their arrival in Qatar.

However, the Ministry has said that citizens and residents travelling with a family member who is among the vulnerable groups and who return to the country without that member of their family should be quarantined at a hotel and must book a hotel quarantine package from the listed hotels on the "Discover Qatar" website before their travel abroad.

All citizens and residents not included in the vulnerable list and wishing to travel abroad to one of the countries not included in the COVID-19 Green List must book a hotel quarantine package from the listed hotels on 'Discover Qatar' website before travelling.

Fire Station exhibition displays works of Artist in Residence

Artist in Residence is an annual initiative, established in 2015, that nurtures creative talent from across the country and worldwide. Grey Times runs until July 24 at the Fire Station. The Fire Station is open from 9am to 7pm Saturday to Thursdays and from 1.30pm to 7pm on Fridays.





Qatar Museums Chairperson H E Sheikha Al Mayassa bint Hamad bin Khalifa Al Thani at the opening of "Grey Times" exhibition at the Fire Station.

THE PENINSULA - DOHA

The Fire Station: Artist in Residence has launched Grey Times, an exhibition encompassing the works of artists who participated in the fifth edition of its annual Artist in Residence Programme (AIR5).

The exhibition marks the end of the Artist in Residence programme and is centred on the current context of the global outbreak of COVID-19, characterised by uncertainty and unprecedented challenges.

The initial plan for this year's Artist in Residence Programme — curated by Dr. Bahaa Abudaya and Saida Ali Al-Khulaifi — was for artists to engage with the relationship between the visual arts and literature. However, the pandemic meant artists were unable to embark on creative exploration at the Fire Station's studios but rather had to carry out their respective conceptual journeys in the confines of their homes.

Commenting on the exhibition, Dr. Abudaya, said: "With the current situation, people have been forced to make drastic changes to their lifestyle and livelihood. Within this challenging context, we have invited artists to embark on a journey of self-exploration and examine the relationship they have with their immediate surroundings and the external world during a global pandemic."

The exhibition includes artworks created during the residency, during which the artists take their passion to the next level by moving into one of the available studios, collaborating with fellow creators, and developing their own artistic technique.

The artists showcasing their works as part of the 2020-2021 Artist in Residence Programme include Aisha Al-Muhannadi, Ameera Al-Aji, Ebtesam Al-Hothi, Hadeer Omar, Haytham Sharrouf, Jaser Alagha, Latifa Al-Kuwari, Majdulin Nasrallah, Mariam Rafehi, Maryam Al-Maadhadi, Mashael Al Hejazi, Maysaa Almumin, Muna Al-Bader, Naila Al-Thani, Noor Yousef, Suzana Jouma, Hind Al Saad and Ameena Al Yousef.

Through the artworks created during the participating artists' residency, Grey Times artists sought to answer the questions, "Who am I?" and "Who are they?" The works reflect the evolution and adaptability of the creative process in relation to limitations imposed by the pandemic i.e., the lack of studio space and social engagement, limited creative materials, execution, and installation.

Artist in Residence is an annual initiative, established in 2015, that nurtures creative talent from across the country and worldwide. Grey Times runs until July 24 at the Fire Station.

The Fire Station is open from 9am to 7pm Saturday to Thursdays and from 1.30pm to 7pm on Fridays.

Qatar Museums has implemented protocols in accordance with recommendations from Qatar's Health Protection & Communicable Disease Control office of the Ministry of Public Health. In keeping with the guidelines set by the Ministry of Public Health, a limited number of visitors and staff are allowed in the Fire Station at any given time.

To be allowed entry, visitors are required to present a "green" health status on the Ehteraz virus-tracing app, wear masks (12 years of age and older). and have their temperatures checked for normal reading.

AAB announces winners of 14th Toyota Dream Car Art contest





Winners with Acting CEO of AAB, R K Murugan, and Senior Manager, Toyota National Sales, Awwad Mohamed.

THE PENINSULA — DOHA

Abdullah Abdulghani & Bros. Co. (AAB), sole distributor for Toyota vehicles in Qatar has announced the winners of the national contest of the 14th Toyota Dream Car Art contest that was done recently.

Toyota Dream Car Art contest invites children from all corners of the globe to share ideas about the future of mobility by drawing their dream cars. Every great idea was born in the glimmer of a dream, and we at Toyota hope that this activity will help nurture the creativity of the next generation of great inventors, thinkers and dreamers. Qatar contest was held from November 20 to December 15, 2020.

In the 13th Toyota Dream Car Art contest, Serah Maria Rejeesh, grade 3 student of DPS Modern Indian School had brought accolades to Qatar by winning the prestigious 'Engineering Inspiration Award'. Serah believes her dream car will make the environment green and carbon free.

Since 2004, the Toyota Dream Car Art Contest has been conducted as part of Toyota's social contribution initiatives. In 2019 alone, there were about 950,000 entries from 86 countries and regions around the globe.

The winners of the 14th Toyota Dream Car Art Contest held in Qatar in the category— 1 (under 8 years old) include Rhianna Jamil Gelogo Elle from Philippine School Doha who got first prize followed by Sohan Sandeep from MES Indian School who secured second prize and Manasu Manjunath Kadithota from Rajagiri Indian School who bagged third prize.

In the category— 2 (8 – 11 years old), Palak Banzal from DPS Modern Indian School received first prize; Jazmin Cloei Deveria Pe from Philippine School Doha secured second prize and third prize went to Nemsith Nimpura Hectorge from Shantiniketan Indian School.

In the Category — 3 (12 – 15 years old), Nandana Bijukumar from Birla Public School bagged firs prize followed by Muhammad Jibreel from Al Khor International School who got second prize and Shreyas Ghosh from DPS Modern Indian School received thirds prize.

The prizes to the winners were given in the Toyota Showroom by Acting CEO, AAB, R K Murugan; Senior Manager of Toyota National Sales, Awwad Mohamed and Manager – Fleet Sales, K S Ravikumar in the presence of parents and art teachers and senior management from AAB. AAB congratulated all winning children and also thank all children & schools who participated in the Toyota Dream Car Art contest.

Shura Council committee studies Decree Law regulating entry and exit

QNA — DOHA

The joint committee of the Services and Public Utilities Committee and the Internal and External Affairs Committee of the Shura Council held a meeting under its Rapporteur HE Mohammed bin Mahdi Al Ahbabi.

During the meeting, the committee studied the Decree Law No. 23 of 2019, amending some provisions of Law No. 21 of 2015 regulating the entry and exit of expatriates and their residence, in the presence of Director-General of the Department of Passports Brigadier Mohammed Ahmed Al Ateeq and Director of Legal Affairs Department Brigadier Salem Saqr Al Muraikhi as representatives of the Ministry of Interior. The Committee decided to complete its study at the next meeting.

204 people referred to Public Prosecution for not wearing masks

QNA — DOHA

The designated authorities yesterday referred 204 people to the Public Prosecution for not wearing masks in places where they are mandatory.

The measure is in line with the Cabinet decision, Decree Law No. 17 of 1990 on infectious diseases, and the precautionary measures in force in the country to contain the spread of coronavirus (COVID-19).

The designated authorities called on the public to adhere to the precautionary measures in place to ensure their safety and the safety of others.

Vodafone Qatar to be 'Presenting Sponsor' of Al Khor Carnival

THE PENINSULA — DOHA

Vodafone Qatar has been announced as the 'Presenting Sponsor' of the inaugural Al Khor Carnival 2021, organized and managed by Aspire Zone Foundation. The event will be held in the outdoor open area of Al Bayt Stadium from January 21 to February 6 and projected to be the year's biggest family-friendly festival.

The sponsorship comes in continuation of Vodafone's support of community events and its commitment towards ensuring people are connected digitally at all the country's major events. The carnival will feature food trucks and food outlets, fun rides, live entertainment, and shopping for the entire family.

QATARGAS OPERATING COMPANY LTD

Tender Invitation

No.	TENDER NUMBER / DESCRIPTION	TENDER ISSUE PERIOD	TENDER FEE (QR)	TENDER BOND (QR)	TENDER CLOSING DATE
1	LTC/C/EEB/5137/20 PROVISION OF CONSULTANCY SERVICES FOR LNG PRICE REVIEW	20/01/2021 to 01/02/2021	NA	NA	15/02/2021

Scope of Work:

Qatargas has numerous existing medium and long term contracts supplying LNG to different customers in Europe, Middle East and Far East, and potentially other regions in the world. Price review or price reopening provision has become a common clause in the LNG Sales and Purchase Agreements (SPA). To support a potential price review, Qatargas might need an in-depth market study and technical analysis in relation to the value of natural gas in the market where the LNG is delivered. The Consultant shall be able to demonstrate a minimum 15 years experience in producing analytical work of the relevant markets relating to natural gas/LNG supply demand fundamentals, end users markets, market competition vs. other fuels, infrastructure development, market regulations, energy policies, competitors analysis, competitors market share etc. is encourage to participate in this tender. The Consultant shall also have a minimum 2 price reviews conducted in the last 6 years related to the gas, LNG and power market(s) completed for a region or markets.

Bid Validity: Bid should be valid for 180 days from the Tender Closing Date.

Place for Tender Collection and Bid Submission:

ITT document for this tender will be available in Qatargas website under Suppliers tab >Current Open Tenders. The bids shall be submitted through the Qatargas online platform (SMART by GEP).

The World's Premier LNG Company
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مؤسسة قطر
Qatar Foundation

SUPPLIER PRE-QUALIFICATION

REFERENCE NO.	PRE-QUALIFICATION CATEGORY TITLE	SUBMISSION CLOSING DATE AND TIME
QF/PD/21/PQ/357	Pre-qualification of suppliers for Educational items	Tuesday February 16, 2021 at 1pm
QF/PD/21/PQ/358	Pre-qualification of suppliers for Corporate Printing Services	Tuesday February 16,2021 at 1pm
QF/PD/21/PQ/359	Pre-qualification of suppliers for QF Events, Rental and Production Services	Tuesday February 16, 2021 at 1pm
QF/PD/21/PQ/360	Pre-qualification of suppliers for IT Hardware & Software	Wednesday February 17,2021 at 1pm
QF/PD/21/PQ/361	Pre-qualification of suppliers for various Corporate Gift items	Wednesday February 17,2021 at 1pm
QF/PD/21/PQ/761	Pre-qualification of suppliers for Biological & Reagent Consumables	Wednesday February 17,2021 at 1pm
QF/PD/21/PQ/ 762	Pre-qualification of suppliers for Laboratory Chemicals	Thursday February 18,2021 at 1pm
QF/PD/21/PQ/ 763	Pre-qualification of suppliers for Labware Consumables	Thursday February 18,2021 at 1pm
QF/PD/21/PQ/ 764	Pre-qualification of suppliers for Laboratory Equipment	Thursday February 18,2021 at 1pm

Interested companies shall request the Pre-qualification document by providing clear copies of the following document to QF Procurement Directorate by email to **pdpq@qf.org.qa** before **January 28, 2021.**

1. A Covering Letter signed by authorized signatory that states Company's intent to participate and should list the following information:
   a. QF Pre-Qualification Reference Number and Title
   b. Company's Commercial Registration number *(for companies with other holding companies listed in their CR, the commercial registration name and number of these corporate partners should be mentioned in the letter)*
   c. Name and contact details of the company's focal person in charge of all correspondence related to the pre-qualification. The documents and all related correspondence will be issued to the provided email address only.

Note: It is also mandatory to mention the correct **reference number and title** in the **email subject.**

QF Procurement Directorate will verify and issue the Pre-Qualification documents to companies who have fully complied with above requirements.

Admissions for QF schools open

THE PENINSULA – DOHA

Qatar Foundation's (QF) a diverse range of schools has open admission for the academic year 2021/2022. QF's schools and specialized centers offer an education cultivates a child's talents and capabilities, empowers them to become a lifelong learner, and sets them on the path to realizing their full potential.

The establishment of QAD in 1996 represented an important building block in the foundations of this unique environment housed within Education City. QAD is the largest school in the QF family, with over 1,850 students.

Sama Ayoub is a senior at QAD, a member of QF's Pre-University Education. She joined the school 15 years ago and has enjoyed a multitude of opportunities that have helped her realize her ambitions. "I will be forever grateful for the experience I have had at QAD," she said.

"Through the programmes and courses offered by QAD – and Qatar Foundation – I was able to explore the fields of medicine and the sciences, which helped me decide what to study after high school and the career I'd like to pursue."

Ayoub aspires to specialise in medicine, and being a student at QAD has brought her closer to achieving her dream because of



Dwayne Smith



Sama Ayoub

the school's location within Education City.

Speaking about how the school strives to prepare students for their future, Dwayne Smith, Assistant Principal, QAD Senior School, highlights the holistic learning environment in place at QAD, which includes a rich, inquiry-based International Baccalaureate (IB) curriculum that enables students to be selective of their areas of studies, together with unique after school activities.

Smith emphasises the importance QAD places on enabling student's voices. "We provide a lot of opportunities for students to provide feedback, such as through our very active student council. We routinely seek feedback and feel like we have a good sense of what our students want and their challenges. We give them the opportunity to voice that, so we can collaboratively find solutions."

He highlighted some of the other features of the school including a faculty of more than 200 international teachers, and access to the multiple world-class facilities and buildings found throughout Education City.

Yasser Al Nuaimi has four children – each of whom went through different education stages at the school, from preschool to senior school – with one son recently graduating.

Speaking about the school, Al Nuaimi said, "QAD has always been keen to create a family environment behind its walls by involving us, the parents, in the school's activities and events – in terms of both attendance and participation. They also make sure to keep us constantly updated on the achievements of our children during the year, especially in the early years."

QU academic appointed as Editor-in-Chief of IJCP

THE PENINSULA – DOHA

Qatar University's College of Pharmacy (QU-CPH) Professor of Clinical Pharmacy and Practice Dr. Derek Stewart and Manager of Academic Quality Assurance at Vice President for Medical and Health Sciences Office has been appointed as the Editor-in-Chief of the International Journal of Clinical Pharmacy.

The International Journal of Clinical Pharmacy (IJCP) is published by Springer Nature and offers a platform for research articles in the broad field of clinical pharmacy and related subjects. The journal publishes original research articles, reviews, short research reports, commentaries, book reviews, editorials, and letters. It is a bimonthly, international, peer-reviewed journal that publishes around 150 articles per year on a wide range of subjects.

Commenting on his achievement, Dr. Derek said: "I have been committed to the journal for many years as an author, regular reviewer of submitted articles, and editorial board member. It is an honour and highlight of my career to take on the role of Editor-in-Chief and attempt to follow in the footsteps of Foppe van Mil, who had been



Dr. Derek Stewart

Editor-in-Chief for 20 years. I am supported by associate four editors, Filipa Alves da Costa, Vibhu Paudyal, Shusen Sun, and Yolande Hanssens. I am particularly indebted to Yolande Hanssens of Hamad Medical Corporation, who willingly assumed the role of Interim Editor-in-Chief until my appointment. I am keen to raise the scientific standing of the journal in academic and clinician circles."

QU-CPH Dean Dr. Mohammad Diab added, "Dr. Derek's new appointment is an outstanding achievement which provides an excellent opportunity to enhance our international reputation in research."

The journal is affiliated with the European Society of Clinical Pharmacy (ESCP). In December 2020, Dr. Derek was also appointed as ESCP President.

Redesigned Ooredoo Money App launched

THE PENINSULA – DOHA

Ooredoo, the region's leading enabler of digital innovation, has announced the launch of the latest and most powerful version of its versatile Ooredoo Money app.

Completely redesigned to provide an entirely revamped user experience, this reworked financial service product is tailored for maximum customer convenience and engagement.

The Ooredoo Money app is set up to cater to users and friends, family, and domestic help, with functions allowing for Sub-wallets and salary payments. All actions can be performed with a minimal number of clicks. Users can easily manage their everyday financial needs with maximum convenience, easily and efficiently, thanks to the app.

The redesign brings more than a dozen key features to the fore. These include easy navigation and a contextual user interface, biometric logins, ease of sending overseas remittances, and safe and secure transfers with QR codes.

Director PR at Ooredoo Sabah Rabiah Al-Kuwari – said: "We have worked tirelessly to ensure the new version of the Ooredoo Money app meets and exceeds customer expectations, and functions as the most effective financial services app in Qatar.

"Based on extensive research and utilising the latest technologies, the revamped Ooredoo Money app offers more features and greater safety and security than ever before, both key requirements in this digital age. We're excited to see customer reactions and are confident they'll agree it's the best way to manage their financial needs quickly, easily, safely, and effectively."

The Ooredoo Money app can be easily downloaded via the App Store or Google Play, and will be continually updated with new features over time.

Kahramaa opens Al Mazrouha, Al Froosh substations

THE PENINSULA – DOHA

To enhance the electric transmission network, Qatar General Electricity and Water Corporation (Kahramaa) has inaugurated Al Mazrouha and Al Froosh power substations at the cost of QR230m.

Al Mazrouha substation project built at the cost of QR134m will be fed by Al Sakhama giant substation. However, it will supply electricity to National Services Academy's substation, said Kahramaa in a statement.

Al Froosh substation with the capacity of 132/11 KV built at the cost of QR96m will be fed by the northern Izghawa substation, and it will feed to the governmental, residential plots in the area.

The substations were supplied with electric cables of 250 MVA each, and it includes control panels with a voltage of 132 KV



Al Mazrouha substation recently opened by Kahramaa.

and 11 KV and transformers with a voltage of 40 MVA.

Despite the difficulties created by the COVID-19 pandemic, Kahramaa has completed the two substations' construction with more than 838.164 Man-hours Without a Lost-time Injury.

Kahramaa provides the highest standards of reliability in its electrical network, in line with the highest international standards, by using an advanced protection system linked to the optical fiber network for control switches with a voltage of 11/232 kilovolts to increase protection on the network feeders.

Kahramaa follows safety and security standards in all its activities and operations, which was achieved by completing work according to its strategic plans without recording injuries or accidents among the project workers, which positively affected the increase in productivity.

It is noteworthy that Kahramaa built 32 substations during 2020, the last of which were Al Mazrouha and Al Froosh.

They were built to meet the increasing needs and the growing electricity demand and enhance the security and continuity of services provided through the transmission and electrical distribution networks, in line with the stations' operational frameworks. It will serve the vital and future projects of the State.

Qatar National Library to hold lecture on parenting

THE PENINSULA – DOHA

To help parents develop childcare skills that raise healthy minds today and responsible citizens tomorrow, Qatar National Library will hold a virtual lecture on this vital topic on January 30.

