

## CORONAVIRUS AID TO AMERICANS Trump's bid stalls in US Senate

REUTERS, Washington

US Senate leader Mitch McConnell dealt a likely death blow on Wednesday to President Donald Trump's bid to boost coronavirus aid to Americans, declining to schedule a swift Senate vote on a bill to raise relief checks to \$2,000 from \$600.

McConnell said on the Senate floor that a bill passed by the Democratic-controlled House of Representatives, which sought to meet fellow Republican Trump's demands for bigger checks, "has no realistic path to quickly pass the Senate."

McConnell, who controls the Senate's agenda and opposes the increase in aid, had introduced a competing bill combining the \$2,000 checks with provisions unacceptable to Democrats, who could block it.

With a new Congress set to be sworn in on Sunday, the action appears all but certain to kill the effort to increase the amount of the \$600 checks Congress has already approved.

Trump had ramped up pressure on fellow Republicans to back the bigger checks for struggling Americans in a series of tweets over recent days. "\$2000 ASAP!" Trump wrote on Twitter early on Wednesday.

On Tuesday, the president attacked Republican leaders as "pathetic" and accused the party of having a "death wish" if it did not back raising the stimulus payments or scrap legal protections for social media companies.



A girl wearing a mask and "2021" head band looks on at a shopping mall as The New Year countdown celebrations and crowded events were banned amid the spread of the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) in Bangkok, Thailand, yesterday.

PHOTO: REUTERS

### NEWS IN BRIEF

#### Syria war killed 6,800 in 2020

The Syrian conflict claimed at least 6,800 people in 2020, the lowest annual death toll since it began nearly a decade ago, a war monitor said yesterday. According to figures compiled by the Syrian Observatory for Human Rights, more than 10,000 people were killed in the conflict in 2019. The deadliest year was 2014, when more than 76,000 people died, according to the UK-based organisation, which has an extensive network of sources on the ground. The overall tally since the start of the conflict has crept up to 387,000, including 117,000 civilians. On Wednesday, fighters from the Islamic State jihadist group ambushed soldiers in the eastern province of Deir Ezzor, killing 37 of them.

#### 26 held after Pak Hindu temple destroyed

At least two dozen people, including several Muslim clerics, were detained yesterday after a mob attacked and set fire to a Hindu temple in northwest Pakistan, police said. Around 1,500 Muslims on Wednesday descended on the temple -- which was destroyed in similar circumstances in 1997 -- after staging a protest against renovations at an adjoining building owned by Hindus. The temple is located in a remote village in Karak district, some 160 kilometres (100 miles) southeast of Peshawar. Police were looking for a further 50 people identified from videos of the attack.

#### Assam bans madrasas

An Indian state ruled by Prime Minister Narendra Modi's Hindu nationalist party on Wednesday passed a law abolishing all Islamic schools, saying they provided sub-standard education. Opposition politicians criticised the move and said it reflected the government's anti-Muslim attitude in the Hindu-majority country. More than 700 of the schools, known as madrasas, in northeastern Assam will be shut by April, the state's education minister Himanta Biswa Sarma told the local assembly. The government would convert them to regular schools as education provided in the madrasas could not prepare anyone for "the temporal world and its earthly concerns", Sarma said.

#### British PM Johnson's father applying for French citizenship



The father of British Prime Minister Boris Johnson yesterday said he was in the process of applying for a French passport to maintain his ties with the European Union after Brexit. Stanley Johnson, a former member of the European Parliament who voted Remain in Britain's 2016 referendum, told RTL radio he wanted to become a French citizen because of strong family links to France. "I will always be a European, that's for sure. One cannot tell the British people: you are not Europeans. Having a tie with the European Union is important," said the 80-year-old Johnson. The United Kingdom officially leaves the EU's orbit on Thursday night, after an often strained 48-year liaison with the European project.

SOURCE: AFP, REUTERS

## US sees record daily deaths

China okays Sinopharm's vaccine; Tokyo sees record cases

AGENCIES

The US logged its highest ever daily death toll from the coronavirus as the world prepares to turn the page on a grim year defined by the pandemic, with much of the globe united in one hope for 2021: that a slew of new vaccines will stamp out Covid-19.

New Year's Eve marks one year since the World Health Organization first mentioned a mysterious pneumonia in China later identified as Covid-19, which went on in 2020 to kill more than 1.79 million people and devastate the global economy in unprecedented ways.

