

International

France's Macron tests positive for COVID

Two fellow leaders, top French officials go into self-isolation

PARIS: President Emmanuel Macron yesterday tested positive for COVID-19, the presidency said, sending at least two fellow leaders as well as other top French officials into self-isolation. He is one of several world leaders who have contracted COVID-19, including British Prime Minister Boris Johnson and US President Donald Trump.

Macron was tested after the "onset of the first symptoms" and will now, in accordance with national regulations, "self-isolate for seven days," his office said in a statement.

"He will continue to work and carry out his activities remotely." The result comes at a tricky time for Macron as he seeks to handle the pandemic crisis in the own country while keeping a close eye on talks for a Brexit trade deal and a host of other international issues. Macron had notably attended an EU summit in Brussels last week and also on Monday was personally present at a conference in Paris organized by the Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD).

The president of the European Council, Charles Michel, who was also present in Paris for that meeting, has entered self-isolation, his spokesman said. Spanish Prime Minister Pedro Sanchez, who was also there, is going into quarantine, his office said. As result of the diagnosis, a trip next week by Macron to Lebanon—where

the president had been pressing for far-reaching political change after the giant Beirut port explosion in August—has been cancelled, his office said.

'Defeat pandemic together'

French Prime Minister Jean Castex will self-isolate after contact with Macron, his office said. It said the premier shows no symptoms but will no longer be going to the French Senate yesterday to outline his government's vaccine strategy to combat COVID-19. Macron's wife Brigitte will also be self-isolating but also shows no symptoms, her office said. Parliament speaker Richard Ferrand is also self-isolating after contact with Macron, his office said.

Fellow world leaders rushed to wish Macron a speedy recovery. "Sorry to hear my friend @EmmanuelMacron has tested positive for coronavirus. We are all wishing you a speedy recovery," tweeted Johnson, who has locked horns with Macron in recent months over the Brexit talks. EU Commission President Ursula von der Leyen, said she was with Macron "with all my heart". "We are going to defeat this pandemic together," she said on Twitter. "We will continue to work hand in hand to immunize and protect our citizens."

France earlier this week eased restrictions imposed to battle the second wave of the coro-



PARIS: In this file photo, French President Emmanuel Macron (left) welcomes European Council president Charles Michel prior to a meeting marking the 60th anniversary of the creation of the OECD at the Elysee Palace in Paris. — AFP

navirus but infection rates remain high. There is still a nationwide overnight curfew from 8 pm to halt the spread of the virus while restaurants and cafes as well as theatres and cinemas remain closed.

Over 59,300 people have died in France of

coronavirus since the start of the pandemic, according to official figures. The recording of over 17,000 new cases on Wednesday alone has also generated concern as people shop and travel more intensely ahead of the Christmas holidays. — AFP

US to unseal charges against Lockerbie bombing suspect

WASHINGTON: The United States plans to unseal charges soon against a Libyan man suspected of assembling the bomb that blew up a US airliner over Lockerbie, Scotland, in 1988, US newspapers have reported. But in Britain, the father of one of the victims of the disaster called the development "unwelcome" and cast doubt on the involvement of the suspect, Abu Agila Mohammad Masud.

"I can't see the connection between these new allegations and the Lockerbie story," Jim Swire, whose daughter Flora was killed in the bombing 32 years ago, said yesterday. Masud is currently being held by the Libyan authorities, according to The Wall Street Journal, and US authorities are seeking his extradition to stand trial in the United States. The New York Times said Masud's exact whereabouts are unknown but that he was imprisoned in Libya at one point for unrelated crimes.

The Journal said Masud, alleged to have been a top bomb-maker for the late Libyan leader Muammar Gaddafi, is suspected of assembling the device that blew up Pan Am Flight 103. The newspapers said US prosecutors are expected to unseal charges soon against Masud.

'Horrible attack'

The case against Masud is reportedly based largely on a confession he gave to Libyan authorities in 2012 as well as travel and immigration records. Monday is the 32nd anniversary of the bombing which killed a total of 270 people, including 190 Americans and 11 people on the ground.

In a statement, the FBI said that while it "cannot comment on any upcoming announcement, we can assure the public and most



In this file photo taken on December 22, 1988, the scene is seen of devastation caused by the explosion of a 747 Pan Am Jumbo jet over Lockerbie, that crashed 21 December on the route to New-York, with 259 passengers on board. — AFP

importantly, the families of the Pan Am 103 victims, that we have worked tenaciously for 32 years to investigate this horrific terrorist attack." "Domestic and foreign partners alike have been focused on identifying who was responsible for the bombing," the FBI said. "Just as in any investigation, the FBI is persistent in our investigations with a dedicated focus on the victims of crime and terrorism."

Scottish appeal

Five judges at Scotland's highest court of criminal appeal are currently considering a posthumous appeal by the family of the only man convicted of the bombing. In 1991, the American and Scottish courts announced the indictment of two Libyan intelligence agents, Abdelbaset Mohmet Al-Megrahi and Amine Khalifa Fhimah, for their role in the attack. — AFP

Self-harm rises in Greek migrant camps amid lockdown

ATHENS: A major increase in self-harm and mental health conditions has accompanied the coronavirus lockdown in Greece's migrant camps, a prominent aid group said yesterday. The International Rescue Committee said data from three islands with the largest migrant populations—Lesbos, Chios and Samos—showed that three quarters of more than 900 people assisted since 2018 had such symptoms. As of the end of October, 41 percent had reported symptoms of post-traumatic stress disorder, 35 percent reported suicidal thoughts and 18 percent reported having attempted to take their own lives, IRC said.

And immediately after Greece imposed a virus lockdown in March, there was a 71 percent increase in psychotic symptoms and a 66 percent increase in self-harm, the group said. More than 15,000 people live in camps in the three islands, and over 17,000 in Aegean camps overall, according to government data. On Lesbos, more than 7,000 people are staying in a makeshift tent camp set up after the permanent facility burned down in September.

On Monday, a three-year-old Afghan girl was found semi-conscious and bleeding in the camp lavatory, with authorities saying she was likely raped. "The mental health of refugees has been decimated this year, in the wake of devastating fires in Lesbos and Samos, Covid and the lockdown restrictions brought with it, and the move to a new temporary reception centre on Lesbos, which is yet to provide dignified living conditions," said IRC Greece director Dimitra Kalogeropoulou. Only a few thousand refugees have been allowed to relocate to other EU states this year, despite repeated requests by Athens and the European Commission. These include around 1,300 ailing or unaccompanied minors. — AFP