Aptly titled "Raising Children," the event will be delivered by Dr. Mamoun Mobayed, Director of the Treatment and Rehabilitation Department at the Behavioral Healthcare Center. Dr. Mobayed will coach parents on navigating the challenges of parenting and master what many deem the hardest job in the world.

Dr. Mobayed will draw on his experience as a leading psychiatrist and author of several parenting books. The lecture, which will be delivered in Arabic, revolves around the ten core principles of parenting and covers the most common pitfalls.

Commenting on the event, Maram A. Al Mahmoud, Head of the Children's Library at Qatar National Library, said: "It has long been said that the hardest job in the world is to be a successful parent. As every mother and father knows, the role is akin to riding a roller coaster, as ups and downs are commonplace every day, no matter the child's age. This lecture is a chance for parents to reexamine their relationship with their children and discover some important child-raising skills that can help them and their youngsters on their incredibly special journey together."

Lulu offers promotions to mark Al Meshaf branch anniversary

THE PENINSULA – DOHA

Lulu Hypermarket Group marked the first anniversary of its Al Meshaf branch by inaugurating the branch's extended parking lot and offering big promotions.

Director of Lulu Group, Dr. Mohamed Althaf, inaugurated the ceremony by cutting a cake in the presence of senior officials from Lulu regional headquarters, fast-moving consumer goods (FMCG)/retail sectors and a gathering of ethnic and expatriate communities.

In line with the anniversary celebrations, LuLu Hypermarket Al Meshaf launched its signature promotion with a ten-day bonanza of fantastic offers on all product categories, from grocery essentials to lifestyle range and gadgets, starting from January 20 to 30.

The anniversary celebration includes in-store promotions such as daily deals, killer offers, and one day wonder offers.

LuLu also kicked off its 'Buy 2 Get 1 Free' promotion, one of the major attractions to pass by. This promotion will highlight almost all international brands of menswear, ladies-wear, churidars, saris, children-wear, footwear, and ladies' bags, which is valid until January 29, 2021.

Further, as a responsible retailer, Lulu Hypermarket realised that parking is the



Officials during the anniversary celebration of LuLu Hypermarket Al Meshaf branch.

prime convenience of a shopping center from the customer's point of view.

It ensures the advantage of a hassle-free shopping experience. With the extension work accomplished, the Lulu Hypermarket Al Meshaf branch has commissioned the parking lot with the capacity for 700 vehicles after adding the extended parking area with the capacity for 500 vehicles.

The proximity of parking lots to the store will be advantageous for shoppers, especially in certain weather conditions. The aisles between the rows are provided with enough width to facilitate easy navigation. The management stated that the extended parking facility would increase the customer footfall.

QRCS, ICRC hold webinar on legal protection for medical professionals

THE PENINSULA – DOHA

Qatar Red Crescent Society (QRCS) and the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) co-held yesterday a webinar titled 'Special Legal Protection for Medical Professionals at Times of Armed Conflict'.

The virtual event featured 83 participants from National Societies, representatives of the International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement, Dr. Mohamed Hamad Al Asbali; Executive Director of the Islamic Committee of the International Crescent (ICIC), Eng. Ibrahim Abdullah Al Malki, CEO of QRCS and QRCS heads of mission.

In his opening speech, Secretary-General of QRCS, Ali bin Hassan Al Hammadi said the purpose of the webinar was to have a discussion, exchange views, raise issues, and propose solutions regarding the legal protection that medical and relief personnel are supposed to enjoy while performing their professional and humanitarian responsibility of helping victims of armed conflict.

"We at QRCS have lost many humanitarian providers on the ground, and many of our health facilities were rendered inoperable as a result of deliberate bombing. This is in grave breach of the principles of International Humanitarian Law (IHL), the Geneva Conventions, and their additional protocols, which stipulate the protection of all individuals, vehicles, and premises, clearly showing the Red Crescent or Red Cross emblem," said Al Hammadi.

"While we as members of the movement practice all forms of humanitarian action both at times of conflict and peace, there is a complementary role that we have to do for the victims of armed conflicts: To ensure that they are not made victims in the first place."

Al Hammadi said this could be done by making their voices heard. He urged the international community to intervene in their favour, forcing all warring parties in international and non-international conflicts to respect international laws and conventions and universal ethical rules, particularly the Principle of Distinction between Civilians and Combatants.

"This consultative webinar is part of QRCS's numerous activities in humanitarian diplomacy and advocacy, through active participation in international humanitarian events, exchange of visits, and signing of agreements with different movement partners," said Al Hammadi.

He said this webinar builds on the close historical cooperation between QRCS and ICRC, based on common mission and goals, towards integrated field relief work.

ICRC Head of Mission – Qatar, Cherine Pollini, said, "The definition of medical personnel refers to personnel assigned to the search for, collection, transportation, diagnosis, or treatment of the wounded, sick, and shipwrecked, and the prevention of disease, to the administration of medical units, or the operation or administration of medical transports."

Aspire Zone Foundation signs deal with S'hail Holding Group

THE PENINSULA — DOHA

Aspire Zone Foundation (AZF) has recently signed a collaboration agreement with S'hail Holding Group. The agreement included strengthening the areas of cooperation to expand the scope of work in the community events that will be held throughout 2021 in Aspire Zone.

Commenting on the partnership agreement, CEO of Aspire Zone Foundation, Mohammed Khalifa Al Suwaidi, said: "We are pleased to sign this partnership with S'hail Holding Group, as it contains community contributions that meet and develop the needs of society through joint work mechanisms."

"The State of Qatar has changed the concept of sport among society in the past ten years. The state has also contributed to sports awareness among the people and developed the infrastructure in line with the culture of sports," said CEO of Aspire Zone Foundation, Mohammed Khalifa Al Suwaidi.

"The State of Qatar has changed the concept of sport among society in the past ten years. The state has also contributed to sports awareness among the people and developed the infrastructure in line with the culture of sports," Al Suwaidi added.

Sheikh Abdulaziz bin Ahmed Al Thani, a board member of S'hail Holding Group, said: "We at S'hail Holding Group are proud to be here as a partner sponsor of Aspire Zone Foundation activities. The agreement is a part of our commitment to social responsibility because sport is one of the most important pillars of Qatar's National Vision 2030, as embodied by the Amir H H Sheikh Tamim bin Hamad Al Thani."



Officials of Aspire Zone Foundation (AZF) and S'hail Holding Group after signing the agreement.



Ambassador of Qatar to the Kingdom of Spain, H E Abdullah bin Ibrahim Al Hamar (right), attending the meeting in Madrid.

Qatar participates in 113th session of UNWTO Executive Council

QNA — MADRID

The State of Qatar participated in the 113th session of the Executive Council of the UN World Tourism Organization (UNWTO), in the Spanish capital, Madrid. The State of Qatar was represented at the session by Ambassador of Qatar to the Kingdom of Spain H E Abdullah bin Ibrahim Al Hamar.

At the end of the 113th session, the Executive Council's members voted to elect the organization's Secretary-General for the period 2022-2025, as the candidate of the Republic of Georgia and the current Secretary-General of the Organization Zurab Pololikashvili won a second term.

On the sidelines of the session, Spanish Prime Minister H E Pedro Sanchez met with Ambassador of the State of Qatar. During the meeting, they reviewed bilateral cooperation relations.

Ambassador of the State of Qatar also participated in the Global Tourism Crisis Committee's first meeting to discuss the current global challenges facing the tourism sector. The committee stressed the need to overcome challenges through concerted efforts in order to resume the global tourism movement.

HBKU's Women, Society and Development programme focuses on women's role in society

THE PENINSULA - DOHA

The Women, Society and Development programme at Hamad bin Khalifa University (HBKU) is an interdisciplinary programme focusing on issues related to women in the context of social and economic development in the Middle East, as well as women's various roles in the advancement of their communities and societies.

A Master of Arts in Women, Society, and Development student at HBKU's College of Humanities and Social Sciences, Hamidah Dorzadeh **(pictured)** has sad that the programme gives a great depth to life and give a better understanding of society, as well as systems of gender.



"What I like about my area of studies is how interdisciplinary it is which has been useful in terms of understanding gender constructs, power structures, and their impact on men and women as well as paying closer attention to the lived experiences of women," she said.

"I was always passionate about issues relating to women and gender, and in particular, I could see within my community that when it came to women, they were subject to multiple rules and regulations. Therefore, I joining the programme was really a quest for understanding my own life and experience as a woman," she added.

Hamidah's short-term goal is to continue reading and writing about what she has learnt over the past year.

After graduating, she is aiming to pursue a PhD in gender studies with a focus on the Middle East region and continue my journey as an academic.

At present Hamidah is the coordinator for newly established Iranian Studies Unit at the Arab Center for Research and Policy Studies.

"One of the most important skills along with research, writing, and strong interdisciplinary skills that I have gained through this program has been critical thinking. I apply all these skills in the work I do as my job involves a lot of research and writing," she said.

"Ever since I started this master's program, my aim has been to write about my own community, which is the Balochi community in Qatar. My professors and classmates have repeatedly heard me saying that "I will integrate the Balochis in Qatar to literature" and that is what really keeps me going as I feel the need to fill this gap and contribute to a better understanding of my community. I am very sure that my thesis will be a great addition and I hope that, one day, people would see me as a reference when writing about Balochis," said Hamidah.

Sharing about how HBKU experience differ from her expectations when she first joined, Hamidah said, "I remember when I first joined, I really had no idea about gender, gendered practices, and discourses. I also was not aware of the many great feminist scholars, and their theories. I was truly not expecting to learn so much in such a short period of time. Each course I took added a new dimension into my understanding of these issues and introduced me to so many interesting scholars whose books have really had a great impact on my life."

According to Hamidah, the programme helps in critical thinking about certain notions, terms, and institutions that are taken for granted such as patriarchy, family, marriage, kinship, religion, laws, feminism, liberalism, and capitalism.

Bayanat Engineering Qatar: Providing modern, advanced solutions for airports

In order to understand the airports and its development – it is important to know its history, how it was created and came into the concept.

First airport and first airport in Qatar

When you think of the word, 'airport', you will most likely associate the term with the sleek, modern airports we have grown accustomed to today, such as Hamad International Airport in Qatar. Airports have, of course, not always been this way and have advanced significantly in the last 100 years. In this article we reflect on the world's first airport, as well as the first airport in Qatar, and how companies such as **Bayanat Engineering** helped them become the modern transport facilities we know them to be today.



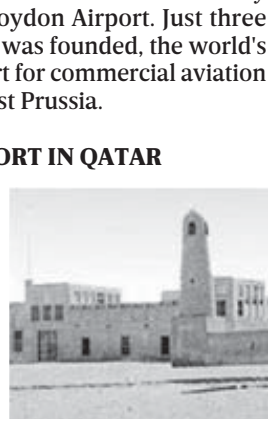
THE WORLD'S FIRST AIRPORT

In 1919, over a 100 years ago, Hounslow Heath Aerodrome opened. Many people mistakenly believe the Wright Brothers developed the first airport, whereas, in reality, they developed the world's first continually operating airfield. For an airfield to be classified as an airport, it needs to have an aerodrome, storage for aircraft and a control tower, making Hounslow Heath Aerodrome the world's first official airport.

The world's first scheduled international commercial air services flew to and from Hounslow before it shut its doors in 1920 after essentially being replaced by Croydon Airport. Just three years after Hounslow was founded, the world's first permanent airport for commercial aviation services opened in East Prussia.

THE FIRST AIRPORT IN QATAR

Dukhan airport was the first airport in Qatar and was completed in the late 1930s. While the airport was initially a commercial success, it was eventually overshadowed by Doha International Airport, which was built in 1959 and subsequently made Dukhan obsolete. Some buildings within the airport were preserved but the majority of the airport grounds were left to ruin.



The importance of development

If the founders of Dukhan airport and Hounslow Heath Aerodrome were able to walk around modern airports in Qatar today, the technology surrounding them would appear as if it came from science-fiction. In the past 100 years, technological advancements have been made at an astounding pace, meaning airports have been able to advance and develop at an unprecedented rate. Advancements in technology have brought many benefits to airports, such as allowing flights to take off more regularly and travel further distances.

HOW ARE MODERN AIRPORTS BUILT TO ADDRESS MODERN SECURITY RISKS?

Modern airports in Qatar, such as Hamad International Airport, are built to not only



provide excellent commercial services but also to ensure the safety and security of all individuals who enter and exit the airport. For example, a modern airport must be complete with surveillance technology, structured cabling systems to allow for reliable communications, specialized lighting to ensure pilots have complete visibility and advanced navigation systems, to name but a few features.

Bayanat Engineering Qatar is proud to be working with Hamad International Airport in Qatar and other airports in Qatar to help them implement and utilize advanced communication, surveillance, air traffic management, navigation and terminal operation professional services. We respect the history of the world's and Qatar's first airports while we are dedicated to provide modern solutions for airports in operation today.

DPS-Modern Indian School introduces nature to students

THE PENINSULA - DOHA

To nurture appreciation of importance of nature among youngsters since childhood, DPS-Modern Indian School organised a 'nature walk' for its students of Kindergarten on the first week of January within the school premises.

This year everything was so different due to pandemic. The children were waiting to come out of their homes. It was a very good thing to plan such an activity where the children got to learn as well as explore nature.

The emphasis is not on finding out names or identifying things as one might do on a nature walk. Sometimes children are accustomed to the fast-paced changes and excitement that nature shows on television. But they soon learn that nature really has its own rhythm and takes time to unfold its movement; it is not entertainment but more the reward of diligent observation and sustained interest.

Early in the morning, all the kids were briefed about the nature walk in their respective classes. One day the first group of children was taken, and the second group was taken on the next day. Teachers encouraged them to observe the plants and surroundings.



Kindergarten students of DPS-Modern Indian School taking lesson on nature during the activity.

The students were also instructed to maintain social distance and not to touch anything for safety reasons.

Children were full of queries during this time. They were amazed to see the beautiful flowers in the garden.

The main aim of the nature walk was to stimulate children's appreciation for the natural world. Nature enhances emotional change, promotes socialisation and physical fitness. Overall, it was a refreshing experience for the little ones.

Spending time in nature can lead to some of the most enjoyable and profound learning experiences. Nature-based learning touches on and connects every academic discipline imaginable while enlivening the senses and invigorating the body.

It encourages curiosity and inquiry, exploration and experimentation, while the mind catalogues, analyzes, and compares.

Teaching children about the natural world should be one of the important events in their lives.

BPS student wins Toyota Dream Car Painting Contest

THE PENINSULA - DOHA

A student of Birla Public School (BPS), Nandana Bijukumar won the first prize in Toyota Dream Car Painting Contest Qatar Region (Category 3).

The competition was conducted in December last year. Toyota company officials – Manager of Fleet Sales, K S Ravi Kumar and Assistant Manager (Toyota Marketing), Kannan P R presented the award to Bijukumar on January 11.



Nandana Bijukumar, winner of the contest, receiving certificate from Manager of Fleet Sales at Toyota Company, K S Ravi Kumar and Assistant Manager (Toyota Marketing) Kannan P R.

Toyota Dream Car Art contest invites children from all corners of the globe to share ideas about the future of mobility by drawing their dream cars. Every great idea was born in the glimmer of a dream, and that this activity will help nurture the creativity of the next generation of great inventors, thinkers and dreamers.

Qatar contest was held from November 20 to December 15 last year.

Iran 'will respect commitments if US returns to deal'

REUTERS — DUBAI

Iranian President Hassan Rouhani urged the incoming US administration yesterday to return to a 2015 nuclear agreement and lift sanctions on Tehran, while welcoming the end of President Donald Trump's era.

US President Joe Biden, who took office yesterday, has said the United States will rejoin the pact, which includes restrictions on Iran's nuclear work, if Tehran resumes strict compliance.

"The ball is in the US court now. If Washington returns to Iran's 2015 nuclear deal, we will also fully respect our commitments under the pact," Rouhani said in a televised cabinet meeting.

"Today, we expect the incoming US administration to return to the rule of law and commit themselves, and if they can, in the next four years, to remove all the black spots of the previous four years," he said. Tensions have grown between Tehran and Washington since 2018, when Trump quit the deal between Iran and six world powers that sought to limit Tehran's nuclear programme and to prevent it developing atomic weapons. Washington reimposed sanctions that have badly hit Iran's economy.

Iran, which denies ever seeking nuclear arms, retaliated to Trump's "maximum pressure" policy by gradually breaching the accord. Tehran has repeatedly said it can quickly reverse those violations if US sanctions are removed.

Iran, which denies ever seeking nuclear arms, retaliated to Trump's "maximum pressure" policy by gradually breaching the accord. Tehran has repeatedly said it can quickly reverse those violations if US sanctions are removed.

Antony Blinken, Biden's choice for secretary of state, said on Tuesday the United States would not take a quick decision on whether to rejoin the pact.

Trump's political career and his ominous reign are over today and his 'maximum pressure' policy on Iran has completely failed, Rouhani said. Biden appears to see a return to the deal as a prelude to wider talks on Iran's nuclear work, its ballistic missiles and regional activities. But Tehran has ruled out halting its missile programme or changing its regional policy.

Biden's choice to lead the Pentagon, retired Army General Lloyd Austin, said on Tuesday that Iran posed a threat to American allies in the region and forces stationed in the Middle East. "The United States and other Western countries have turned our region to a powder keg, not Iran," Foreign Minister Mohammad Javad Zarif told state TV.



Houthi supporters hold up their weapons during a demonstration against the United States' decision to designate the Houthis as a foreign terrorist organisation, in Sana'a, Yemen, yesterday.

US exempts UN from Houthi blacklisting

REUTERS — WASHINGTON/NEW YORK

The United States on Tuesday exempted aid groups, the United Nations, the Red Cross and the export of agricultural commodities, medicine, and medical devices from its designation of Yemen's Houthi movement as a foreign terrorist organisation.

The carve-outs are not enough to allay UN fears that Washington's move would push Yemen into a large-scale famine. The United Nations describes Yemen as the world's biggest humanitarian crisis, with 80% of its people in need.

"Our concern from the beginning... is the impact on the commercial sector and that the vast majority of food and other basic supplies that come into Yemen comes in through the commercial sector," said UN spokesman Stephane Dujarric.

UN officials and aid groups said the designation will scare off commercial trade in Yemen, which relies almost solely on imports, creating a gap the humanitarian operation cannot fill regardless of US humanitarian exemptions.

The United States has exempted the export to Yemen of agricultural commodities. Its description of that includes food for people, including raw, processed, and packaged foods, live animals, vitamins and minerals, and bottled drinking water.