In the world's worst-hit country, the US, the numbers keep climbing: On Wednesday more than 3,900 people died of Covid-19, a new record, bringing the toll since the pandemic began to more than 19.7 million infections and 341,000 lives lost.

And experts believe the worst is yet to come, as US healthcare workers brace for a surge in cases after major holiday gatherings.

China yesterday approved its first Covid-19

vaccine for general public use, a shot developed by an affiliate of state-backed pharmaceutical giant Sinopharm.

No detailed efficacy data of the vaccine has been publicly released but its developer, Beijing Biological Products Institute, a unit of Sinopharm subsidiary China National Biotec Group (CNBG), said on Wednesday its vaccine was 79.34% effective in preventing people from developing the disease based on interim data.

Pakistan yesterday announced a 1.2 million dose purchase deal with Sinopharm.

China also confirmed its first case of a new coronavirus variant that was recently detected in Britain, health officials said. Even as vaccinations ramp up in Europe and North America, global infections have surged to more than 82 million.

New infections in Japan's capital hit a record high of 1,337 yesterday, Tokyo's Metropolitan Government said. Nationwide, new cases surpassed 4,000 for the first time, local media said.



## Trump aims to fabricate 'pretext for war': Iran FM

AFP, Tehran

Iran's Foreign Minister Mohammad Javad Zarif yesterday accused outgoing US President Donald Trump of aiming to fabricate a "pretext for war" as tensions mount between the two countries.

His remarks come ahead of the first anniversary of the US killing of top Iranian military commander Qasem Soleimani in a drone strike in Baghdad on January 3.

US aircraft carrier USS Nimitz has been patrolling Gulf waters since late November and two American B-52 bombers recently overflew the region.

"Instead of fighting (the novel coronavirus) in US, @realDonaldTrump & cohorts waste billions to fly B52s & send armadas to OILR region," Zarif wrote on Twitter. "Intelligence from Iraq indicate plot to FABRICATE pretext for war," he added.

Trump ordered a drone strike on January 3 this year to kill Soleimani near Baghdad's international airport. Days later, Iran launched a volley of missiles at Iraqi bases housing US and other coalition troops, with Trump refraining from any further military response.

Trump said last week said he would hold "Iran responsible" for any fatal attack on Americans in Iraq after accusing Tehran of being behind a rocket strike on the US embassy in Baghdad on December 20.

Zarif at the time warned the US president against any "adventurism" before leaving the White House on January 20, and said "putting your own citizens at risk abroad won't divert attention from catastrophic failures at home".

## Indian forces kill three J&K 'militants'

REUTERS, SRINAGAR

Indian security forces said they killed three militants in Kashmir's main city, Srinagar, on Wednesday after a gun battle, but families of the dead men said they were innocent.

India has been fighting an armed insurgency in the disputed Himalayan region for decades and killed more than 200 militants this year, according to official data.

It is, however, rare for families to immediately contest victims' allegiance to insurgent groups. Police in Kashmir this month filed charges against an army officer and a civilian for allegedly killing three labourers and planting weapons to pass them off as militants.

Bashir Ahmad Ganai, grandfather of 25-year-old Aijaz Ahmad Ganai, who was killed in the protracted firefight in Srinagar, told reporters his grandson was not a militant.

"He was a student. Why did they kill him?" he said at a protest by family members outside a police office.

## China holds sway in Nepal as communist factions spark crisis

REUTERS, Kathmandu

Alarmed that a political crisis in Nepal could endanger China's strategic interests and Belt and Road projects, a Chinese Communist Party emissary has held days of talks to try to stop the Himalayan country's ruling communist party from tearing itself apart.

The crisis erupted on Dec. 20 when Prime Minister KP Sharma Oli, decided he could no longer work with rival factions within his Nepal Communist Party (NCP), which was formed in 2018 to unite the Marxist-Leninist and main Maoist parties following their success in elections in late 2017.

With two years of his term to run, Oli dissolved parliament and called for fresh elections in a move that foreign diplomats say caught China by surprise and plunged the impoverished nation of 30 million people into uncertainty.

Seven ministers quit Oli's government, and anger over the descent into political infighting at a time when the economy is reeling from the coronavirus sparked protests at which effigies of the prime minister were burnt.

