



5 2020: World rocked by COVID, Trump and Black Lives Matter



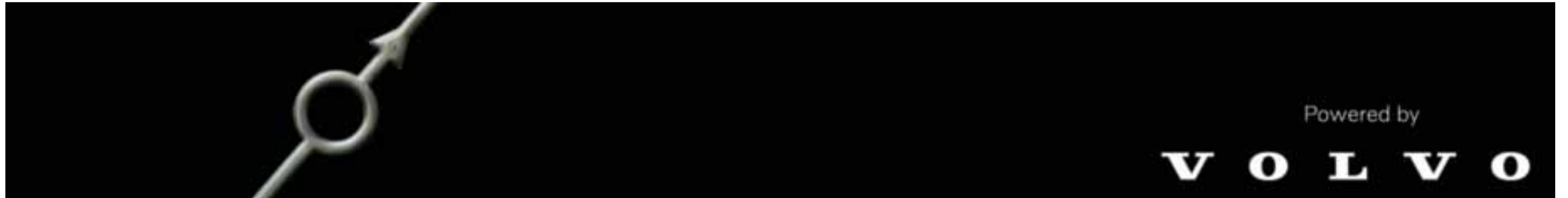
8 Aussie lobster sector claws back trade after China ban



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MPs discuss general amnesty law in meeting with premier

Lawmakers target expats in govt jobs • Foreign consultants terminated

Kuwait's COVID vaccination drive begins in earnest

KUWAIT: Health Minister Sheikh Dr Basel Al-Sabah yesterday hailed the high turnout of medical personnel and frontline workers at the coronavirus vaccination center after the vaccination campaign kicked off yesterday. The actual inoculation campaign began yesterday after its inauguration on Thursday, the minister said in a statement to journalists while inspecting the center at the International Fairgrounds in Mishref.

Medical personnel will be the first to take the vaccine against COVID-19 throughout the week, Sheikh Basel affirmed. A shipment of vaccine doses will arrive in Kuwait every month and they will be provided to willing citizens and expatriates throughout 2021, he added. The minister called on everyone to register their names and other required data on the assigned website to get a date for immunization against COVID-19. He revealed none of those who had taken the vaccine suffered from side effects. — KUNA



KUWAIT: Health Minister Sheikh Dr Basel Al-Sabah watches as a medic receives a dose of the Pfizer-BioTech COVID-19 vaccine at the vaccination center at the international fairgrounds in Mishref yesterday. — KUNA (See Page 4)

By B Izzak

KUWAIT: HH the Prime Minister Sheikh Sabah Al-Khaled Al-Sabah yesterday met around 10 MPs and discussed with them the government's position towards a proposed general amnesty law to pardon political activists. MP Ahmad Al-Azemi said the meeting also tackled other issues like cooperation between the Assembly and the government and popular issues including housing, education, health and others.

The lawmaker said the meeting focused on the need to pardon a group of former opposition MPs and activists who have been living in exile in Turkey for more than two years. The Assembly's legal and legislative committee yesterday discussed the general amnesty law and invited authorities to send their views on the legislation within two weeks, head of the committee MP Khaled Al-Enezi said.

He said the committee also discussed draft laws for amending the election law and for Kuwaitization of government jobs. The government was given two years to send its views on these bills, after which the committee will invite the concerned minister for discussion, Enezi said. The Kuwaitization law aims at replacing a majority of expats in government jobs with Kuwaitis.

The move comes after new Commerce and Industry Minister Faisal Al-Medlej dismissed all foreign consultants at the ministry and banned

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News in brief

60,000 ration cards canceled

KUWAIT: The commerce ministry announced it will be cancelling 60,000 food ration cards of domestic workers who are no longer working under their employers from the beginning of January. A source said some of the domestic workers have left the country but their sponsors have not updated their records and continue to receive their share. The decision will save around KD 4.5 million annually. — Al-Rai

KD 130 health insurance

KUWAIT: Chairman of Health Assurance Hospitals Co (Dhaman) Mutlaq Al-Sane said the company plans to launch operations at five primary care centers with a 600-bed capacity by the beginning of 2022. Speaking during the opening of a primary care center in Dajej, he said patients will have to pay annual health insurance of KD 130 per person, in addition to visitation fees. — Al-Rai