US Secretary of State Mike Pompeo announced the move against the Houthis last week and it took effect on Tuesday, one day before Democratic President-elect Joe Biden succeeds Republican President Donald Trump.

Biden's nominee for secretary of state, Antony Blinken, told the Senate Foreign Relations Committee during a confirmation hearing on Tuesday: "We would propose to review that immediately to make sure that what we are doing is not impeding the provision of humanitarian assistance."

UN officials are trying to revive peace talks to end the war as Yemen's suffering is also worsened by an economic collapse and the COVID-19 pandemic.

The designation freezes any US-related assets of the Houthis, bans Americans from doing business with them and makes it a crime to provide support or resources to the movement.

Iraq postpones early elections by four months to October

AP — BAGHDAD

Iraq's Cabinet voted on Tuesday to postpone early elections for four months based on a recommendation by the country's electoral commission, which proposed the change citing technical reasons.

Elections will now be held in October, according to a statement from the prime minister's office following a unanimous vote in the Cabinet. Previously they were slated for June, about a year ahead of schedule.

Prime Minister Mustafa Al Kadhimi announced in July that early polls would be held to meet the demands of anti-government protesters. Demonstrators took to the streets in the tens of thousands last year to demand political change, and an end to rampant corruption and poor services. More than 500 people were killed in mass demonstrations as security forces used live rounds and tear gas to disperse crowds.

Al Kadhimi said in the statement on Tuesday the delay was due to "technical" needs spelled out in a proposal submitted to the Cabinet to ensure a transparent electoral process. He did not provide details on what the technical issues were.

In a step toward holding elections, Iraq's president ratified a new electoral law late last year aimed at giving political independents a chance at winning seats in parliament. The law was passed despite objections from political parties.

In its proposal for pushing back early elections, the electoral commission, which is legally tasked to organise the polls, said more time was needed for nominees to be named and for electoral commissioners to fulfill technical requirements.



An Iraqi woman updates her voter ID registration at an Independent High Electoral Commission centre in Baghdad, yesterday.

Al Kadhimi said the commission was "keen on the integrity of the elections and equal opportunities for everyone to run the electoral process fairly," according to his statement.

The May 2018 federal elections were mired in allegations of voter fraud and corruption and saw historically low turnout.

Al Kadhimi said neither political opposition to the early polls nor the state's crumbling finances were to blame for the extension. The government, which is suffering through an unprecedented liquidity crisis due to low oil prices, said the commission's budget is accounted for.

Parliament must also dissolve itself in order for the polls to be held.

Palestine to challenge US ambassador to Israel for recognising settlement project

QNA — RAMALLAH

The Palestinian Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Expatriates has pledged to legally pursue the US ambassador to the Israeli occupation, David Friedman, after he recognised the settlement project called City of David in the occupied city of Jerusalem.

The Ministry underlined in a statement that all of East Jerusalem is a Palestinian territory occupied since 1967, and "it is the eternal capital of the State of Palestine despite Friedman and his outgoing administration, which has deviated from every legal, diplomatic or ethical norm."

The Ministry considered that "Friedman's bigoted statements are a flagrant violation of international legitimacy and its resolutions, and international law and diplomatic traditions."

The Ministry affirmed that it will take responsibility to follow up this matter with legal experts and the authorities concerned to discuss the possibility of holding Friedman accountable before international and specialised courts. The statement condemned Friedman's recognition of the City of David settlement project, which came two days before the end of his duties as US ambassador to Israel, and considered it "illegal, invalid and reflects Friedmans intentions and his dark ideology he tries to attach not only to his country, but to the American constitution and principles, and to employ them for the benefit of the Israeli narrative in Jerusalem."

Israel pushes settlements as Trump leaves office

AP — JERUSALEM

An Israeli watchdog group said the government approved nearly 2,600 new housing units in east Jerusalem and the West Bank settlements a day before President-elect Joe Biden took office.

Israeli authorities made a major last-minute push this week to advance settlement construction in the occupied West Bank, which the Palestinians seek as part of a future independent state, in the twilight hours of the Trump administration. The anti-settlement monitoring group Peace Now said the majority of the new government tenders — published on Tuesday, President Donald Trump's last full day in office — are deep inside the West Bank. Earlier this week, the Israeli government advanced plans for nearly 800 homes in West Bank settlements.

Israel accelerated settlement construction under Trump, whose administration did not criticise settlement announcements and in 2018 said it did not consider settlements illegal under international law.

According to Peace Now, Israel approved or advanced construction of over 12,000 settlement homes in 2020, the highest number in a single year since it started recording in 2012.

Biden is expected to reverse course and adopt the traditional American stance of opposing settlement constructions, setting the stage for tension with Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu.

Syria says huge fire near Homs refinery controlled, no casualties reported

REUTERS — AMMAN

Syrian civil defence teams on Tuesday extinguished a huge fire that swept a number of oil tankers loading crude oil from an installation near the country's main Homs refinery after a blast that hit the depot area, state media said.

An explosion had earlier hit a government-owned crude oil transportation company in the city and oil tankers loading crude oil from the installation then caught fire, state media reported.

Oil Minister Bassam Touma said an unknown explosion that hit a tanker that was offloading crude oil to Homs refinery ended up engulfing seven oil tankers.

"The company and the refinery are fine," Touma told state media as state television relayed live footage of the fires.

The governor of Homs, Bassam Barsik, was earlier quoted on state media as saying civil defence teams were working on extinguishing the fire that erupted during "the loading of crude oil".

"There are no human casualties and we are working on containing the spread of the fire," Barsik said.

The government did not say whether the blast and the fires were a result of an attack as it normally has done in previous incidents where it has blamed foreign-backed "terrorists." Officials privately however said they did not rule out such an attack in a war-torn country where violence has subsided but insurgents and rebels still wage attacks in government-held areas, targeting oil and gas installations.

There have been hit-and-run attacks on government forces in the central province of Homs in recent months by remnants of Islamic State militants who take shelter in outlying, sparsely populated areas.

The Russian air force has also been active in recent weeks in helping the Syrian army bomb suspected hideouts of militants in the Homs area.

Both Homs refinery alongside Banias on the Mediterranean coast are currently facing supply shortages due to erratic supplies of Iranian crude oil to the sanctions-hit country that relies mainly on Tehran for its energy needs.

Kuwait FM receives phone call from Arab League head

QNA — KUWAIT

Kuwaiti Minister of Foreign Affairs Sheikh Dr. Ahmad Nasser Al Mohammad Al Sabah received yesterday a phone call from Secretary-General of the League of Arab States Ahmed Aboul Gheit.

During the call, they reviewed the most prominent developments in the region and developments at the regional and international levels.

Virus cases in Oman at 132,317

QNA — MUSCAT

The Omani Ministry of Health announced yesterday that the total reported cases of coronavirus (COVID-19) in the Sultanate had reached 132,317.

The total number of deaths due to COVID-19 reached 1,516, while the recoveries reached 124,579, bringing the recoveries rate to 94.1 percent, the Ministry said in a statement carried by *Oman News Agency* (ONA).

Patients who have been isolated in hospitals due to infections in the past 24 hours reached 15, bringing the total to 84, while patients in the intensive care units reached 24, the Ministry added.

The Omani Ministry of Health has announced Tuesday that the total of COVID-19 cases reported in the Sultanate reached 132,146.

Iran telecom minister appears before prosecutor

AP — TEHRAN

Iran's judiciary released the country's telecom minister on bail yesterday after he was summoned for prosecution by Iran's general prosecutor, state TV reported.

The state media outlet quoted Jamal Hadian, a spokesman for the telecommunications ministry, as saying Mohammad Javad Azari Jahromi appeared before a prosecutor yesterday, was released and had already returned to his office.

The office of the general prosecutor had summoned Jahromi for prosecution over his refusal to block Instagram and other foreign social media messaging systems, according to earlier reports. It was unclear how much bail money Jahromi posted or when he might have to appear again.

The move was seen as part of the push and pull between hard-liners and President Hassan Rouhani's moderate administration ahead of June presidential elections.

Jahromi, Iran's information and communications technology minister, is a possible contender in the election. He worked for the Intelligence Ministry before taking his current position.

Instagram and WhatsApp remain unblocked in Iran.

Iraq reports H5N8 bird flu outbreak on farm: OIE

REUTERS — PARIS

Iraq has reported an outbreak of highly pathogenic H5N8 bird flu in the city of Samaraa in the centre of the country, the Paris-based World Organisation for Animal Health (OIE) said yesterday.

The virus was found on January 12 at a farm some 130 km north of the capital Baghdad and killed 63,700 birds in the 68,800-strong flock, the OIE said in a report posted on its website, citing the Iraqi ministry of agriculture.

The remaining animals were culled, it said.

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EDITORIAL

Biden begins amid hopes

THE US elections and the accompanying media momentum, campaigns, enthusiasm, partisan festivals and debates make the process one of the most exciting electoral activities that every four years draw attention of global public with no exception.

This is also because of the political and economic status of the US as an undisputed superpower since the end of the Cold War, along the influential and effective role of its leadership in achieving peace, security and stability in various parts of the world.

President Joe Biden took the oath of office yesterday, becoming the 46th President of the United States, and he made history with having Kamala Harris, the first woman as Vice-President.

Expectations and reactions to the new administration may vary in a region like the Middle East where issues are complex and intertwining.

For Qatar, as a close ally to the US, change in administration could be a routine, that may not affect the status of the friendship of the two countries therefore, Amir H H Sheikh Tamim bin Hamad Al Thani was among the first to congratulate President H E Joe Biden and Vice-President Kamala Harris wishing them continued success and looks forward to new heights in the friendship of the two countries.

While welcoming the new US administration, it can be said that there are much to be expected from the new administration, especially that the controversial personality of President Trump was reflected on his country's foreign policies. As he tried to reward allies and antagonising those who disagreed with his vision, even they are loyal allies to the US and safeguarding its interests.

There are many complex issues of the region awaiting the Biden Administration for resolving, foremost of which is reducing tension in the Gulf with Iran, rebuilding trust with allies, not only in the Gulf, but even its oldest European allies, in view of economic protectionism that has hurt the global economy amid the coronavirus.

There are other crises in the region that are no less important than the dispute with Iran over nuclear agreement, such as the war in Yemen and the humanitarian crisis, the civil war in Syria, Libya and Afghanistan. The policy of rewarding allies and punishing opponents pursued by President Trump inflicted great damage to the Palestinian cause, and the incoming administration is expected to change the approach that Trump had taken to resolve the Israeli-Palestinian conflict.

All are optimistic and excited about the new era beginning with Biden's administration, realising the importance of US position in the world, and the importance of its role in global peace and stability.

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Biden faces a tougher task than any president but Lincoln

JEFF GREENFIELD
THE WASHINGTON POST



A general view of the Capitol during the inauguration of Joe Biden as the 46th President of the United States on the West Front of the US Capitol in Washington, yesterday.

When Olympic competitors take to the ice, the diving board or the gymnastics floor, they're not judged simply on what they do but on how hard the routine they're attempting is: The more twists, turns, flips, axels or Lutzes they execute, the higher they score.

There's no such "degree of difficulty" standard when it comes to measuring how tough a task an incoming president faces. But it's obvious that new chief executives have been met with radically different prospects, ranging from prosperity to catastrophic economic conditions; from eras of good feeling to bitter political division; from peace to war. If we calculate the degree of difficulty for Joe Biden's incoming administration, how tough is his task? In my view, it is among the very hardest challenges any new president has ever encountered.

Nobody is likely to match what Abe Lincoln faced. By the time of his inauguration, seven Southern states had seceded; Fort Sumter fell in just over a month, and the Civil War began, lasting until five days before Lincoln went to Ford's Theatre to see "Our American Cousin."

But other candidates – even the clearly burdened – had advantages that Biden does not.

Take another strong contender contender for the title of Most Challenged New President. Franklin Delano Roosevelt came into office in 1933 at the height of the Depression. A quarter of the nation was out of work, banks were collapsing by the hour, farms were fallow, and bread lines stretched through cities. But the very severity of the conditions he faced gave Roosevelt almost limitless power to act. (Indeed, luminaries like columnist Walter Lippmann suggested he might have to become something of a dictator.) With huge majorities in both houses of Congress and a nation eager to embrace the optimism that fueled his inaugural address, FDR pushed 13 major programs into law within the now-famous "100 days." The confidence he projected in his fireside chats and the explosion of activity, along with a still-wounded but recovering economy, were enough to win Democrats unprecedented gains in the 1934 midterms and a 46-state landslide in 1936.

Biden faces nothing like a 25 percent jobless rate. But because the still-ailing economy is largely a product of the pandemic, there is a limit to what he can do to fix the problem. He'll argue for a massive infusion of money to keep people in their homes with food on the table, and to stave off disastrous damage to the critical work of state and local government. And he'll push to get vaccines distributed and administered quickly, in hopes of ending the pandemic sooner. But a revived economy – with businesses thriving, with tourism and travel and crowded restaurants, with a surge of relief and optimism – has to wait until it's safe for people to be with one another again.

The stumbling rollout of vaccines so far means such a renewal is at least months away – months when the deaths and shuttered businesses will be on Biden's watch, not Donald Trump's anymore. The tsunami of suffering – the millions unable to work or whose work makes them particularly vulnerable to the virus, the single-parent families who cannot send their children off to school, the devastating psychological wounds of the isolated, the countless local shops, diners, nonprofit health and legal services storefronts for which money won't arrive in time: All of this will be Biden's burden.

He's proposed trillions in rescue aid, but look at the political terrain. Trump provided Biden with a Democratic Senate. In sharp contrast to FDR's massive congressional majorities, though, Democrats have control of a 50-50 split Senate only because Vice President Kamala Harris will cast tie-breaking votes. They also have a smaller edge in the House than in the last Congress. That's a thin reed on which to build a bold legislative agenda. As for the prospect of bipartisan cooperation, we've heard Republican calls for "unity" and "healing" in the wake of the Capitol riot, and GOP leaders like House Minority Leader Kevin McCarthy are now saying that Biden did indeed win in November. But if past is prologue, McCarthy and his Senate counterpart, Mitch McConnell, are more likely to be counting the days to November 2022, when history suggests Democratic control of both houses will be in jeopardy.

Biden can take some comfort, in a way, from the fact that the political climate of a president's first days does not predict what will happen: Jimmy Carter came to office with no war, no economic calamity and solid Democratic majorities in Congress. But a revolution in Iran, an oil shock, surging inflation and long lines at gas stations led to a landslide defeat in 1980. George H.W. Bush inherited a peaceful wind-down of the Cold War and a generally satisfied electorate. But a nasty recession and discontent within his party helped make him a one-term president.

It is nice to build plans and prepare for future



DR. YOUSUF ALI AL MULLA

At some point during COVID -19 pandemic, did any of us ask what would happen if he was infected and somehow had serious complications afterwards and even forced to enter the hospital. Certainly, your greatest concern here will be for your family and your children; however you may make sure of their safety during the period of your illness by having someone from your family or any other trusted person to take care for them.

But let's delve into your story or our story with the infection, after you entered the hospital, then you realized that your condition is more serious and this will concern you so that you wonder ... Who will pay the bills, who will meet the needs of the mother during my absence. Who and who? Do I hope the doctors will take maximum measures and put me on a ventilator if needed without delay? Will there come a time when maybe my family will be required to make decisions about my health or even my death? Perhaps here you realize that you have failed in the simplest planning to prepare your son, daughter, or person entrusted with it for the responsibilities that you will face if you fall ill or pass away.

Interestingly, year 2020 has shown us all the value of being prepared. In the early days of the pandemic, people developed fear and anxiety, at which for instance people filled their homes, with the presence of uncertainty of the lockdown measures that we lived through. In fact here the truth, planning for uncertainty is undoubtedly a better strategy and it is probably the greatest gift you can give to your family.

When you sit down to imagine a serious health crisis and the instructions that you want to provide to your responsible son or daughter for example, will it be frustrating in your opinion? Are you not with me with a realistic look – if I can say – that it will be interesting and you with your advance directive writing are sitting to study life? I believe it is an opportunity to think and direct ahead of your life, but perhaps the life of your family, so you think about your true worth and look deeply into your hopes of aging well and what makes life worth living.

Supposedly if you imagine with me, you take your time to prepare a plan for your children or your family and perhaps it is your will, while you are absorbed in quiet thinking. Almost your mind saying I have written my instructions for making healthy decisions, I wanted to provide instructions for situations that I may not imagine now...And here you are completing your narration ,where your mind saying I think the best way to do this is to include my thoughts about what I value in the life that I have lived so far. Hence what I want my children to think about as one way or the other, the day will come and they will find difficult choices about the quality of life they will live.

Therefore, with regard to today's challenge and every day, I encourage you to seize the opportunity as we learned in 2020, to prepare by establishing a healthy direction, but beyond that in all areas of life in support of your family in times of crisis. Thus, it is important to practice that one becomes more aware of one's mood and thoughts, so enabling children for example, to build their resilience and manage their stress.

However, you undoubtedly agree with me here, going back will help you build on the lessons you have learned and you may even discover some hidden positive habits that you did not realize you started with. It is really nice to build plans and prepare for what is coming and probably the most beautiful here is to think about the lessons of the past year, in addition to how many good habits were created or developed from discovering new ways of practicing sport, for example to strengthening friendships that have arisen through some social media platforms and learning to cook healthy meals or making ourselves responsible for taking care of others.

And now, with the distribution of vaccines with an end to the pandemic on the horizon, you do not need to abandon these changes, instead try to build on them and even create plans that were healthy and social for your family and yourself, beside adding a moment of reflection at the end of each day as well...During this time, your family can think about the day and pave the way for a better tomorrow.

Dr.Yousuf Ali Al Mulla is a physician, medical innovator and writer. For any queries regarding the contents of the article can be contacted at: dryusufalmulla@gmail.com



Quote of the day

The will of the people has been heard, and the will of the people has been heeded. We've learned again that democracy is precious and democracy is fragile. At this hour, my friends, democracy has prevailed.

Joe Biden, President of the United States

43 Europe-bound migrants drown in shipwreck off Libya

AP — CAIRO

A boat carrying migrants bound for Europe capsized in the Mediterranean Sea off the coast of Libya, drowning at least 43 people, the UN migration agency said yesterday.

The International Organization for Migration said the "tragic" shipwreck that took place a day earlier was the first maritime disaster in 2021 involving migrants seeking better lives in Europe.

In recent years, the EU has partnered with Libya's coast guard and other local groups to stem such dangerous sea crossings. Rights groups, however, say those policies leave migrants at the mercy of armed groups or confined in squalid detention centres rife with abuses.

