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States pass their own virus aid, not waiting on Washington

By BRIAN WITTE
Associated Press

ANNAPOLIS, Md. (AP) — Not waiting for more federal help, states have been approving their own coronavirus aid packages, spending hundreds of millions of dollars to help residents and business owners devastated by the pandemic's economic fallout.

Maryland and California recently moved forward with help for the poor, the jobless, small businesses and those needing child care. New Mexico and Pennsylvania are funneling grants directly to cash-starved businesses. North Carolina's governor wants additional state aid for such things as bonus pay for teachers and boosting rural internet speeds.

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In this Nov. 19, 2020, file photo, a server carries food for a customer at Ye Olde King's Head in Santa Monica, Calif..

Associated Press

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States pass their own virus aid, not waiting on Washington

Continued from Front

The spending also provides fuel for critics who say states don't need another massive infusion of cash from Congress. The Biden administration's \$1.9 trillion coronavirus relief plan calls for sending \$350 billion to state and local governments. Directing federal money to state governments has been so contentious that the idea was stripped from the previous congressional aid package passed in December. Republican Sen. Rick Scott of Florida has frequently criticized proposals to send more money to state governments, calling it a bailout for Democratic-run states he accuses of overspending.



In this Jan. 19, 2021, file photo, diners exit a restaurant with open notices scrawled on plywood sheets covering the establishment's windows, a block south of the State Capitol in downtown Denver.

Associated Press

"It's great news that states are doing well, many seeing revenues higher than projected, and are able to help their citizens during this pandemic," he said in a statement to The Associated Press. "House

and Senate Democrats should follow the facts and ditch their radical efforts to award wasteful bailouts for failed politicians in states like New York and California."

Many governors say contin-

ued uncertainty about the ongoing effects of the pandemic on their economies justifies the need for more federal spending. They say their state aid initiatives are targeted at people who remain desperate for help nearly a year after the pandemic began shuttering businesses.

In Maryland, where direct stimulus checks were being distributed as part of more than \$1 billion in relief, Catrina Garrett said the boost from the state was crucial. Garrett, a 35-year-old single mother with a part-time job, said it will help her pay rent and catch up on bills.

"A lot of people will need this, and it will help families that have not been able to provide for their children," said Garrett, who lives in Baltimore with her three kids. Other states are considering significant spending to provide more relief to residents. Governors and lawmakers have said they are concerned the economy and job prospects will deteriorate even further before Congress acts on the Biden plan. A slow start to the nationwide vaccination program also has tempered expectations that inoculations will be widespread soon enough to rescue businesses that have struggled with shutdown orders.

Under a bill awaiting the governor's signature, New Mexico would provide \$200 million in direct grants to businesses, which could use them to pay rent and mortgages. It's part of a proposed state pandemic relief package that also would provide a \$600 tax rebate to low-wage workers, a four-month tax holiday for restaurants as they recover from indoor-dining restrictions and a waiver on liquor store license fees.

Democratic Gov. Michelle Lujan Grisham said aggressive action is needed to ward off business closures and evictions as Congress deliberates.

"The cascading effect, it's actually a problem that most states are grappling with ... waiting for the relief money out of the feds," she said. "We need to be able to hold up, to shore up businesses moving forward, and we want them to have security to hold their current employees and potentially hire more."

In California, Gov. Gavin Newsom this week signed a \$7.6 billion relief package that includes \$600 in one-time payments for about 5.7 million residents, including immigrants who were left out of previous relief initiatives. Another \$2 billion is going to struggling businesses.

Maryland Gov. Larry Hogan, a Republican, signed legislation last week with bipartisan support in the Democratic-controlled legislature for one-time stimulus payments of \$300 for certain individuals and \$500 for families. It also provides up to \$9,000 in sales tax relief for small businesses. "Absent of a federal response, the states are having to step up," said Robin McKinney, co-founder and CEO of the CASH Campaign of Maryland, a nonprofit organization that helps low-income residents file taxes.