Within days, Beijing dispatched to Kathmandu Guo Yezhou, a vice-minister in the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) International Liaison Department, which manages relationships with foreign political parties of all hues, both in power and opposition.

Oli has recommended an election be held in two phases in April and May, but what happens next could be in the lap of

the Supreme Court, as his opponents have challenged the dissolution of parliament as unconstitutional. A hearing will resume in January.

Guo has held separate meetings with Oli, and rivals in the communist party to get their sides of the story, as well as leaders of the main opposition party and other politicians.



Still, some foreign diplomats in Kathmandu viewed Guo's mission as a brazen demonstration of China's growing influence over Nepal's internal affairs.

"Why would a country rush a delegation to a neighbouring nation amid a pandemic? It's rather obvious they control the internal politics of Nepal as they want to expand investments in near future," a senior Western diplomat said.

An Asian diplomat struck a similar note. "They have been buying land and investing in large-scale infrastructure projects by keeping a tight control on the ruling party and the opposition," said the Asian diplomat.

"A lot is at stake for Beijing," he said.

## Peacekeeping mission in Darfur ends

AFP, Nyaala

The United Nations-African Union mission in the Darfur region of Sudan (UNAMID) will officially end operations on Thursday, when the Government of Sudan will take over responsibility for the protection of civilians in the area, the mission said in a statement on Wednesday.

The bitter conflict has largely subsided in recent years and longtime autocrat Omar al-Bashir -- wanted by the International Criminal Court for genocide and other alleged crimes in the western region -- was deposed last year.

But the country's transitional government is fragile, and ethnic and tribal clashes still periodically flare in Darfur, including clashes last week that left at least 15 people dead and

dozens wounded. Darfur, many of whom remain in teeming camps years after they fled their homes, have held protests in recent weeks against the mission's imminent departure.

"The lives of Darfuri people are at stake, and the United Nations should reconsider its decision," Mohamed Abdelrahman told AFP on Wednesday at Kalma camp in Nyaala, the capital of South Darfur.

The UN said that the phased withdrawal of the mission's approximately 8,000 armed and civilian personnel will begin in January and be completed inside six months.

### গণপ্রজাতন্ত্রী বাংলাদেশ সরকার

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স্মারক নং-উপঃস্বাস্থ্যকমঃ/বি/২০২০-২৮৯৪