The IOM said coastal security forces in Libya's western town of Zuwara rescued 10 migrants from the shipwreck on Tuesday and brought them to shore. It said the dead were all men from West African nations, according to survivors.

Libyan forces rescued 10 migrants. The dead were all men from West African nations, according to survivors.

The migration agency said the boat left the town of Zawiya early Tuesday and capsized a few hours later after its engine stopped working amid rough seas.

In the years since the 2011 uprising that ousted and killed longtime dictator Muammar Gaddafi, war-torn Libya has emerged as the dominant transit point for migrants fleeing war and poverty in Africa and the Middle East.

Smugglers often pack desperate families into ill-equipped rubber boats that stall and founder along the perilous Central Mediterranean route.

The Libyan coast guard yesterday intercepted at least 48 migrants, including 11 children, and returned them to shore, the IOM said. The UN migration and refugee agencies called for an "urgent and measurable shift in the approach" to the situation in the Mediterranean, including an end to migrant returns to "unsafe ports."

"Arbitrary arrests and arbitrary detention in the direst of conditions continue (in Libya). Many are victimized and exploited by traffickers and smugglers, held for ransom, tortured, and abused," they said in a statement yesterday.

The IOM said in November that some 500 migrants have died trying to cross the central Mediterranean, but the actual number of people who lost their lives could be much higher, due to "the limited ability to monitor routes."

UK helps Kenya prepare to roll out vaccine

REUTERS — NAIROBI

Britain said yesterday it was helping Kenya prepare to roll out the COVID-19 vaccine developed by Astrazeneca and Oxford University, as African nations race to ensure their populations are inoculated.

Later yesterday, Kenya said it had confirmed two cases of the new COVID-19 variant first seen in South Africa, which health authorities there have said might be responsible for a recent jump in infections there.

The East African nation has ordered 24 million doses of the vaccine and it expects delivery of the shots to start in the second week of February.

"It is for us not just our moral duty, but in the British national interest to see Kenyans vaccinated just as soon as we physically, logistically can," British foreign minister Dominic Raab told a news conference during a visit to Nairobi.

Britain has provided technical assistance to Kenya's health ministry to help ensure the vaccine "gets to those who need it just as quickly as we physically possibly can", Raab said, without offering more details.

The Kenya state medical research institute (KEMRI) has been carrying out trials of the vaccine locally but it has not released the results of the study yet. Kenya's government has ordered the vaccines through an African Union (AU) initiative aimed at ensuring African nations are not left behind, Health Minister Mutahi Kagwe has said.

Shots will also be imported directly, he said.

African countries will pay between $3 and $10 per vaccine dose to access 270 million COVID-19 shots secured this month by the AU, according to a draft briefing on the plan prepared by the African Export-Import Bank.



Britain's Foreign Affairs Secretary Dominic Raab and Kenya's Cabinet Secretary for Foreign Affairs Raychelle Omamo address a news conference in Nairobi, Kenya, yesterday.

Kenya has reported 99,444 cases of COVID-19 infection after 1.13 million tests. It has reported 1,736 deaths.

Patrick Amoth, acting director general of health at the Ministry of Health, said the two men who tests showed had the new South African COVID-19 variant had since left the country.

He did not say where the infected men were tested or whether they had been notified.

"This was picked (up) because of our heightened surveillance system. These two gentlemen have since gone back to their country. At the point of picking them (up), they were all asymptomatic," he told a news conference.

Algeria President undergoes foot surgery after virus infection

REUTERS — ALGIERS

Algerian President Abdelmadjid Tebboune yesterday successfully underwent surgery on his foot to address complications resulting from a coronavirus infection, the presidency said.

The surgery, details of which were not specified, was carried out in Germany, where he had spent more than two months for treatment of COVID-19, returning home in December.

Elected in December 2019, Tebboune, 75, has promised political and economic reforms following mass protests that forced his predecessor Abdelaziz Bouteflika to resign after two decades in power.

Experts urge SA govt to detail vaccine plan

REUTERS — JOHANNESBURG

South African healthcare experts are urging the government to share a detailed plan for administering COVID-19 vaccines with private sector partners who are offering their help, warning infrastructure bottlenecks will otherwise delay the rollout.

With around 1.34 million total cases and 37,449 deaths as of Monday, South Africa is by far the African nation hardest hit by the pandemic and is grappling with a second wave of infections driven by a new variant of the virus first identified in the country.

The government has said the first vaccine doses will arrive by the end of January, and South Africa will aim to vaccinate 40 million people by the end of 2021.

But with a public health system creaking even before the pandemic hit, experts say the vaccination drive will require a plan to coordinate with private health services, pharmacies, supermarkets, major employers and non-government sectors.

"South Africa needs all hands on deck," said Glenda Gray, president of the South African Medical Research Council (SAMRC). "If we rely on the current healthcare system, then the plan is doomed." On Tuesday, the government released a statement saying a national committee would oversee the vaccine roll-out in both the public and private sectors.

It did not say when the roll-out would start, how distribution and storage logistics would be managed or identify private companies that would be involved. The health ministry did not reply to an email sent on Monday seeking those details. Experts said they believed big private sector players should already be on board. "Currently there is a single channel of procurement and no clarity on efficient and speedy delivery," said Alex van den Heever, a professor at the Wits School of Governance in Johannesburg. "It is hugely constraining."

Tuesday's government statement said the system would be based on a pre-vaccination registration and appointment system.

Zimbabwe Foreign Minister dies of COVID-19

AP — HARARE, ZIMBABWE

Zimbabwe's Foreign Minister Sibusiso Moyo, who gained prominence in 2017 as the military general who announced the coup against then-president Robert Mugabe on television, has died from COVID-19, the government announced yesterday. He was 61.

Moyo, previously little known to the public, became the face of the coup when he announced that the military had placed Mugabe under house arrest as the military's armored vehicles rolled into the capital, Harare. The coup ended Mugabe's 37-year rule in Zimbabwe and he later died in Sept. 2019.

Moyo was appointed foreign affairs minister after President Emerson Mnangagwa took power with military backing.

Moyo "succumbed to COVID-19 at a local hospital" yesterday, Mnangagwa's spokesman George Charamba said in a statement.

Zimbabwe is experiencing a resurgence of the disease, with record numbers of daily confirmed cases and deaths.

Mnangagwa is today set to bury another Cabinet minister, Ellen Gwaradzimba, who died from COVID-19 last week. Opposition spokeswoman Fadzayi Mahere says she has tested positive for COVID-19 after being released from prison. She was freed after seven days of detention on Monday.



A file photo of Zimbabwe's Foreign Minister Sibusiso Moyo

Jailed journalist Hopewell Chin'ono and other inmates have previously raised concern over crowded prison conditions, which they said encourages COVID-19 transmission among inmates and jail guards.

Harare mayor and opposition official, Jacob Mafume, released from jail this week after a month-long detention, is in isolation after his lawyers said three of his cellmates had died from COVID-19.

Zimbabwe, like many other African countries, initially recorded low numbers of COVID-19 but has recently experienced a spike in cases. There are fears that a new, more infectious variant of the virus arrived from South Africa when scores of thousands of Zimbabweans living in South Africa returned home for the holiday season.

The government has said it is in the process of conducting genetic sequencing to confirm the presence of the variant.

Zimbabwe, whose once robust public health system has deteriorated, has recorded 28,675 cases and 825 deaths on Jan.19, up from the slightly more than 10,000 cases and 277 deaths at the beginning of December, according to government figures.

The 7-day rolling average of daily deaths in Zimbabwe has risen over the past two weeks from 0.06 deaths per 100,000 people on Jan. 5 to 0.26 deaths per 100,000 people on Jan. 19, according to Johns Hopkins University.

The southern African country has not yet received any vaccines. The government has said it expects to get some vaccines through the international COVAX initiative, but it does not have a firm date on when they will be delivered.

Three die in blast at warehouse in western Libya

AP — CAIRO

A fire, followed by an explosion at an ammunition warehouse at a naval academy in western Libya killed three people, including two officers, a Libyan spokesman said yesterday.

It was not clear what caused the overnight blaze at the academy in the town of Janzur, about 24 km west of capital Tripoli, said Masoud Abdal Samad, the spokesman of the Libyan navy. Four people were also wounded in the incident. Samad said the dead included Brig. Gen. Ahmed Ayoub, the head of the academy, and Brig. Gen. Salem Abu Salah, who ran the naval college. The third person who died was not identified.

Video footage showed firefighters and ambulances rushing to the site where a building is engulfed in a huge fire.



Demonstrators argue with policemen during anti-government protests in Tunis, Tunisia, on Tuesday.

Tunisia PM reaches out to protesters

AP — TUNIS

Tunisian youth clashed with police overnight, maintaining their protests and riots over economic difficulties despite efforts by the president and the prime minister to calm tensions.

"Your voice is heard, and your anger is legitimate, and it is my role and the role of the government to work to realise your demands and to make the dream of Tunisia to become true," Prime Minister Hichem Mechichi appealed to the protesters on national television on Tuesday night.

Hours later, dozens of people throwing projectiles and setting barricades on fire faced off with police firing tear gas in the Tunis suburb of Ariana.

"I know that the economic and social situation is a crisis deepened by COVID and the necessary measures that we have taken to preserve the health of Tunisians, and that they (lockdown measures) have limited some personal freedoms such as the freedom of movement," the prime minister said.

"I make a distinction between the peaceful protests and acts of robbery and sabotage," he said, adding that while Tunisia's post-revolution Constitution guarantees the right to protest, his role is to maintain the peace.

Armed men try to storm house of governor in Darfur region

AP — CAIRO

Armed men opened fire overnight, trying to storm the residence of a provincial governor in Sudan's restive Darfur region but were repelled by guards, officials said yesterday.

There were no injuries or damage in the attempted attack on West Darfur Governor Mohammed Abdalla Al Douma's residence in the provincial capital of Genena, but it underscored the heightened tensions in the restive region where a bout of tribal violence has killed around 230 people since last week.

A statement from the governor said the attempted attack sought to create "instability and chaos" in the province. There was no immediate claim of responsibility, and the statement did not say who the attackers were.

A military official, speaking on condition of anonymity because he was not authorized to talk to reporters, said that the attackers opened fire on the heavily fortified residence, prompting the guards to return fire. The exchange lasted for over an hour.

The *Darfur 24* news outlet reported heavy gunfire in Genena's neighbourhood of Gamarek where the governor's residence is located.

Earlier this week, officials from the Sudanese capital of Khartoum visited Genena to discuss the tribal clashes with the governor.

The fighting between members of the Arab Rizeigat tribe and the non-Arab Massalit tribe grew out of a fistfight in Friday in a Genena camp for displaced people. Some 160 people on both sides, including women and children have been killed.

The fighting also led to the displacement of at least 90,000 people, who have taken shelter in schools and government buildings and nearby villages, according to the United Nations.

Authorities in West Darfur imposed a 24-hour curfew in all of the province and authorized military and police to use "all necessary force" to regain order. The central government in Khartoum also deployed security reinforcements.

In South Darfur province, clashes on Monday between the Rizeigat and non-Arab Falata tribe killed around 70 people, according to Governor Mousa Mahdi. The clashes was sparked by the killing of a shepherd in Al Twaiyel village, 85 km south of Nyala, the provincial capital.

Mahdi, who visited the village on Tuesday, vowed to bring to justice those who instigated the violence.

The latest bout of Darfur violence poses a challenge to Sudan's transitional government that has been struggling to end civil war in the country's far-flung areas. It is also a major test to the government's ability to protect civilians in the war-torn region following the end of the joint U.N.-African Union peacekeeping force's mandate in Darfur this month.

Sudan is on a fragile path to democracy after a popular uprising led the military to overthrow longtime autocratic Omar Al Bashir in April 2019, after nearly three decades of rule. A military-civilian government is now in power.

India starts COVID-19 vaccine shipments to neighbours

REUTERS — NEW DELHI

India started delivering coronavirus vaccines to its neighbours yesterday, the foreign ministry said, flagging off a drive to garner goodwill in an often fractious region with the first shipment sent to the tiny Himalayan kingdom of Bhutan.

Bangladesh and Nepal said they expected deliveries on Thursday. The only neighbour absent from India's list apart from China, is Pakistan, which had not requested assistance, according to an Indian government official.

Many low and middle-income countries are relying on India, the world's biggest vaccine maker, for supplies to start COVID-19 immunisation programmes and bring an end to their outbreaks.

"The Pharmacy of the World will deliver to overcome the COVID challenge," Foreign Minister S. Jaishankar said on Twitter, adding the first vaccine lots had reached Bhutan and the Maldives.

His ministry said on Tuesday "supplies under grant assistance" would be shipped to Bangladesh, Nepal, Myanmar and the Seychelles also. Shipments to Sri Lanka, Afghanistan and Mauritius were awaiting regulatory clearances.

> *Many low and middle-income countries are relying on India, the world's biggest vaccine maker, for supplies to start COVID-19 immunisation programmes and bring an end to their outbreaks.*

India authorised two vaccines this month for emergency use at home, one licensed from Oxford University and AstraZeneca and another developed at home by Bharat Biotech in partnership with the state-run Indian Council of Medical Research. Both are manufactured locally.

At least two other vaccines are expected to be authorised by India in the next few months.

India initially will only ship the AstraZeneca vaccine, made by the Serum Institute of India, the world's biggest vaccine maker, which brands the shot as COVISHIELD.

Bangladesh said it expected to receive a gift of two million doses of COVISHIELD from India on Thursday. The country of more than 160 million has yet to start its vaccination programme and has ordered a further 30 million doses of the shot.

Nepal said it has been pledged one million doses free of charge by India.

Pakistan has approved for emergency use the Chinese Sinopharm COVID-19 vaccine and another developed by AstraZeneca and Oxford University, but has not got any supplies yet.

India, which has reported the highest number of coronavirus infections after the United States, has so far vaccinated 786,842 frontline workers after starting the campaign on Saturday, the federal health ministry said yesterday.

The world's second-most populous country reported yesterday 13,823 new cases, taking the total to 10.9 million. The number of deaths from the disease rose by 162 to 152,718, data from the health ministry showed.

The government has urged frontline workers not to refuse the vaccines, after almost all states failed to meet their targets in the first few days of the immunisation drive. Many people have declined to take the shots, especially the Bharat Biotech vaccine whose efficacy data from late-stage trials are not known, fearing side-effects.

In a survey conducted by New Delhi-based online platform LocalCircles, 62% of 17,000 respondents were hesitant to get vaccinated immediately, mainly due to worries over possible adverse reactions.

The government has reported hospitalisation from side effects in only 0.002% of vaccine recipients.



A healthcare worker receives a dose of AstraZeneca's COVISHIELD vaccine at a medical centre in Mumbai, yesterday.

India govt offers to suspend farm reforms

REUTERS — NEW DELHI

India's government yesterday offered to suspend implementation of three new farm laws that have triggered the biggest farmers' protests in years, which farm union leaders said they would now consider calling off.

The cornerstone of the reform, introduced in September, allows private buyers to deal directly with farmers.

Angry farmers, who say that will make India's traditional wholesale markets irrelevant and leave them at the mercy of big retailers and food processors, have camped out on major highways outside New Delhi for more than two months.

Agriculture & Farmers Welfare Minister Narendra Singh Tomar said the government was open to suspending the laws for up to 18 months, during which time representatives of the government and farmers should work to "provide solutions" for the industry.

Bilateral talks have so far failed to break the deadlock - landing Prime Minister Narendra Modi with one of his most significant challenges since he was re-elected in 2019.

The next round of talks is due on tomorrow, and farm leader Dharmendra Malik said the unions would let the government know then if they would accept the offer and call off the protests.

Widodo promises compensation to kin of plane crash victims

AP — JAKARTA

Indonesia's leader yesterday assured relatives of 62 people killed in a Sriwijaya Air plane crash that they will be compensated.

President Joko Widodo visited the command center at Jakarta's international container terminal where tons of plane debris hauled by divers from seafloor were collected for an investigation into what caused the Boeing 737-500 to nosedive into the Java Sea shortly after takeoff from Jakarta on January 9.

He also witnessed the first three relatives of the victims receiving money from the compensation fund.

Sriwijaya Air offered relatives an insurance payout of 1.25 billion rupiah ($89,100), in line with the Indonesian law that stipulates compensation must be offered within 60 days of a crash. In addition, state-owned insurance company Jasa Raharja has provided 50 million rupiah ($3,560) to each family of the victims.

"I assure you that all compensation will be completed immediately for all victims," Widodo said.

A search is still ongoing for the crucial memory unit of the cockpit voice recorder.

The device apparently broke loose from its exterior and officials have said the underwater locator beacons attached to both crash-proof black boxes became dislodged due to the impact.

The flight data recorded was recovered three days after the crash.

The 26-year-old Boeing had been out of service for almost nine months last year because of flight cutbacks caused by the pandemic.

Indonesia's aviation industry grew quickly after the nation's economy was opened following the fall of dictator Suharto in the late 1990s. Safety concerns led the United States and the European Union to ban Indonesian carriers for years, but the bans have since been lifted due to better compliance with international aviation standards.



Snow in Seoul

Women wearing face masks as a measure to prevent contracting coronavirus disease walk under an umbrella as it snows in Seoul, South Korea.

Moon taps former adviser as FM in bid to revive talks with North Korea

REUTERS — SEOUL

South Korea's president yesterday nominated a former national security adviser who was partly blamed for a failed summit between North Korea and the United States in 2019 as the country's next foreign minister.

The nomination of Chung Eui-yong, 74, to replace Kang Kyung-wha as foreign minister was seen as a bid to help revive stalled denuclearisation talks with North Korea, just hours before Joe Biden takes office as the US president.

Chung had sought to mediate between the two countries as President Moon Jae-in's top security adviser, making a surprise announcement on the White House lawn in March 2018 that US President Donald Trump would hold a summit with North Korean leader Kim Jong Un.

But Chung was accused of misleading both sides about the potential for agreement after their second summit in 2019 in Vietnam failed to produce a deal.

The reshuffle came two days after Moon called for Biden to hold dialogue with North Korea to build on progress made by Kim and Trump at their first meeting in Singapore.

Chung's nomination is to "breathe new life into the lineup of diplomats and regroup their forces in time for the inauguration of the Biden administration," a presidential official told reporters.

Kim and Trump agreed in Singapore to foster new relations and work toward complete denuclearisation of the Korean peninsula.