The spending also shows that many states have proved unexpectedly resilient during the pandemic, with better-than-projected tax revenue and healthy budgets. In California, revenue for the current fiscal year through January was running more than \$10 billion ahead of the governor's initial projections. □



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Amid surge, U.S. tries to expedite release of migrant children

By NOMAAN MERCHANT

Associated Press

HOUSTON (AP) — With its long-term facilities for immigrant children nearly full, the Biden administration is working to expedite the release of children to their relatives in the U.S.

U.S. Health and Human Services on Wednesday authorized operators of long-term facilities to pay for some of the children's flights and transportation to the homes of their sponsors. Under the agency's current guidelines, sponsors can be charged for those flights and required to pay before the government will release children, even if the sponsors have been vetted by the government.

Those costs can sometimes exceed \$1,000 per child.

An internal memo sent Wednesday and obtained by The Associated Press authorizes facility operators to use government funding for transport fees "in the event that a sponsor is not able to pay fees associated with commercial airfare, and a child's physical release would be otherwise delayed." HHS declined to say how many flights would be funded.

HHS has drastically cut its capacity due to the coronavirus pandemic. Nearly all of the department's 7,100 beds for immigrant children are full. Meanwhile, Border Patrol agents are apprehending an av-



In this Aug. 29, 2019, file photo, migrant teens line up for a class at a "tender-age" facility for babies, children and teens, in Texas' Rio Grande Valley, in San Benito, Texas.

Associated Press

erage of more than 200 children crossing the border without a parent per day. Most Border Patrol facilities aren't equipped for long-term detention, with children forced to sleep on mats in cells where the lights stay on around the clock.

To take children from the Border Patrol, HHS reopened a surge facility at Carrizo Springs, Texas, that can hold up to 700 teenagers, and may soon reopen another site at Homestead, Florida. While they have beds, classrooms and dining areas, surge facilities cost an estimated \$775 per child per day and are not subject to the same licensing requirements as regular facilities.

Democrats sharply criti-

cized them during the administration of former President Donald Trump, and news of Carrizo Springs' reopening has drawn criticism from some Democrats as well as Republicans who argue Trump was unfairly blamed. Some have accused Biden of moving to detain children in "cages." No children are detained in cells or behind chain-link fencing at Carrizo Springs, which has long trailers that serve as dormitories and a large tent as a dining hall.

"We had to expand and open additional facilities because there was not enough space in the existing facilities if we were to abide by COVID protocols," White House Press Secretary Jen Psaki said Wednesday. Psaki noted

that Biden halted a Trump-era practice of expelling unaccompanied immigrant children under public health law, though the U.S. still expels immigrant families and single adults who cross the border without permission.

"Our objective is to move these kids quickly from there to vetted, sponsored families and to places where they can safely be," she said.

But experts on the detention of immigrant children say HHS needs to change how it works to relieve pressure on the overall system. Leecia Welch, senior director of child welfare at the nonprofit National Center for Youth Law, said HHS could have made several policy changes months

ago that would alleviate what she called "a government-created crisis." She applauded the move to pay for flights and called on U.S. officials to explore other ways to release children from HHS faster, including by raising the capacity of regular facilities while ensuring that protocols are followed to stop the spread of the virus.

"While we recognize the Biden administration's efforts to process unaccompanied children in a responsible way that addresses public health needs and prioritizes children's safety, it is critical that it not repeat the mistakes of the Trump administration," Naureen Shah, an attorney for the American Civil Liberties Union, said in a statement.

One longstanding requirement that has delayed some releases is forcing sponsors to pay for airfares. "Facilities have told families that they will not release a child unless they specifically go to a specific travel agency and purchase tickets," said Dr. Amy Cohen, executive director of the advocacy group Every Last One.

In one case this week, Cohen said, staff at a facility told a woman that she would have to bring a certified check to the airport in order to collect her child, who has been in an HHS facility for three weeks. □

Chief: Capitol police were unsure about using force Jan. 6

By M. BALSAMO

Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — Police officers who defended the Capitol during the Jan. 6 insurrection did not properly lock down the building and were unsure of the rules for using deadly force against the rioters, according to the acting chief of the Capitol Police. In a statement submitted for a House hearing Thursday, Yogananda Pittman provides new details about the law enforcement response to the Capitol riot

and the problems that hobbled the police's response. The statement fills in crucial new details as lawmakers begin investigating what went wrong the day of the attack. Pittman emphasizes the heroism of officers during the "ugly battle" on Jan. 6 and states that Capitol Police had compiled an internal intelligence assessment ahead of the insurrection, when thousands of pro-Trump rioters stormed Congress as lawmakers were certifying Joe Biden's presidential win. That as-

essment, she says, warned that militia members, white supremacists and members of other extremist groups were likely to participate, that demonstrators would be armed and that it was possible they would come to the Capitol to try to disrupt the vote.