600 teachers face termination

KUWAIT: The education ministry is considering terminating 600 expatriate teachers who are still stranded abroad due to coronavirus travel restrictions. The teachers specialize in subjects including computer, craft and Islamic education - which can be taught by locally-hired teachers. But the ministry decided to bring back to Kuwait around 330 teachers of maths, chemistry, English and physics who are stuck abroad by issuing them new visas. — Al-Jarida

Gulf FMs discuss 'cooperation'

KUWAIT: Gulf Arab foreign ministers held a virtual meeting hosted by Manama yesterday to bolster "cooperation" ahead of a summit next month amid efforts to end a rift between a Saudi-led alliance and Qatar. The six GCC countries addressed yesterday "suggestions on supporting and strengthening joint Gulf cooperation in various political, economic and social aspects", according to a statement by Kuwait's foreign ministry. — AFP (See Page 2)

EU launches vaccinations to end 'nightmare'

PARIS: EU countries yesterday embarked on a vaccination campaign to defeat the "nightmare" of COVID-19, with the first to be immunized expressing emotion after their job and leaders hailing a milestone in the fight against the pandemic. The vaccine is a glimmer of hope for a continent yearning for a return to normal from a pandemic that has killed 1.76 million

people worldwide since emerging in China late last year and caused at least 80 million confirmed cases, according to an AFP tally.

But polls have shown many Europeans are unwilling to take the vaccine, which could impede its effectiveness in beating the virus, while it will take months for large chunks of the population to be immunized. "It is with deep pride and a deep sense of responsibility that I got the vaccine today. A small gesture but a fundamental gesture for all of us," said Claudia Alivernini, 29, an Italian nurse who was the first in her country to receive the Pfizer-BioNTech jab yesterday morning.

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SEVRAN, France: Mauricette, a 78-year-old French woman, receives the first dose of the Pfizer-BioNTech COVID-19 vaccine at Rene-Muret Hospital on the outskirts of Paris yesterday. — AFP

Oman launches vaccination drive

MUSCAT: Oman started coronavirus vaccinations yesterday, two days ahead of plans to resume all flights and open borders that temporarily closed amid concerns over a new strain of the disease. The sultanate - which has recorded the second highest number of COVID-19 deaths in the Gulf after Saudi Arabia - is the last of the Gulf Cooperation Countries (GCC) to begin inoculating people. Like most of its neighbors it has opted for the Pfizer-BioNTech vaccine.

Health Minister Ahmed Al-Saidi, one of the first citizens to get a jab at a Muscat clinic, said priority

would be given to front line health workers and people who are considered to be vulnerable. Oman has so far recorded more than 128,000 cases of the novel coronavirus, including 1,495 deaths - the highest after Saudi Arabia which has recorded over 6,000 deaths.

Along with Saudi Arabia and Kuwait, the Gulf sultanate suspended commercial travel and banned entry and exit via their land and sea borders last week after a new strain of the virus appeared in Britain. Saudi Arabia has yet to announce whether it will lift the suspension this week, while Kuwait has said it plans to re-open on Jan 1.

Oman is hoping to quickly start receiving tourists, especially from its wealthy neighboring countries, to boost its economy that has been hit hard by slumping oil prices and the pandemic. — AFP



MUSCAT: Oman's Health Minister Ahmed Al-Saidi reacts as he receives his first dose of the vaccine yesterday. — AFP

11 killed in Iran blizzards, avalanches

TEHRAN: Three more climbers in Iran have died after avalanches struck mountains north of the capital Tehran, bringing the overall toll to 11, the Red Crescent said yesterday. State news agency IRNA said the tragedy began on Friday when avalanches and blizzards hit the mountainous region. Several climbers were trapped in the area but the Red Crescent managed

to rescue 14 during a three-day operation led by 20 emergency teams backed by helicopters.

On Saturday, rescuers said they had found the bodies of eight climbers, while yesterday morning it was announced that another had died. The bodies of another two were recovered in the Darabad mountains, the Red Crescent said yesterday, adding that the rescue operation was now over.

Tehran lies at the foot of the Alborz mountain range which stretches across 900 km from the border with Azerbaijan in Iran's northwest to Khorasan province in the northeast. The area is famous for its many ski resorts and is popular with climbers. — AFP



TEHRAN: A handout picture shows rescue team transporting the bodies of mountaineers who died after blizzards and avalanches hit mountains north of Tehran on Saturday. — AFP