But their Vietnam summit collapsed when Trump rejected Kim's offer to abandon North Korea's main nuclear facility in return for lifting some sanctions, an idea that Moon had trumpeted on hopes for a restart of inter-Korean economic projects.

Former US National Security Adviser John Bolton, in his memoir released last June, said Moon had raised unrealistic expectations for his own "unification" agenda without reflecting on either side's position.

Bolton also cited Chung as sharing Moon's "schizophrenic" comment that Trump had rightly refused Kim's proposal but on the other hand, Kim's willingness to dismantle the Yongbyon facility was a "very meaningful first step" toward "irreversible" denuclearisation.

Chung has said Bolton's accounts were "inaccurate" and "distorted," without elaborating.

After the North blew up a joint liaison office in June, Kim's sister said she had rejected a previously unknown proposal from Moon to send Chung as a special envoy, calling the offer "sinister" and blaming Seoul's "incompetence and irresponsibility" for worsened ties.

South Korea's main opposition party criticised Chung's nomination, saying it reflected Moon's unwillingness to take a new approach to prevent another mediation failure.

A trade expert, Chung spent three years as Moon's security adviser until he retired last July.



South Korea President Moon Jae-in

> *The reshuffle came two days after Moon called for Biden to hold dialogue with North Korea to build on progress made by Kim and Trump at their first meeting in Singapore.*

Thailand govt files defamation case against oppn politician

REUTERS — BANGKOK

Thailand's government yesterday filed a criminal complaint of defaming the monarchy against a banned opposition politician after he criticised the country's COVID-19 vaccine strategy.

The move could mark the highest-profile lese majeste case since a wave of anti-government protests emerged last year and extended to criticism of King Maha Vajiralongkorn over accusations of meddling in politics and taking too much power.

The complaint against Thanathorn Juangroongruangkit under Article 112 of the criminal code came two days after he said the government was too reliant on a company owned by the Crown Property Bureau, which is under the king's personal control, to produce vaccines for Thais. Lese majeste in Thailand punishes defaming or insulting the king by up to 15 years in prison. Government officials who filed the complaint told reporters Thanathorn had defamed the monarchy by linking it to the vaccine strategy.

"Thanathorn distorted facts and caused misunderstanding among people," Suporn Atthawong, a minister in the prime minister's office, told reporters.

"He violated the monarchy, which upset Thai people who love and protect the monarchy." The complaint, which also included a cyber crime accusation of uploading false information, came after Prime Minister Prayuth Chan-ocha, who took power in a 2014 military coup, vowed on Tuesday to prosecute "distorted" information about the vaccine strategy.



A file photo of Future Forward Party leader Thanathorn Juangroongruangkit giving a speech in Bangkok.

"The more you discredit or harass me with legal cases, the clearer my suspicions become," Thanathorn, who was banned from politics for 10 years by a court last year, said in a Facebook post following the government's complaint.

The Progressive Movement, headed by Thanathorn, said earlier there was no insult in his comments at the group's event titled "Royal Vaccine: Who Benefits and Who Doesn't?", broadcast on Facebook Live on Monday. "It's obvious that 112 is being used again as a political tool," Pannika Wanich, Thanathorn's colleague and one of the group's leaders, told Reuters, referring to the law.

Charles Santiago, a Malaysian lawmaker who chairs the Association of Southeast Asian Nations' Parliamentarians for Human Rights, called the move "yet another illustration of the cynical weaponisation of the lese majeste law to stifle any form of criticism".

Government spokeswoman Ratchada Dhanadirek said prosecutions were not politically motivated.

"The government doesn't need to use the law as a political tool to deal with anyone," she told Reuters. "We're focused on urgent economic problems and long-term national recovery." The Progressive Movement was formed after a court last year ruled to dissolve Thanathorn's Future Forward Party, which came in third in 2019 elections held five years after Prayuth's coup. Opposition parties accused Prayuth's junta of designing the elections to ensure he remained in power. Prayuth's pro-military party has said the elections were free and fair.

Beijing steps up COVID-19 curbs as outbreak persists

REUTERS — BEIJING

China's capital Beijing said it will investigate all individuals who entered the city from abroad from December 10 and it shut down a subway station after reporting the biggest daily jump in new COVID-19 cases in more than three weeks.

The measures come amid what has become China's most serious coronavirus outbreak since March 2020 ahead of Lunar New Year holiday season, when hundreds of millions of people travel, raising fears of another major COVID-19 wave that could bring the country back into a debilitating standstill.

The National Health Commission said yesterday a total of 103 new COVID-19 cases were reported on January 19, down from 118 a day earlier. Northeastern Jilin province reported 46 new infections, however, setting another record in daily cases, while Hebei province surrounding Beijing reported 19 new cases.

Reported daily cases in China are currently far lower than in other major countries but the Chinese government is acutely aware of potential wider transmissions due to its dense urban populations and highly developed transport network.

Beijing reported seven new cases, matching the total reported on December 28. Of these, six patients live in the Daxing district and the city's subway operator said it had shut down the Tiangong Yuan metro station located near Daxing patients as part of COVID-19 prevention measures.

> *The measures come amid what has become China's most serious coronavirus outbreak since March 2020 ahead of Lunar New Year holiday season, when hundreds of millions of people travel, raising fears of another major COVID-19 wave that could bring the country back into a debilitating standstill.*

Two Daxing cases reported on January 17 were analysed and are considered to be highly similar to the new, more transmissible strain of the virus that began spreading in Britain, Pang Xinghuo, deputy director of Beijing's Center for Disease Control and Prevention, told a news conference yesterday.

The two cases have no genetic association with previous local and imported cases in Beijing, nor to recent local cases in other Chinese regions, Pang said, adding the source of infection was initially determined to be from overseas.

The ruling Communist Party-backed *Beijing Daily* said the capital's party and government leadership met late on Tuesday and agreed to further tighten monitoring, minimise public gatherings and reduce passenger loads in public transport.

"We estimate that around 1.7 billion passenger trips will be made during the 2021 Lunar New Year travel season, averaging around 40 million per day," Wang Xiuchun, an official at the transport ministry, said at a separate media briefing.

That would be a drop of 40% from 2019, but 10% more than last year's season and two times current levels, she said.

China's week-long Lunar New Year holiday begins on February 11.

People returning home during the Lunar New Year season should have a negative COVID-19 test taken seven days before travelling, Wang Bin, an official at the National Health Commission, said at the briefing.

Concern and confusion over this requirement on social media saw it quickly become the No. 1 trending topic on China's Twitter-like platform Weibo, with 510 million reads by 1300 GMT yesterday.

Authorities in northeast China, where most of the new coronavirus cases are located, have employed a combination of measures including lockdowns, travel curbs and mass testing. Tens of millions have been put into home or centralised quarantine in Hebei, Jilin and Heilongjiang provinces.

Songyuan city in Jilin yesterday ordered a lockdown for the main urban area under its jurisdiction and began mass testing. Harbin, the capital of Heilongjiang, has temporarily shut down businesses and public venues such as gyms, coffee shops, karaokes and religious institutions.

One Communist Party official in a village in Shijiazhuang, capital of Hebei, was suspended for mistreatment of a man who tried to enter the village to buy cigarettes after being told to turn back. The man was tied to a tree and verbally abused under the party official's directions.

China has also stepped up its vaccination campaign, with more than 15 million shots given as of yesterday.

The number of new asymptomatic infections, which China does not classify as confirmed cases, fell to 58 from 91 cases a day earlier. Total confirmed COVID-19 cases in mainland China now stand at 88,557, while the reported death toll remains unchanged at 4,635 – figures much smaller than in other major countries.

The figures exclude cases reported in Hong Kong and Macau, which are Chinese territories but independently report their data. The commission also excludes cases reported in Taiwan, the self-ruled island that China claims as its own.



People wearing face masks commute in a subway station during morning rush hour as coronavirus disease continues to spread, in Beijing, China, yesterday.

China rescuers prepare escape route for trapped gold miners

REUTERS — SHANGHAI

Rescue teams yesterday drilled new holes down a gold mine in China's Shandong province, searching for more survivors after an explosion 10 days ago and preparing an escape passage for a group known to still be alive, state media reported.

A total of 22 workers were trapped underground in the Hushan gold mine on the outskirts of Yantai, on China's eastern coast, following the January 10 blast. Rescuers have managed to deliver supplies to 11 workers, one of whom is in a coma after sustaining a head injury during the explosion.

Another eight of the 11 are in good health, while two are unwell, Shandong's official Qilu Daily newspaper said, citing the rescue headquarters. One more worker who survived is in another section of the mine and believed to be injured, while the whereabouts of the remaining 10 are unclear, it added. China has deployed 16 professional rescue teams and dozens of medical personnel to try to save the miners.

Song Xicheng, the medical rescue team leader, told reporters that more than 80 medical personnel were on standby, including nutritionists, neurosurgeons, trauma specialists and psychologists.

The operation involves drilling 10 channels, with one 711 millimetre-wide hole — intended to serve as an escape route — wide enough to lift out the miners, the *People's Daily* said. Rescuers could not say when this hole would be finished but admitted they were in a race against time. An air ventilation shaft that rescuers also want to use to pull the miners to safety has been cleared to a depth of 350 metres, the report said. The miners were working at a depth of more than 600 metres at the time of the explosion.

A channel previously used to send down supplies has been replaced because water inside was posing a threat to those underground, while another hole is being drilled to search for more signs of life, *Beijing Evening News* reported.

Pakistan tests medium-range Shaheen-III missile

AP — ISLAMABAD

Pakistan yesterday successfully test-fired a surface-to-surface ballistic missile with a range of 2,750km, the military said.

In a statement, it said the launch of the medium-range Shaheen-III missile was aimed at "re-validating various design and technical parameters of the weapon system." The statement didn't say whether the missile was capable of carrying nuclear warheads, although Pakistan has previously said the missile had such a capability.

The military did not say where the missile was fired from, but such tests are often conducted by Pakistan in the Arabian sea.

President Asrif Alvi and Prime Minister Imran Khan congratulated scientists and the military over the successful missile test.



Supporters of former President Donald Trump hold a rally ahead of the inauguration of President-elect Joe Biden, in Tokyo yesterday.

Japanese fans of Trump rally in Tokyo ahead of Biden inauguration

REUTERS — TOKYO

A small group of Japanese fans of Donald Trump took to the streets of Tokyo yesterday, shouting support for the outgoing United States president hours before his successor Joe Biden is sworn into office.

About 120 people joined the march in central Tokyo, with participants waving American and Japanese flags and holding banners claiming Trump was "the true winner" of the November 3 election.

Democrat Biden won the election with 306 Electoral College votes to Trump's 232.

"We wanted to show that many people in Japan are supporting President Trump," rally organiser Naota Kobayashi said.

"We all chanted together so that our voice can fly over the Pacific Ocean and reach the US."

> *About 120 people joined the march in central Tokyo, with participants waving American and Japanese flags and holding banners claiming Trump was "the true winner" of the November 3 election.*

Some Trump fans in Japan are drawn to his hard-line stance against regional rival China.

Others like Kobayashi are part of conservative Christian sects, while still others are adherents to QAnon — a conspiracy theory that posits that Trump is secretly fighting a global cabal of child predators that includes prominent Democrats, Hollywood elites and "deep state" allies.

Tokyo has seen a series of pro-Trump demonstrations since the election, with participants waving his campaign banners and wearing his signature red caps.

Yesterday's march was smaller than some previous events.

Japan's former Prime Minister Shinzo Abe, who resigned last August, forged close ties with Trump, playing golf and engaging in frequent phone calls and meetings.

Biden became the 46th US president at a ceremony in Washington that has been greatly scaled back due to both coronavirus precautions and security concerns following the January 6 assault on the US Capitol by supporters of Trump.

More stores shutter in Ginza Six mall in Tokyo

REUTERS — TOKYO

More than a dozen stores closed in Tokyo's high-end Ginza Six mall this week as the coronavirus pandemic kept big-spending foreign tourists and other luxury shoppers away from an upscale shopping district famous for brand-name boutiques.

Until the pandemic closed Japan off to most foreign visitors last year, the retail complex, which opened in 2017 with around 240 stores, was a symbol of Ginza's revival as a popular destination for tourists, especially those from China descending on stores by the busload.

Ginza Six said yesterday that around 15 stores, including Italian fashion house Moschino, cosmetics brands Shiseido and Shu Uemura, as well as Salon des Parfums selling Annick Goutal and other fragrance brands, have shut in the past few days.

While Japan has not seen COVID-19 outbreaks on the scale of some other major economies such as the United States and Britain, infections have been rising steadily and the government declared a second state of emergency earlier this month.

The continued travel ban, particularly the absence of Chinese tourists during next month's Lunar New Year holiday for a second year running, is also expected to deal a blow to Tokyo retailers, said Atsumi Gamou, head of Japan Tourism Agency.

"Retailers which were mainly focused on duty-free and other products popular with inbound tourists are struggling hard," he told reporters yesterday.

"It's extremely difficult, to have an entry ban on tourists at a time when Chinese visitors would ordinarily be coming for Lunar New Year holidays."

The number of Chinese visitors had risen more than six-fold in the seven years to 2019. They also spent more than others, accounting for 30% of tourists but 37% of tourist spending even after a Chinese government crackdown on import and re-sale of luxury goods dampened their frantic shopping sprees for Japanese electronics and cosmetics dubbed "bakugai", or "explosive buying", by Japan's media.

Ginza Six has catered heavily to foreign visitors, with a large service centre offering tax refund processing and luggage storage in addition to a dedicated bus bay.



Event staff wearing protective masks and face shields wait for visitors at an exhibition centre, in Tokyo yesterday.

South Korea may get more vaccines from Novavax

REUTERS — SEOUL

South Korea may secure additional coronavirus vaccines for 20 million people from US drugmaker Novavax Inc, President Moon Jae-in said, according to a statement from the presidential office yesterday.

Novavax entered into a development and supply agreement for its vaccine with South Korea's SK bioscience Co last year, according to a statement in August.

Moon visited SK bioscience's work site yesterday and said that the agreement between Novavax and SK bioscience "raised the possibility of securing vaccines for an additional 20 million people," the statement said.

That is in addition to the vaccines that the South Korean government has secured so far.

The country has secured 106 million doses to allow for coverage of 56 million people, more than the 52 million residents of the country, Korea Disease Control and Prevention Agency (KDCA) director Jeong Eun-kyeong said earlier this month.

Pfizer vaccine effective against UK variant: Study

REUTERS — FRANKFURT

The antibodies in the blood of the volunteers given the vaccine, known as Comirnaty, or BNT162b2, neutralised the pseudovirus as effectively as the older coronavirus version that the product was initially designed for.

The COVID-19 vaccine developed by Pfizer and BioNTech is likely to protect against a more infectious variant of the virus discovered in Britain which has spread around the world, according to results of further lab tests released yesterday.

The encouraging results from an analysis of blood of participants in trials are based on more extensive analysis than those released by the US drug-maker last week.

Last week, Pfizer said a similar laboratory study showed the vaccine was effective against one key mutation, called N501Y, found in two highly transmissible new variants spreading in Britain and South Africa.

The latest study, posted on bioRxiv.org but not yet peer reviewed, was conducted on a synthetic virus with 10 mutations that are characteristic of the variant known as B117 identified in Britain.

Among the 11 authors of the study are Ugur Sahin and Oezlem Tuereci, co-founders of BioNTech. Sahin is chief executive and his wife Tuereci is chief medical officer.

It provides further hope as record numbers of daily deaths from COVID-19 are reported in Britain, which is believed to be driven by the more transmissible variant. It also means vaccine development would for now not have to start all over again.

But the virus needs to be continuously monitored to check that changes maintain protection by vaccines, the study said.

For the test, blood samples drawn from 16 vaccinated participants in prior clinical trials were exposed to a synthetic virus called pseudovirus which was engineered to have the same surface proteins as B117, as characterised by 10 hallmark mutations.

The antibodies in the blood of the volunteers given the vaccine, known as Comirnaty, or BNT162b2, neutralised the pseudovirus as effectively as the older coronavirus version that the product was initially designed for.

Experts said the findings were reassuring and not surprising and results from similar studies on the South African variant would be keenly watched.

"This makes it very unlikely that the UK variant will escape from the protection provided by the vaccine," said Jonathan Stoye, a specialist in virus science at Britain's Francis Crick Institute. "It will be interesting to carry out the same experiments with the South African variant."

BioNTech has said it plans to publish a more detailed analysis of the likely effect of its vaccine on the South African variant within a few days.

The world is pinning its hopes on vaccines to rein in the coronavirus, first detected in the central Chinese city of Wuhan at the end of 2019, as many countries impose tighter and longer lockdowns to try to bring the pandemic under control.

The variants are said by scientists to be more transmissible than previously dominant ones, but they are not thought to cause more serious illness.

"The South African strain has been detected in the UK — albeit currently in small numbers — but does seem to be increasing in recent weeks," said Paul Hunter, a professor in medicine at Britain's University of East Anglia.

"Variants with this mutation could reduce vaccine efficacy, though most likely all current vaccines would still be highly effective."

Experts have called for continued testing to establish whether vaccines will protect people as the virus mutates. COVID-19 has killed more than 2 million people worldwide.

Preparation for potential COVID-19 vaccine strain changes would be "prudent", the study said on Wednesday.

The Pfizer/BioNTech COVID-19 vaccine and the one from Moderna Inc, which both use synthetic messenger RNA technology, or mRNA, can be quickly adapted to address new mutations in the coronavirus if necessary. Scientists have suggested the changes could be made in as little as six weeks.

AstraZeneca, Moderna and CureVac are also testing whether their respective shots will protect against the fast-spreading variants. They have not released the results of those tests.



People queue to receive the COVID-19 vaccine, at the St Charles Centre for Health and Wellbeing, in London yesterday.

Kremlin critic Navalny held in infamous Moscow jail

REUTERS — MOSCOW

Kremlin foe Alexei Navalny, detained on Sunday after flying back to Russia for the first time after being poisoned with a nerve agent, is spending his days under strict control in a VIP cell inside one of Moscow's most infamous jails.

The prison, called Matrosskaya Tishina or Sailor's Silence, occupies a block in Moscow's north-east and has housed high-ranking prisoners the authorities wanted to cut off from the outside world since the Soviet era.

"I'd read about it (the prison) in books and now I'm here," Navalny quipped in an Instagram post.

Mikhail Khodorkovsky, once Russia's richest man, who spent four years in the jail as its highest profile prisoner of the Putin era, tweeted that Navalny would find it harsh: "It's tough in the beginning. And not much easier after. You can be killed at any minute."