#### উন্মুক্ত দরপত্র বিজ্ঞপ্তি

০১	মন্ত্রণালয়/বিভাগ	স্বাস্থ্য ও পরিবার কল্যাণ মন্ত্রণালয়/স্বাস্থ্য সেবা বিভাগ।		
০২	সংগ্রাহক/স্বত্বাধিকারীর নাম	উপজেলা স্বাস্থ্য ও পঃপঃ কর্মকর্তার কার্যালয়, বেগমগঞ্জ, নোয়াখালী।		
০৩	অর্থায়নের উৎস	রাজস্ব/জিওবি/বোকা/অতিরিক্ত/বিশেষ বরাদ্দ।		
০৪	আহবানকৃত দরপত্রের স্মারক ও তারিখ	স্মারক নং-উপজেলাঃ স্বাস্থ্যকমঃ/বিঃ/নোয়া/২০২০/২৮৯৪/৩০ তারিখঃ ৩০/১২/২০২০ইং		
০৫	দরপত্রের নাম/কাজের বিবরণ	২০২০-২০২১ইং অর্থবছরে উপজেলা স্বাস্থ্য ও পঃপঃ কর্মকর্তার কার্যালয়, বেগমগঞ্জ, নোয়াখালী এর এম.এস.আর সামগ্রী সরবরাহের দরপত্র (গ্রুপ নং- "ক" ঊষধপত্র, "খ" সার্জিক্যাল যন্ত্রপাতি, "গ" লিনেন সামগ্রী, "ঘ" গজ, ব্যাভেজ, কটন, "ঙ" কেমিক্যাল রি-এজেন্ট এবং "চ" আসবাবপত্র ও ক্রিচেন সামগ্রী।		
০৬	সংগ্রাহক স্বত্বাধিকারীর জেলা	নোয়াখালী।		
০৭	ক্রয় প্রক্রিয়া	পিপিআর ২০০৬, ২০০৮ ও (সংশোধিত ২০১৯) মোতাবেক উন্মুক্ত দরপত্র।		
০৮	দরপত্রদাতাদের যোগ্যতা	যোগ্যতা ও অভিজ্ঞতাসম্পন্ন সকল এম.এস.আর সরবরাহকারী/বাজারজাতকারী/আমদানীকারক/উৎপাদনকারী/এজেন্ট/ঠিকাদারী প্রতিষ্ঠান।		
০৯	দরপত্র তফসিলের মূল্য (অফেরতযোগ্য)	প্রতিটি সিডিউলের মূল্য চালানের মাধ্যমে কোড নং-১-২৭১১-০০০০-২৬৮১ এ বাংলাদেশ/সোনালী ব্যাংক, টোমুহনী শাখায় জমাদানপূর্বক উপজেলা হিসাবরক্ষণ অফিস, বেগমগঞ্জ, নোয়াখালী কর্তৃক চালানের সি.টি.আর সহ মূলকপি অত্র কার্যালয়ের ক্যাশিয়ারের নিকট জমা দিয়ে দরপত্র সংগ্রহ করিতে হইবে।		
১০	দরপত্র জামানত/বায়নার	গ্রুপের নাম	সিডিউলের মূল্য (অফেরতযোগ্য)	দরপত্র জামানতের পে-অর্ডার/ব্যাংক ড্রাফট এর পরিমাণ
		"ক" ঊষধপত্র	১০০০ (এক হাজার) টাকা	৫০,০০০/- (পঞ্চাশ হাজার টাকা মাত্র)
		"খ" সার্জিক্যাল যন্ত্রপাতি ও মেরামত	৭৫০ (সাতশত পঞ্চাশ) টাকা	৪০,০০০/- (চল্লিশ হাজার টাকা মাত্র)
		"গ" লিনেন সামগ্রী	৫০০ (পাঁচশত) টাকা	২০,০০০/- (বিশ হাজার টাকা মাত্র)
		"ঘ" গজ, ব্যাভেজ, কটন	৫০০ (পাঁচশত) টাকা	২০,০০০/- (বিশ হাজার টাকা মাত্র)
		"ঙ" কেমিক্যাল রি-এজেন্ট	৫০০ (পাঁচশত) টাকা	১৫,০০০/- (পনের হাজার টাকা মাত্র)
"চ" আসবাবপত্র ও ক্রিচেন সামগ্রী	৫০০ (পাঁচশত) টাকা	১৫,০০০/- (পনের হাজার টাকা মাত্র)		
১১	দরপত্র তফসিল বিক্রয়, দর প্রস্তাব গ্রহণকারী প্রতিষ্ঠানের নাম ও ঠিকানা	উপজেলা স্বাস্থ্য ও পঃ পঃ কর্মকর্তার কার্যালয়, বেগমগঞ্জ, নোয়াখালী। (দরপত্র পুস্তিকা/সিডিউল, অত্র কার্যালয়ের ক্যাশিয়ারের নিকট হতে সংগ্রহ করিতে হইবে।)		
১২	দরপত্র সংগ্রহের স্থান	১। উপজেলা স্বাস্থ্য ও পঃ পঃ কর্মকর্তার কার্যালয়, বেগমগঞ্জ, নোয়াখালী ২। সিভিল সার্জন অফিস, নোয়াখালী ৩। উপজেলা নির্বাহী অফিসসহকারী কার্যালয়, বেগমগঞ্জ, নোয়াখালী।		
১৩	দরপত্র তফসিল বিক্রয়ের শেষ তারিখ দিন ও সময়	২৪/০১/২০২১খ্রিঃ অফিস চলাকালীন সময় (০৮-০২-৩০ মিনিট)।		
১৪	দরপত্র তফসিল দাখিলের স্থান	উপজেলা স্বাস্থ্য ও পঃ পঃ কর্মকর্তার কার্যালয়, বেগমগঞ্জ, নোয়াখালী।		
১৫	দরপত্র দাখিলের শেষ তারিখ ও সময়	২৫/০১/২০২১খ্রিঃ দুপুর ১২.০০ ঘটিকা পর্যন্ত।		
১৬	দরপত্র বাস্তব খোলার তারিখ ও সময়	২৫/০১/২০২১খ্রিঃ দুপুর ১২.৩০ ঘটিকা।		

জিডি-০১

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