Navalny, held for now on a 30 day pre-trial detention order for failing to check in with parole authorities over a suspended prison sentence in a fraud case he says was trumped up, is occupying a three-person VIP cell.

He will be held alone for at least two weeks due to COVID-19 precautions, said Alexei Melnikov, a member of Moscow's Public Monitoring Commission which observes treatment of prisoners.

Melnikov, who visited Navalny on Monday night, said his cell had a fridge, an electric kettle, TV and hot water.

Marina Litvinovich, another member of the monitoring commission, said the prison was famed for its control of inmates.

Navalny was being held on an upper floor in a section informally supervised by Russia's intelligence services.

"The motto of this central Kremlin prison is isolation from information. It's about control and isolation," she said. She said lawyers sometimes found it hard to access clients there and that medical attention was sometimes denied to those who refused to cooperate with investigations.

Navalny's mother, Ludmila, complained on Wednesday that prison officials had told her they were unable to accept letters for her son for the time being due to technical problems.

UK hospitals like war zones as death toll nears 92,000

REUTERS — LONDON

Some British hospitals look like war zones with doctors struggling to cope with an influx of patients infected with COVID-19, the government's top scientific adviser said, as the death toll rose by a record daily amount towards 100,000.

The United Kingdom's official death toll is 91,470 — Europe's worst figure and the world's fifth worst after the United States, Brazil, India and Mexico. Deaths rose by a record on Tuesday.

As hospital admissions soared, the British government's chief scientific adviser, Patrick Vallance, said there was enormous pressure on the National Health Service with doctors and nurses battling to give people sufficient care.

"It may not look like it when you go for a walk in the park, but when you go into a hospital, this is very, very bad at the moment with enormous pressure and in some cases it looks like a war zone in terms of the things that people are having to deal with," Vallance told Sky.

"There have been huge numbers of cases, the NHS is under enormous pressure at the moment," said Vallance, formerly head of research at GlaxoSmithKline and a professor of medicine at University College London.

Home Secretary Priti Patel said that the death numbers were horrendous but that it was not the time to look back at the government's possible mismanagement of the crisis.

Prime Minister Boris Johnson has been criticised for reacting too slowly to the crisis, failing to supply sufficient protective equipment and for bungling the testing system, although the United Kingdom has been swift to roll out a vaccine.

The British government reported a record rise in deaths on Tuesday with 1,610 people dying within 28 days of a positive coronavirus test. Currently 37,946 people are in hospital with COVID, 3,916 of them on ventilation.

There have been calls for a public inquiry from some doctors and bereaved families into the handling of the crisis, but Johnson has resisted this.

"Every single death is deeply tragic," Patel told LBC when asked why the death toll was so large. "There's no one factor as to why we have such a horrendous and tragic death rate."

"I don't think this is the time to talk about mismanagement," Patel said when asked by the BBC if the government had mismanaged the crisis.

Ministers say that while they have not got everything right, they were making decisions at speed in the worst public health crisis for a century and that they have learned from mistakes and followed scientific advice.

Loosening the UK lockdown too soon, though, would be a mistake, Vallance said.

"The lesson is every time you release it too quickly you get an upswing and you can see that right across the world," he said.

Gas explosion rips through building in Madrid, 4 dead

AP — MADRID

A powerful explosion apparently caused by a gas leak ripped the facade off a residential building in central Madrid yesterday, killing four people and injuring at least 11 more.

The first images and footage shared on social media showed a tower of smoke coming out from the six-storey building and rubble scattered in Toledo Street, near the city centre. Emergency crews could be seen aiding several people on the ground.

Mayor José Luis Martínez Almeida earlier confirmed the two deaths and two injuries to reporters as he visited the site and said that the initial assessment was that the blast was caused by a gas leak. The Madrid general vicar, Avelino Revilla, told Spain's TVE that one person linked to the Catholic church occupying part of the building was still missing.

A fire that started inside the building is making more difficult for rescuers and firefighters to look for any other possible survivors, Martínez Almeida said.

A nearby nursing home was evacuated although no injuries were initially reported among the residents, Martínez Almeida said. He said the residents were being taken to a hotel across the street.

Martínez Almeida also said that some mild damage had been identified in a nearby school. Spain's public broadcaster, TVE, initially said the school was thought to have been empty, but the mayor later said that there were people there but they suffered no more than "scratches."

Leire Reparaz, an area resident, told The Associated Press that she heard a loud explosion some minutes before 3pm local when she was heading to her home near the Puerta de Toledo, a local landmark.

"We didn't know where the sound came from. We all thought it was from the school. We went up the stairs to the top of our building and we could see the structure of the building and lots of grey smoke," the 24-year-old Madrid resident said.



Smoke rises from a damaged building after an explosion in Madrid downtown, in Spain, yesterday.

Former royal staff to shed light on Meghan letter

AP — LONDON

A lawyer for the publisher of the *Daily Mail* newspaper said yesterday that the Duchess of Sussex had no reasonable expectation of privacy for a letter she sent to her estranged father after her marriage to Prince Harry.

Arguing against the duchess' privacy-infringement claim, attorney Antony White said "it's to be inferred that the letter was written and sent by the claimant with a view to it being disclosed to third parties and read by the public."

He said ex-employees of Meghan and Harry would be able to shed light on the creation of the letter when the case comes to trial.

The former Meghan Markle, 39, is suing publisher Associated Newspapers for invasion of privacy and copyright infringement over five February 2019 articles in the *Mail on Sunday* and on the MailOnline website, which published portions of a handwritten letter to her father, Thomas Markle, after her 2018 wedding to Harry, a grandson of Queen Elizabeth II.

Meghan's lawyer, Justin Rushbrooke, argued on Tuesday that the publisher had "no real prospect" of winning because "it's a very straightforward case about the unlawful publication of a private letter."

But the defence argues Meghan wrote the letter as part of a media strategy to rebut a negative view conveyed by her father, and with help from the communications team in the royal couple's Kensington Palace office.

"Why was the Kensington Palace communications team involved at all in the wording of the letter if it was a wholly private letter?" White said.

Lawyers representing four former Kensington Palace staffers, including ex-communications secretary Jason Knauf, said in a letter submitted to the court that "one or more of our clients" would be able to provide insight on "whether or not the claimant anticipated that the letter might come into the public domain," and whether or not Meghan "directly or indirectly provided private information" to the authors of a book about her and Harry, called *Finding Freedom*.

Meghan married Harry at Windsor Castle in May 2018. Their son, Archie, was born the following year.

Six suspected militants killed in Chechnya

AP — MOSCOW

Chechnya's Kremlin-backed leader said yesterday that his forces have killed six suspected militants, including a warlord accused of organizing a 2011 suicide attack at a Moscow airport.

Ramzan Kadyrov, the regional leader of Chechnya, said that troops under his command had tracked down the suspects in the village of Katar-Yurt and killed all of them on the spot. Kadyrov claimed that the raid marked the elimination of the last group of militants that remained in the region.

Kremlin spokesman Dmitry Peskov said that Russian President Vladimir Putin called to congratulate Kadyrov, who personally took part in the security sweep.

Kadyrov said that those killed included warlord Aslan Byutukayev, whom Russian authorities accused of involvement in the January 2011 suicide bombing at the arrivals area of Moscow's Domodedovo airport that killed 37. Byutukayev appeared in a video alongside top Chechen warlord Doku Umarov and the suicide bomber.

Umarov, who also claimed responsibility for several other attacks in Russia, was killed in a security raid in 2013.

After Umarov's death, Byutukayev became the leader of militants in Chechnya and swore allegiance to the Islamic State group.

The Kremlin has relied on Kadyrov to stabilize Chechnya after two separatist wars in the 1990s and the early 2000s and has provided generous subsidies to help rebuild the region.

EU hails 'new dawn' for ties with US under Biden

AP — BRUSSELS

European Commission President Ursula von der Leyen hailed Biden's arrival as "resounding proof that, once again after four long years, Europe has a friend in the White House".



The European Union's top officials breathed a sigh of relief yesterday that Joe Biden will be taking over as president of the United States, but they warned that the world has changed after four years of Donald Trump and that trans-Atlantic ties will be different in the future.

"This new dawn in America is the moment we've been awaiting for so long," European Commission President Ursula von der Leyen **(pictured)** said, hailing Biden's arrival as "resounding proof that, once again after four long years, Europe has a friend in the White House."

"The United States are back, and Europe stands ready to reconnect with an old and trusted partner to breathe new life into our cherished alliance," she told EU lawmakers, hours before Biden was to be sworn in at his inauguration ceremony in Washington.

European Council President Charles Michel, who chairs summits between the EU's 27 heads of state and government, said that trans-Atlantic relations have "greatly suffered in the last four years. In these years, the world has grown more complex, less stable and less predictable."

"We have our differences and they will not magically disappear. America seems to have changed, and how it's perceived in Europe and the rest of the world has also changed," said Michel, whose open criticism of the Trump era contrasted starkly with the silence that mostly reigned in Europe while the Republican leader was in the White House.

This change, Michel said, means "that we Europeans (must) take our fate firmly into our own hands, to defend our interests and promote our values," and he underlined that "the EU chooses its course and does not wait for permission to take its own decisions."

The Europeans have invited Biden to a summit, quite probably in Brussels, in parallel with a top-level Nato meeting as soon as he's ready. Michel said the EU's priority is to tackle the coronavirus pandemic and climate change, rebuild the global economy and boost security ties with Washington.

In Germany, President Frank-Walter Steinmeier issued a video statement on his website as well as Instagram and Facebook before the inauguration, calling it a "good day for democracy."

He said that the US had "faced tremendous challenges and endured."

"Despite the attempts to tear at America's institutional fabric, election workers and governors, the judiciary and Congress have proven strong," he said. "I am greatly relieved that, today, Joe Biden is being sworn in as president and will be moving into the White House. I know many people in Germany share this feeling."

With Biden and incoming Vice-President Kamala Harris, Steinmeier said there was new hope that the US would again be a "vital partner" internationally to tackle issues like the coronavirus pandemic, climate change, security issues including arms control and disarmament, and multiple conflicts.

"When our views do differ, such differences of opinion will not divide us, but should rather spur us on to find joint solutions," he said. "Despite all the joy we feel today, we must not forget that even the most powerful democracy in the world has been seduced by populism.

"We must work resolutely to counter polarisation, protect and strengthen the public square in our democracies, and shape our policies on the basis of reason and facts."

In Poland, where the right-wing government has been on very good terms with the Trump administration, Prime Minister Mateusz Morawiecki, said that he expects cooperation with Biden and his team to develop positively.

"We have many points in common, joint projects linked to the Three Seas Initiative (in central and eastern Europe) where we are developing many infrastructure connections," Morawiecki told an online news conference.

He also mentioned the energy sector, where Poland is importing substantial quantities of US liquefied gas, LNG, and security cooperation around Nato's borders with Russia, saying that "for these reasons and also due to the security cohesion, this cooperation will be developing well, or even very well."

Russia files Sputnik V registration in Europe

REUTERS — MOSCOW

Russia's sovereign wealth fund RDIF has filed for registration of the Sputnik V COVID-19 vaccine in the European Union and expects it to be reviewed in February, as Moscow seeks to speed up its availability worldwide.

The official account promoting the vaccine tweeted the latest development yesterday, moving it a step closer for approval as countries across the world plan massive vaccine rollouts to stem the pandemic.

The Sputnik V vaccine has been approved in Argentina, Belarus, Serbia and several other countries.

The Sputnik V and European Medical Agency (EMA) teams held a scientific review of the vaccine on Tuesday, the Sputnik V account said, adding the EMA will take a decision on the authorization of the vaccine based on the reviews.

While vaccines from Pfizer Inc and Moderna Inc have started rolling out in several countries, experts have said multiple vaccines will be necessary to control the pandemic that has killed over two million people globally.

Mexico, which is seeing a reduction in deliveries of COVID-19 vaccine doses from Pfizer Inc, has said it aimed to make up for the shortfall with doses from other providers.

Russia would submit a formal application to the European Union in February for approval of its Sputnik V coronavirus vaccine, RDIF chief Kirill Dmitriev had said in an interview last week.



Aurora Borealis in Finland

The Aurora Borealis (Northern Lights) is seen in the sky over Muonio in Lapland, Finland, on Tuesday.

EU reports nearly 300,000 excess deaths in eight months of 2020

REUTERS — BRUSSELS

Around 297,500 more people died in the European Union between March and October last year compared with the same period in 2016 to 2019, according to EU data published yesterday.

March 2020 was when the coronavirus pandemic began spreading across most of Europe and October is the last month for which data for all 27 EU member states are available.

Statistics from Eurostat showed that across the bloc, excess mortality — the increase in total number of deaths, from any cause, compared to that of previous years — peaked during the early rise of COVID-19 in April 2020 at 24.9 percent.

Summer lulls began at different times across the region, before numbers rose again in autumn, and still further in November in all member states with available data.

Poland led the excess mortality at 97.2 percent in November, followed by Bulgaria and Slovenia with 94.5 percent and 91.4 percent respectively.

Denmark, Finland and Estonia saw the smallest number of excess deaths in November, with 5.5 percent, 5.6 percent and 6.4 percent respectively.

With 0.7 percent less excess deaths, Norway — not an EU member state — was the only country Eurostat covered which did not see the number rise in November.

Italy plans legal action against Pfizer over vaccine delays

REUTERS — ROME

Italy is considering legal action against Pfizer Inc after the US drugmaker announced a further cut in coronavirus vaccine deliveries, the country's COVID-19 special commissioner Domenico Arcuri said.

Pfizer is facing criticism across Europe over its surprise move to temporarily delay vaccine shipments to countries that fear disruptions could throw their inoculation campaigns into disarray.

The company told Italy last week that it was cutting its deliveries by 29 percent. On Tuesday, it said it was not in the position to make up the 29 percent shortfall next week and that it was planning a further "slight reduction" in deliveries, Arcuri said.

"As a result, we discussed what action to take to protect Italian citizens and their health in all civil and criminal venues," Arcuri said in a statement late on Tuesday.

"It was unanimously decided that these actions will be taken starting in the next few days."

He did not elaborate.

The Pfizer vaccine requires two injections, given around 21 days apart, to prime the immune system well enough to fight off the coronavirus.

Pfizer's move was having a serious impact on vaccination plans drawn up by local authorities, the governor of the northern Emilia Romagna region said.

"Due to the reduction in doses, many regions have been forced to slow down or even suspend new vaccinations to ensure administration of the second dose to those who had already received the first," Stefano Bonaccini told *Reuters* in an email.

A spokeswoman for Pfizer declined to comment yesterday over Italy's legal threat and criticism regarding delivery delays beyond its statement on Friday about supply cuts.

The drugmaker said last week it was temporarily slowing supplies of its coronavirus vaccine to Europe to make manufacturing changes that would boost output.

Pfizer said the changes would "provide a significant increase in doses in late February and March".

According to an Italian source, Rome is now trying to assess whether Pfizer is acting under force majeure, or circumstances beyond its control.

Germany irked at short-notice

REUTERS — BERLIN

Germany's health minister said COVID-19 vaccine delivery delays that were announced at short notice by Pfizer and its German partner Biotech were annoying and were making Germany's vaccine campaign planning challenging.

"We can only vaccinate with that which has been delivered," Jens Spahn said.

Pfizer informed the European Union that it would temporarily reduce its deliveries of a COVID-19 vaccine to member states due to construction work at its plant in the Belgian town of Puurs, the German health ministry said on Friday.

Poland: Judge, govt critic refuse to appear before prosecutor

REUTERS — WARSAW

A Polish judge critical of the ruling nationalists' judiciary reforms refused to appear for questioning at a prosecutor's office yesterday, the latest twist in a case that has come to symbolise the conflict between the government and some judges.

Poland has been embroiled in a long-running dispute with the European Union over the rule of law, and the removal of Judge Igor Tuleya's immunity from prosecution in November by a disciplinary chamber the bloc says is not independent underlined the rift.

He is facing disciplinary proceedings over allowing media access to a 2017 court hearing at which he ruled on a sensitive case regarding the lawfulness of a parliamentary vote on the budget criticised for not having opposition politicians present.

"I cannot appear voluntarily for questioning because I would be contradicting my own words," Tuleya told cheering supporters, some holding banners with slogans such as "Freedom for Polish judges".



Supporter of Judge Igor Tuleya stands with a banner in front of the National Public Prosecutor's Office in Warsaw, Poland, yesterday.

"The accusation is completely false... if I went into the prosecutor's office I would be assessing the actions of the so-called disciplinary chamber as lawful, but they aren't," he added.

Cabinet minister Michal Wojcik, who formerly served as deputy justice minister, criticised Tuleya's refusal to appear before the prosecutor.

"This shows that Judge Tuleya puts himself above society," he told *Reuters* by text message. "It's a kind of caste thinking that some people aren't bound by the law."

Tuleya is a well known opponent of judicial reforms carried out by the ruling Law and Justice (PiS) party, which critics say aim to increase political control over the courts.

PiS says the reforms are necessary to improve the efficiency of the judiciary and remove a residue of communist influence from the system.

Call for action to protect fragile ceasefire in eastern Ukraine

REUTERS – KIEV

More steps are needed to protect a fragile ceasefire in eastern Ukraine as violations are rising, Swedish Foreign Minister Ann Linde said during a trip to the region yesterday.

Linde was on her first visit to Ukraine since taking over as the rotating head of the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE), which monitors the conflict in the Donbass region between Ukraine and Russian-backed forces.

President Volodymyr Zelenskiy was elected in 2019 on a pledge to end the conflict, which has killed 14,000 people since 2014 and poisoned relations between Kiev and Moscow.

Both sides agreed to a ceasefire in July last year, though there are still military and civilian casualties. A Ukrainian soldier was killed during shelling last week.

"There has been a significant reduction in ceasefire violations since the 27th of July when the ceasefire was agreed upon," Linde said by phone.

"The next step is to try to see if we can find more steps of keeping the ceasefire. Right now it's a little bit fragile," she added. "The incidents are going up."

Linde said work should continue in the so-called 'Normandy' format of talks, between Ukraine, Russia, France and Germany. She met Zelenskiy and Ukraine's Foreign Minister Dmytro Kuleba this week.

Ukraine suggested in November that the OSCE send 1,500 police to Donbass as a precursor to being able to hold elections in the region. Asked whether the proposal was discussed this week, Linde said:

"There are several proposals on the table, and we are taking all of them seriously, and hopefully some can go forward."

After Moscow's annexation of the Crimea peninsula in 2014, pro-Russian separatists rose up across a belt of eastern Ukraine. Kyiv blames Moscow for engineering the uprising, and providing troops and arms that led to its escalation into a full-blown war. Moscow denies the accusation.

Oxygen thefts mount in Mexico; virus deaths rise

AP — MEXICO CITY

Thefts of oxygen mounted as Mexico reported its highest daily death toll since the coronavirus pandemic began, with 1,584 deaths confirmed Tuesday. There was also a near-record one-day rise in new virus cases of 18,894.

The Mexican Social Security Institute reported that an armed man burst into a government hospital in northern Sonora state around noon Tuesday and stole seven oxygen tanks.

The institute said the man pointed a gun at a hospital employee, demanded to know where the oxygen was kept, and took four empty cannisters and three full ones. Authorities in the city of Navajoa are looking for the man and another suspect who drove off in a car carrying the tanks.

Also on Tuesday, police in the town of Tultepec, just north of Mexico City, chased down a small freight truck carrying 44 oxygen tanks, after the truck was reported stolen. Two suspects were detained at the scene.

The thefts came as authorities launched a campaign urging people to return rented oxygen tanks they no longer need, saying enormous demand amid the pandemic has created a shortage of the cylinders.

The thefts came as authorities launched a campaign urging people to return rented oxygen tanks they no longer need, saying enormous demand amid the pandemic has created a shortage of the cylinders.

The consumer affairs agency launched an online campaign under the slogan "Return Your Tank, For The Love of Life."

With hospitals in Mexico City and other states overwhelmed by a wave of COVID-19 cases, many families have turned to treating their relatives at home with supplementary oxygen, creating spot shortages of tanks and oxygen for refills.

But once patients recover, the agency said, many people simply keep the cannisters just in case someone else falls ill.

"By doing this they are depriving other patients of something they need at a given moment, and cannot get," the agency said.

Even those who have their own tanks must often wait in long lines and wait hours to get oxygen tanks filled.

Mexico has seen almost 1.67 million confirmed coronavirus infections and almost 143,000 test-confirmed deaths related to COVID-19. With the country's extremely low testing rate, official estimates suggest the real death toll is closer to 195,000.

The country's Defense Department, meanwhile, said four doses of coronavirus vaccine were stolen at a public hospital in Cuernavaca, south of Mexico City, probably by a hospital employee or with the aid of an employee.

"This theft was able to be carried out through the dishonesty and greed of a member of the hospital's vaccination staff," the department said in a statement.

The army has been given responsibility for transporting and guarding vaccines in Mexico, but a private security firm was apparently in charge inside the hospital.

Before Tuesday, Mexico had received only about 750,000 doses of the Pfizer vaccine, and several people have been sanctioned for cutting lines to get doses. Mexico's total amount so far is enough to vaccinate about half of the country's 750,000 front-line medical personnel, all of whom will need two doses.



Mexico's Health Minister Jorge Alcocer gives a speech next to Finance Minister Arturo Herrera after the landing of a plane carrying a batch of doses of COVID-19 vaccine at Benito Juarez International Airport, in Mexico City, on Tuesday.

US plans full review of approach to North Korea: Blinken

REUTERS — WASHINGTON

President-elect Joe Biden's nominee for secretary of state, Antony Blinken, said on Tuesday the incoming administration planned a full review of the US approach to North Korea to look at ways to increase pressure on the country to come to the negotiating table over its nuclear weapons.

At the same time, the United States would also look at providing humanitarian help to North Korea if needed, Blinken said.

"We do want to make sure that in anything we do, we have an eye on the humanitarian side of the equation, not just on the security side of the equation," he told his Senate confirmation hearing.

Asked by Democratic Senator Ed Markey whether he would, with the ultimate aim of North Korea denuclearizing, support a "phased agreement" that offered tailored sanctions relief to Pyongyang in return for a verifiable freeze in its weapons programs, Blinken replied:

"I think we have to review, and we intend to review, the entire approach and policy toward North Korea, because this is a hard problem that has plagued administration after administration. And it's a problem that has not gotten better — in fact, it's gotten worse."

He said the aim of the review would be to "look at what options we have, and what can be effective in terms of increasing pressure on North Korea to come to the negotiating table, as well as what other diplomatic initiatives may be possible."

Blinken said this would start with consulting closely with allies and partners, particularly with South Korea and Japan.

Biden's senior official for Asia policy, Kurt Campbell, has said the administration would have to make an early decision on its approach and not repeat the Obama-era delay that led to "provocative" steps by Pyongyang that prevented engagement.

Campbell had some praise for outgoing President Donald Trump's unprecedented summits with North Korean President Kim Jong Un, even though no progress was made in persuading Kim to give up his nuclear weapons.

Last week, Kim called for more advanced nuclear weapons and called the United States "our biggest enemy," underlining the challenge to Biden, who took office yesterday.

Brazil battles Chinese red tape to get vaccine ingredients

REUTERS — BRASILIA

Brazil is battling bureaucracy in China to free up exports of active ingredients for vaccines developed by AstraZeneca and Sinovac Biotech, three people familiar with talks said, without which an immunization push could soon slow to a trickle.

More Brazilian states gave their first COVID-19 vaccinations on Tuesday, as the government distributed some 6 million ready doses of the vaccine from China's Sinovac after its approval on Sunday for emergency use.

However the sources, who spoke anonymously due to diplomatic sensitivities, said red tape in China was holding back supplies needed for Brazil to finish and distribute millions more doses from its own biomedical facilities.

"It's a new situation, and there's a bureaucratic problem. The Chinese are still defining procedures, which takes time," one source said. "There's also a relative scarcity of supplies."



Maria Rita da Silva, 107, a Guarani indigenous woman is helped to walk after receiving the first dose of the CoronaVac, Sinovac's vaccine in her village at Tenonde Pora, in Sao Paulo, Brazil, yesterday.

The person said Brazil was not the only country struggling with export hurdles. "It's not targeted at us." Right-wing Brazilian President Jair Bolsonaro has repeatedly antagonized China. Recently, he disparaged the Sinovac shot based on its "origins."

Brazil's federally funded Fiocruz biomedical center said it would not be able to deliver finished doses of the AstraZeneca shot until March as it waits for the first shipment of active ingredients from China. The institute had been aiming for 1 million doses by mid-February.

A British government minister on Monday flagged concerns about a "lumpy" manufacturing process slowing the rollout of vaccines from AstraZeneca and Pfizer in the United Kingdom.

AstraZeneca has arranged for substantial manufacturing of its vaccine's active ingredients in China. Last month, Brazilian health inspectors visited and approved the facilities of Chinese firm WuXi Biologics to export the ingredients of the AstraZeneca shot for finishing in Brazil.

Cash-strapped Venezuela cannot join COVAX vaccine program: PAHO

REUTERS — MEXICO CITY/CARACAS

The timeline has closed for Venezuela to join the COVAX facility for COVID-19 vaccines, an official with the Pan American Health Organization (PAHO) said on Tuesday, though the country was still negotiating for doses through other means.

Venezuela, where pandemic lockdowns aggravated an already-severe economic crisis, expressed interest in joining COVAX, according Ciro Ugarte, director of health emergencies for PAHO, the regional arm of the World Health Organization (WHO).

"However, this is not possible due to lack of resources and timely payments," Ugarte told a virtual press conference. "The time to be able to join the COVAX mechanism has passed."

The COVAX mechanism, coordinated by WHO and the GAVI vaccines alliance to support poorer countries, is funded by donor countries, multilateral lenders such as the World Bank, and private charities. COVAX has secured deals for 2 billion vaccine doses to be deployed this year, PAHO officials said.

Venezuelan President Nicolas Maduro has said the country will receive 10 million doses of the Russian Sputnik V vaccine.

Lawyers for Venezuela's central bank said the country has been unable to make payments required to participate in COVAX because sanctions have left funds frozen in foreign bank accounts.

Last week, they said opposition leader Juan Guaido had rejected a plan under which funds held in London could pay its contribution to COVAX, which Guaido allies deny.

Being locked out of COVAX will leave Venezuela dependent on the Russian vaccine at a time when health services are collapsing, and the economic crisis has raised doubt about the country's capacity to conduct a vaccination campaign.

Venezuelan Health Minister Carlos Alvarado, at a digital conference on Tuesday, blamed the United States and its allies for a "blockade" imposed on its funds, which he said totaled more than $30bn.

"At this time, we are not in a position to use them even for access to the vaccine as we have requested on many occasions," Alvarado said.

Washington in 2019 launched a sanctions program against Venezuela that led to hundreds of millions in Venezuelan funds being frozen in bank accounts in the United States and Britain.

Some of those funds were officially put under the control of Guaido, who more than 50 countries have recognized as Venezuela's legitimate president. But obtaining permits to spend the money has been complicated.

A sustained surge in coronavirus infections in the Americas shows the region is failing to control the spread of the virus, PAHO Director Carissa Etienne told the press conference.

The region recorded 2.5 million new COVID-19 cases and related 42,000 deaths in the last week. From Mexico to Chile, health systems are being strained to their limits, Etienne said.

"I am particularly concerned for the next few weeks," she said, noting that new coronavirus variants found in the United Kingdom, South Africa and Brazil may be increasing infections. "Many hospitals are operating at or very close to capacity."

Guatemala turns more migrants back to Honduras

AP — EL FLORIDO

A once large caravan of Honduran migrants that pushed its way into Guatemala last week had dissipated by Tuesday in the face of Guatemalan security forces. Small groups pressed on toward the Mexican border, while others accepted rides from authorities back to Honduras.

Many of the migrants were driven by an increasingly desperate situation in Honduras, where the economic ravages of the COVID-19 pandemic and two major hurricanes in November have piled atop chronic poverty and gang violence.

But on Tuesday, buses carrying dozens of migrants and police patrol vehicles carrying handfuls arrived sporadically through the morning at the Guatemala-Honduras border crossing of El Florido. They were passed from Guatemalan border agents to their Honduran counterparts and then boarded buses that would take them back to their hometowns.

Chile regulator approves Sinovac vaccine

REUTERS — SANTIAGO

Chile's health regulator approved the emergency roll-out of the CoronaVac COVID-19 vaccine manufactured by China's Sinovac Biotech Ltd, clearing the way for the Andean country to move up a gear in its inoculation effort against the virus.

The emergency approval, which comes after trial data in Brazil raised questions over the vaccine's true efficacy, would cover inoculations with just over 10 million doses of the Sinovac vaccine for Chileans over the age of 18.

Ten members of the Public Health Institute's advisory board approved the vaccine roll-out, while two voted against it and one abstained. The two medical experts who voted against said they wanted to see more data on the vaccine trials.

Heriberto Garcia, director of the Public Health Institute (ISP), said "very encouraging" data from late-stage trials and the ISP's own investigations suggested CoronaVac was a "safe and effective vaccine to fight the pandemic".

"It is proven as a vaccine that prevents hospitalisations and severe iterations of this disease," he said.

Chile paid $3.5m to host a clinical trial of the Sinovac vaccine and has ordered 60 million doses to be administered to its 18 million-strong population over three years.

A delivery around two million Sinovac doses was expected as early as Monday, the science ministry said.

The Sinovac vaccine has already been approved and is being rolled out in Brazil, Turkey and Indonesia.

Data from the drug's late-stage clinical trial in Brazil earlier this month sparked concern among some other potential buyers after it showed the vaccine was 50.4 percent effective at preventing symptomatic infections, including "very mild" cases.

Previously released data said CoronaVac showed 78 percent efficacy against "mild-to-severe" cases.

The ISP said data from the Chilean CoronaVac trial was not yet available, but it had weighed data from trials in other countries. The regulator sent two inspectors to the Sinovac factory in Beijing in November.

Biden to hit reset on fight against virus on first day

REUTERS — WASHINGTON

President Joe Biden yesterday was to immediately reset the nation's response to the COVID-19 crisis when he heads to the Oval Office after being sworn in to lead a country reeling from its worst public health crisis in more than a century.

As part of a first sweep of executive actions, Biden was to order that all federal employees wear masks and make face coverings mandatory on federal property. He will establish a new White House office to coordinate the coronavirus response and halt the withdrawal of the United States from the World Health Organization, a process initiated by former President Donald Trump.

The orders will fulfill Biden's campaign promise to make COVID-19 relief a top priority and will mark a sharp divergence from the Trump administration's pandemic response, which critics say was ineffectual, uncoordinated and at least partly responsible for the death of more than 400,000 Americans.

Biden was also poised to nominate an acting US surgeon general. The new President's executive actions, particularly the mask mandate, are intended to set an example for state and local officials to rein in the virus.

Minutes after Biden took his oath of office at a scaled-back inauguration ceremony unlike any other in US history, he asked onlookers to join him in a silent prayer for the 400,000 Americans who perished from COVID-19.

"We're entering what may be the toughest and deadliest period of the virus and must set aside politics and finally face this pandemic as one nation," Biden said.

He delivered his inaugural speech looking out across the National Mall, which was covered in a "field of flags" instead of typical inauguration crowds since citizens were told to stay home to avoid the risk of contagion.

Biden was also poised to nominate an acting US surgeon general as soon as yesterday, a person familiar with the decision told MSNBC, following the resignation of Trump appointee Jerome Adams.

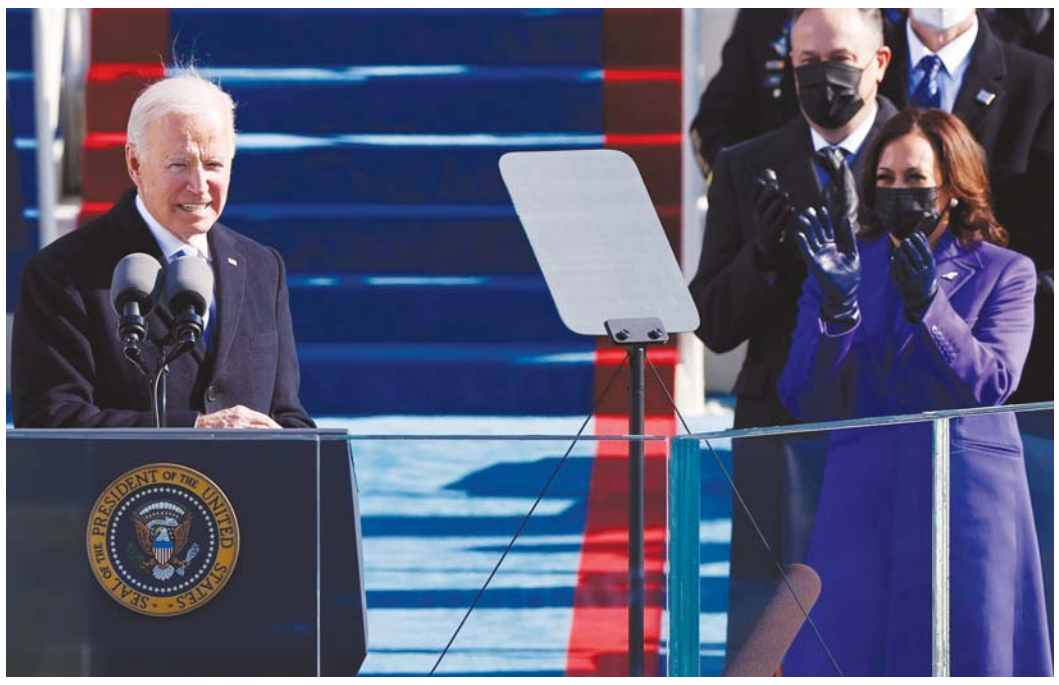
Biden's executive actions, particularly the mask mandate, are intended to set an example for state and local officials to rein in the virus, which has hobbled the US economy. The United States has reported nearly 200,000 new COVID-19 cases and 3,000 deaths per day on a seven-day rolling average, according to data. More than 123,000 Americans were hospitalized with COVID-19 as of yesterday.

Scientists and public health experts have said face masks can help prevent the spread of the highly contagious novel coronavirus, but the coverings have become a flashpoint in American life reflecting the nation's larger political divide.

Trump, who contracted COVID-19 last autumn, had eschewed their use at all but a handful of events and continued to hold crowded, largely maskless campaign rallies while Biden's campaign initially stuck to virtual events before expanding to other masked and socially distant gatherings.

There were few face masks as Trump departed Washington yesterday morning. In remarks to the crowd at Joint Base Andrews in Maryland, Trump again painted his administration as a victim of the virus and listed a series of accomplishments such as tax cuts, deregulation and stock market gains before addressing COVID-19 deaths.

"We got hit. Nobody blames us for that. The whole world got it," he said of the pandemic's toll on the economy. He later touted the development of a vaccine as a "miracle" before paying his respects to people and families impacted by the virus.



US President Joe Biden speaks as Vice-President Kamala Harris applauds during his inauguration on the West Front of the US Capitol in Washington, DC, yesterday.

Pence applauds Trump successor at inauguration

REUTERS — WASHINGTON

Outgoing US Vice-President Mike Pence and his wife Karen attended the inauguration of new President Joe Biden yesterday after skipping both a farewell ceremony for Donald Trump and the usual protocol of welcoming his successor to his home at the Naval Observatory.

Pence, whom some of Trump's supporters during the deadly January 6 assault on the US Capitol had threatened to hang for refusing to try to overturn Biden's Electoral College win in Congress, applauded the next vice president, Kamala Harris, as she arrived at the US Capitol. Trump skipped the inauguration.

Pence, the Republican former Indiana governor, and his wife yesterday were to fly home to Columbus, Indiana, where they will be greeted by a group of supporters and friends, according to a source familiar with the plans. The couple plans to move back to Indiana later this year.

Pence was a loyal lieutenant throughout Trump's four-year term. But he found himself shunned by the outgoing president for days for not supporting his quest to overturn Biden's victory based on false claims of widespread voting fraud and irregularities, although the two men sought to repair their ties before leaving office.

Pence spoke with Harris last Thursday, marking the highest-level contact between the outgoing and incoming administrations.

The father of a Marine Corps F-35 pilot, Pence and his wife thanked troops for their service during a final visit to US troops at military bases in California and New York over the weekend. Pence also met with National Guard troops guarding the Capitol, vowing to ensure a safe transition of power.

Anita McBride, who served as chief of staff to former first lady Laura Bush, said Trump's refusal to participate in Biden's inauguration was a "sad break with tradition" that would leave Trump and his family — and his supporters — without closure.

McBride praised Pence for his actions in recent weeks.

"He did what was right for the country despite intense pressure, and he did not buckle," McBride said.

Pence, who certified Biden and Harris's electoral win in Congress last week after Trump supporters stormed the Capitol in attempt to stop the process, has not publicly spoken directly about the siege or the subsequent impeachment of Trump by the US House of Representatives for inciting an insurrection.

But on Sunday, in his final speech as vice president, Pence praised the resilience of the American people, adding, "I have faith that the day will come where we put these challenging times behind us."



Former Vice-President Mike Pence and his wife, Karen Pence, walk after the inauguration of Joe Biden, in Washington, DC, yesterday.

Biden's inauguration goes off with no security issues

AP — WASHINGTON

Troops in riot gear lined the streets of the nation's capitol, but there were no crowds. Armored vehicles and concrete barriers blocked the empty streets around the US Capitol. From behind miles of fencing, Joe Biden was safely sworn in as president in a Washington on edge, two weeks after pro-Trump rioters besieged the US Capitol.

Law enforcement officials contended not only with the potential for outside threats but also with rising concerns about an insider attack. Officials were monitoring members of far-right extremist and militia groups, increasingly concerned about the possibility such groups could stream into Washington and spark violent confrontations, a law enforcement official said.

There were a few scattered arrests, but no serious disruptions in the city during Biden's inauguration ceremony.

As Biden put it in his address: "Just days after a riotous mob thought they could use violence to silence the will of the people, to stop the work of our democracy, to drive us from this sacred ground, it did not happen. It will never happen. Not today. Not tomorrow, not ever, not ever."

After the deadly attack that killed five on January 6, the US Secret Service stepped up security for the inauguration early, essentially locking down the nation's capital. More than 25,000 troops and police were called to duty. The National Mall was closed. Checkpoints were set up at intersections.

In the hours before the event, federal agents were monitoring "concerning online chatter," which included an array of threats against elected officials and discussions about ways to infiltrate the inauguration, the official said.

In right-wing online chat groups, members who believe in the QAnon conspiracy theory expressed disappointment that their long belief in the unfounded conspiracy that top Democrats would be arrested for a sex trafficking ring and that Trump could seize a second term did not materialize.

And 12 National Guard members were removed from the security operation a day earlier after vetting by the FBI, including two who had made extremist statements in posts or texts about Wednesday's event. Pentagon officials wouldn't give details on the statements. The FBI vetted all 25,000 members in an extraordinary security effort in part over the presence of some ex-military in the riot.

Two other US officials said that all 12 were found to have ties with right-wing militia groups or to have posted extremist views online. The officials, a senior intelligence official and an Army official briefed on the matter, did not say which fringe groups the Guard members belonged to or what unit they served in. The officials said that they had all been removed because of "security liabilities."

The officials were not authorized to speak publicly and spoke on condition of anonymity.

General Daniel Hokanson, chief of the National Guard Bureau, confirmed that Guard members had been removed and sent home, but said only two cases were related to inappropriate comments or texts related to the inauguration.

Hollywood returns: Gaga, J Lo headline inauguration

AP — WASHINGTON

Gaga, J Lo, Hanks, Legend, Miranda, Brooks and Bruuuuce.

It's a far cry from a normal inauguration, with Washington locked down due to security concerns, and most inaugural events gone virtual because of the raging coronavirus pandemic. But one thing is back that virtually disappeared four years ago: the A-list.

A slew of glittery celebrities is descending on Washington — virtually or in person — to welcome the new administration of Joe Biden and Kamala Harris, a duo popular in Hollywood, where Donald Trump was decidedly not.

They're led by Lady Gaga singing the national anthem yesterday, with Jennifer Lopez and Garth Brooks contributing musical performances.

Gaga posted a photo of herself on Twitter and Instagram on Tuesday afternoon, standing inside the Capitol, site of the deadly riot Jan. 6. She called for Inauguration Day to be "a day of peace for all Americans. A day for love, not hatred. A day for acceptance not fear."

Other top-tier performers were to be part of "Celebrating America," a 90-minute, multi-network evening broadcast hosted by Tom Hanks that takes the place of the usual official inaugural balls. "Hamilton" creator Lin-Manuel Miranda will contribute a classical recitation, joining musicians like Bruce Springsteen, John Legend, Katy Perry, Demi Lovato, Foo Fighters, Justin Timberlake and Bon Jovi. Hosts Kerry Washington and Eva Longoria will be joined by basketball legend Kareem Abdul-Jabbar, chef Jose Andres, labor leader Dolores Huerta and Kim Ng, the first female general manager in MLB history.

Trump pardons Steve Bannon, many others

AP — WASHINGTON

President Donald Trump pardoned former chief strategist Steve Bannon and dozens of others as part of a flurry of clemency action in the final hours of his White House term that benefited more than 140 people, including rap performers, ex-members of Congress and other allies of him and his family.

The last-minute clemency, announced yesterday morning, follows separate waves of pardons over the past month for Trump associates convicted in the FBI's Russia investigation as well as for the father of his son-in-law.

To be sure, the latest list was heavily populated by more conventional candidates whose cases had been championed by criminal justice activists. One man who has spent nearly 24 years in prison on drug and weapons charges but had shown exemplary behavior behind bars had his sentence commuted, as did a former Marine sentenced in 2000 in connection with a cocaine conviction.

But the names of prominent Trump allies nonetheless stood out.

Besides Bannon, other pardon recipients included Elliott Broidy, a Republican fundraiser who pleaded guilty last fall in a scheme to lobby the Trump administration to drop an investigation into the looting of a Malaysian wealth fund, and Ken Kurson, a friend of Trump son-in-law Jared Kushner who was charged last October with cyberstalking during a heated divorce

Trump bids farewell to Washington, hints of comeback

AP — WEST PALM BEACH

His presidency over, Donald Trump said farewell to Washington yesterday but also hinted about a comeback despite a legacy of chaos, tumult and bitter divisions in the country he led for four years.

"So just a goodbye. We love you," Trump told supporters at Joint Base Andrews in Maryland where he walked across a red carpet and boarded Air Force One to head to Florida. "We will be back in some form."

Trump departed office as the only president ever impeached twice, and with millions more out of work than when he was sworn in and 400,000 dead from the coronavirus.

The first president in modern history to boycott his successor's inauguration, Trump is still stewing about his loss and maintains that election won by Biden was stolen from him. Republican officials in several critical states, members of his own administration and a wide swath of judges, including those appointed by Trump, have rejected those arguments.

Trump refused to participate in any of the symbolic passing-of-the-torch traditions surrounding the peaceful transition of power, including inviting the Joe and Jill Biden to the White House for a get-to-know-you visit.

He did follow at least one tradition: The White House said Trump left behind a note for Biden. A Trump spokesman, Judd Deere, declined to say what Trump wrote or characterize the sentiment in the note, citing privacy for communication between presidents.

Members of Trump's family gathered for the send-off on the military base along with the president's loyalists, who chanted "We love you!" "Thank you, Trump" and "USA." Four Army cannons fired a 21-gun salute.

Trump said his presidency was an "incredible four years." He told the crowd that he and first lady Melania Trump loved them and praised his family for its hard work, saying they could have chosen to have an easier life.



Outgoing President Donald Trump, with First Lady Melania Trump, waves as he boards Air Force One at Joint Base Andrews, Maryland, yesterday.





PRAYER TIMINGS

FAJR	05.00 am
SUNRISE	06.21 am
DHUHR	11.45 am
ASR	02.40 pm
MAGHRIB	05.12 pm
ISHA	06.42 pm

WEATHER TODAY

18°C Minimum | 24°C Maximum

Moderate temperature daytime with some clouds and blowing dust at places, relatively cold by night.

- ALRUWAIS : 19° → 22°
- ALKHOR : 13° → 27°
- DUKHAN : 16° → 21°
- WAKRAH : 12° → 24°
- MESAIEED : 12° → 24°
- ABUSAMRA : 12° → 22°

HIGH TIDE 01:05 - 09:05

LOW TIDE 03:46 - 17:47

Qatar Airways Holidays extends Travel Bubble Holidays packages to Maldives

THE PENINSULA — DOHA

Qatar Airways Holidays has announced the final extension of its Travel Bubble Holidays packages to the Maldives, providing travellers with more flexibility to plan a last-minute, quarantine-free gateway to the tropical paradise island. The travel period is extended until February 20 for bookings with minimum three-night duration and last outbound date from Qatar on February 17.

To celebrate the success and mark the end of the very popular Travel Bubble Holidays between Qatar and the Maldives, Qatar Airways Holidays will offer customers free upgrades, including use of additional resort facilities, water sports activities — such as canoeing, laser sailing, snorkelling and windsurfing — as well as special food and beverage offerings for all new bookings made before February 15, all at no extra cost.

In November 2020, Qatar Airways Holidays announced the creation of its Travel Bubble Holidays package allowing Qatar citizens and residents to holiday safely with no quarantine or self-isolation requirements on return for citizens and no exceptional entry permit, quarantine or self-isolation requirements on return for residents of Qatar. Even though the Maldives is no longer part of the Green List countries published by the Ministry of Public Health, the Travel Bubble Holidays are unaffected.

All packages include return flights between Qatar and the Maldives on Qatar Airways' exclusive flights for Travel Bubble Holidays customers, accommodation on a full board basis, return airport transfers, and all taxes. Travel Bubble Holidays' packages are available to book on the Qatar Airways Holidays website or from a local travel agent. Three high-end luxury properties including the Sandies Bathala Maldives 4-star resort, Diamonds Thudufushi Beach 5-star resort and Amaya Kuda Rah 5-star resort — each situated on their own private island — are exclusively available for guests travelling from Qatar.

For the safety of themselves and fellow travellers, Travel Bubble Holidays guests mustt take a PCR test in Doha and get a negative COVID-19 PCR test certificate issued no more than 72 hours before departure. This is a requirement of the Maldives government and sign a release form committing to the terms and conditions of the exclusive Travel Bubble Holidays.

Take a rapid PCR test at Hamad International Airport. Results will be available within 15 minutes, and passengers will be allowed to travel if negative. Arrive in the Maldives, where no additional tests are needed, and take a transfer by speedboat directly to the resort. Return to Maldives airport via speedboat transfer on the day of departure. Take a rapid PCR test upon arrival into Doha. If negative, return home without the need to quarantine or self-isolate.

Qatar Airways has become the first global airline in the world to achieve the prestigious 5-Star COVID-19 Airline Safety Rating by international air transport rating organisation, Skytrax. It also provides assurance to passengers across the world that airline health and safety standards are subject to the highest possible standards of professional, independent scrutiny and assessment.



A view of a tourist site in Maldives.

To celebrate the success and mark the end of the very popular Travel Bubble Holidays between Qatar and the Maldives, Qatar Airways Holidays will offer customers free upgrades, including use of additional resort facilities, water sports activities.

EAA Foundation launches #BuildBackEducation campaign

THE PENINSULA — DOHA

Education Above All Foundation (EAA) along with its partners launched the #BuildBackEducation campaign, in the lead-up to the 3rd International Day of Education on January 24.

The campaign calls on the international community to support the important cause of building back education in 2021, which should be put at the forefront of the global COVID-19 recovery process.

Close to 1.6 billion learners in more than 190 countries across the world have been impacted by the pandemic, with already marginalised and vulnerable communities worse hit. The week-long launch of the #BuildBackEducation campaign will call on the international community to ensure this education crisis will not become a generational catastrophe.

Concluding the launch of the campaign on the International Day of Education, EAA and partners, will virtually host the global event, "Education, a key to post COVID-19 pandemic recovery: How can we prevent a generational catastrophe?" on January 24, as part of its YouthTalkEd series.

The event will bring together global leaders and youth to discuss what must be done to ensure that inclusive, equitable and accessible education for all is central to global efforts to recover from the COVID-19 pandemic. The event will be opened by Her Excellency, Lolwah Al Khater, Deputy Minister of Foreign Affairs. Participants will include Ministers from Colombia, Kenya, the Philippines, celebrities, UN agencies, civil society organisations, the private sector and youth.

The event, which consists of two sessions, will conclude with a promise for a set of final recommendations for learners around the world to utilise for educational advocacy in their respective communities.



Mubarak Al Thani from EAA Foundation said, "As the world starts its recovery from the COVID-19 pandemic, the global education crisis caused by the pandemic must not be forgotten. Through our #BuildBackEducation campaign under the umbrella of #UniteToProtect, we urge the international community to come together and create a better tomorrow for the next generation."

The launch of EAA's #BuildBackEducation campaign will focus on key areas that will be essential for the global community to consider while education is rebuilt and reshaped to fit the post-pandemic reality, including, ensuring education is inclusive, accessible, equitable, and of quality for all, ensuring safe schools reopening and resuming vital services around areas such as health and nutrition, protecting, promoting and expanding education financing, and focusing financing on the most marginalised communities, supporting the education workforce, ensuring the fair and equal usage of education technology and bridging the digital divide

EAA's virtual event "Education, a key to post COVID-19 pandemic recovery: How can we prevent a generational catastrophe?", will take place on January 24, 4pm to 6pm AST (8am-10am EST).

You Ask, officials answer

Don't worry, but don't wait! Child Development - Part 1

QISH مركز قطر للسمع والنطق Qatar Institute for Speech and Hearing

What are some of the common causes of speech and language delay?

A: Causes of speech language delay could be congenital or acquired. Congenital developmental causes include cerebral palsy, hearing loss, cleft lip and palate, genetic disorders (Down syndrome, fragile x syndrome, etc), articulation disorders due to oral structural defects, cognitive impairment, etc. Acquired causes include hearing loss, language delay due to lack of environmental stimulation, voice disorders, acquired neurological conditions, etc.

Some disorders can be caused due to genetic/ congenital as well as environmental factors. An example of this is Autism Spectrum Disorders. Hearing loss can also be congenital or acquired.

I have a newborn. Could you please brief me about the normal speech language milestones?

A: From 0-3 months, babies will be communicating through crying. The next step will be cooing, gurgling and laughing. Between 6 and 9 months, babies babble in syllables and they start imitating tones and some speech sounds. By 12 months, a baby's first words usually appear. However, some babies speak their first meaningful word by 10 months and by 18 months to 2 years children use around 50 words and will start putting two words together. From 2-3 years, sentences extend to four and five words.

My one-year-old is not responding to name calls. What should I do?

A: It could be because of hearing loss. So you have to consult an audiologist and get his hearing checked. If his hearing is within normal limits and he is still not responding, along with lack of social smile and eye contact you have to be extra careful and start seeking help from a professional.

My child says letters and numbers but he is not communicating. Why is it so?

A: It could be because of the increased screen time exposure, from where your child might have learnt those letters and numbers. You should gradually stop it. Make him engaged in normal communication through modelling, play, etc. Provide opportunities for him to communicate and spend quality time with your child.

My 3.6-year-old kid is not speaking clearly. Often we make him repeat the words he said.

A: You should consult a speech language pathologist to find out the reason for this. They will check your child's oro-motor skills. Some children cannot speak clearly due to some structural causes as in tongue tie, tongue thrust, etc. Speech clarity issues are seen in kids with hearing loss, neurological damage, cleft lip and palate, etc. Also, we should be aware about the normal phonological development. During the developmental period, typically developing children simplify speech as they are learning to talk and hence exhibit patterns of sound errors called phonological processes. Since kids don't have the ability to coordinate their lips, tongue, teeth, palate and jaw for clear speech, they do these.

(If you have any queries, you can send it to editor@pen.com.qa)

Answers provided by: Merlin Thankam Thomas, Senior speech and language therapist QISH, Doha

Music stars slam UK's failure on EU touring rules

AP — LONDON

Dozens of UK music stars including Elton John, Ed Sheeran and conductor Simon Rattle say musicians have been "shamefully failed" by the British government, which has left them facing post-Brexit restrictions on touring in the European Union.

In a letter published yesterday in the *Times of London*, more than 100 musicians including Sting, Pink Floyd's Roger Waters and Roger Daltrey of The Who, along with the heads of major arts institutions, said the new UK-EU trade deal that took effect January 1 has "a gaping hole where the promised free movement for musicians should be."

Britain's departure from the EU means that UK citizens can no longer live and work freely in the 27-nation bloc. Tourists do not need visas for stays of up to 90 days, and some short business trips are also allowed. But artists and musicians have not been included in the deal.

Britain and the EU disagree about who is to blame for the omission, each accusing the other of rejecting a deal for touring artists.

The new rules mean UK performers have to comply with differing rules in the 27 EU nations, negotiating visas for musicians and permits for their equipment. Many say the costs and red tape will make it impossible for British artists to perform on the continent, endangering the country's status as a cultural powerhouse.

Katara International Arabian Horse Festival Title Show dates amended

THE PENINSULA — DOHA

The Katara International Arabian Horse Festival (KIAHF), held under the patronage of Amir H H Sheikh Tamim bin Hamad Al Thani, presented by Cultural Village Foundation (Katara) has received tremendous response from horse owners and breeders.

More than 300 purebred Arabians have registered for the Title Show, the highpoint of the Festival. Of these, more than 200 horses have met the stipulated requirements and will hence participate in the prestigious show. These figures will rise further as registrations will be made open for horses qualifying in the upcoming 23rd Qatar National Arabian Horse Show, from January 22 to 26. The overwhelming participation necessitates that the Title Show dates are amended to ensure optimum conditions of competition. The show will now be a four-day event, instead of three as previously announced. While the festival dates remain unchanged from February 2 to 6, the Title Show is scheduled from February 3 to 6.

The Organizing Committee of KIAHF is also gearing up to conduct an auction show on January 29. The auction will feature only those purebred Arabians that have already qualified for participation in the Title Show. It will be conducted at Katara's beautiful esplanade.

Katara General Manager Prof. Khalid Bin Ibrahim Al-Sulaiti, Chairman of KIAHF Organizing Committee, said: "We are pleased with the remarkable response we have received from horse owners and breeders. Registrations have been received from the Middle East and Europe, including Belgium, Kuwait, Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, Bahrain, and Qatar."

"The auction is being held as a pre-event to the festival and will offer horse owners an occasion to invest in fine purebred Arabians. It will also present them with the opportunity to be part of the Title Show if they have not registered already. Through the festival, we endeavour to boost the confidence and pride of owners and breeders by presenting them with opportunities to participate in prestigious Arabian horse shows and associated events," he added.

Qatar has earned a place of global distinction in conducting such shows of repute. The nation has previously hosted 29 international shows and championships for purebred Arabians.

This is the first time the premier show is being hosted at Katara. The Title Show has some distinct features; it is the first event of its kind being held by the waterfront, and the total prize money of QR13m is one the highest awarded for such an event. In addition to the Title Show of exquisite Arabians, the five-day festival will include various educational and entertainment activities for equine enthusiasts and the public.