"Based on the assessment, the Department understood that this demonstration would be unlike the previous demonstrations held by protesters with similar ideologies in November and December 2020," Pitt-



In this Wednesday, Jan. 6, 2021, file photo, violent protesters storm the Capitol, in Washington.

Associated Press

man will say, according to her prepared remarks.

The department also took additional measures to beef up security because

of the threat, including calling in additional officers and stepping up protection for key members of Congress. □

Hunters and trappers blow past Wisconsin's wolf kill target

By **TODD RICHMOND**

Associated Press

MADISON, Wis. (AP) —

Hunters and trappers blew past Wisconsin's wolf kill target in less than 72 hours, forcing a premature end to a hunt that initially wasn't supposed to happen for another nine months and raising the ire of animal rights activists.

The Department of Natural Resources reported at midday Wednesday that 162 wolves had been killed, which was 43 more than the state's target of 119.

The agency estimated that about 1,000 wolves roamed the state before the hunt began. The department's population goal is 350.

The season began Monday and had been scheduled to run through Sunday, but DNR officials said the hunt would end at 3 p.m. Wednesday because so many animals had been killed in the first two days.

The wolf season has been one of the most contentious outdoors issues that Wisconsin has grappled with in the last 20 years.

Animal rights advocates have argued that wolf populations are too small to support hunting and that the animals are too majestic to kill. Farmers and rural residents, though, say wolves are killing their livestock and pets.



This July 16, 2004, file photo, shows a gray wolf at the Wildlife Science Center in Forest Lake, Minn. **Associated Press**

Wisconsin law hands wolf hunters and trappers significant advantages during the season. Unlike with deer hunting, wolf hunters and trappers can operate at night and use dogs to corner wolves. Snow cover also aids tracking.

Wayne Pacelle, president of animal rights group Animal Wellness Action, said in a statement Wednesday that killed Wisconsin wolves

didn't stand a chance.

"Traps are set like landmines for unsuspecting animals and the hunters are deep into the woods and out of the range of communication, and they can easily claim they didn't get the 'stop the hunt' notice before they killed their wolf," he said.

Collette Adkins, carnivore conservation director for the Center for Biological

Diversity, an Arizona-based nonprofit that works to protect endangered species, issued a statement calling the Wisconsin hunt "a reckless slaughter."

Hunters and trappers exceeded the state's kill target during Wisconsin's 2012, 2013 and 2014 seasons, which were held before the wolf was placed back on the federal endangered species list.

Wisconsin law requires the DNR to give 24-hour notice of wolf hunting zone closures, which means hunters and trappers can keep killing wolves for another day after a closure is announced. If they kill a wolf after the zone is closed, they would face a \$330 fine.

The Trump administration removed federal protections for wolves in January, returning management to the states. Wisconsin law requires the DNR to hold an annual hunt between November and February. The department was preparing for a November hunt when Republican lawmakers demanded the season start before the end of February, saying they were worried the Biden administration might re-list wolves before November and deny Wisconsin hunters a season.

The DNR resisted, but hunter advocacy group Hunter Nation won a court order earlier this month that forced the immediate launch of a wolf hunting season.

The DNR still plans to hold a November wolf hunting season. Keith Warnke, the department's fish, wildlife and parks administrator, told the agency's policy board during a meeting Wednesday that hunters had exceeded the limit. □

Palm Beach County refuses to lower flags for Rush Limbaugh



In this May 14, 2012 file photo, Rush Limbaugh speaks during a ceremony inducting him into the Hall of Famous Missourians in the state Capitol in Jefferson City, Mo. **Associated Press**

By **TERRY SPENCER and BOBBY CAINA CALVAN**
Associated Press

FORT LAUDERDALE, Fla. (AP) — Palm Beach County defied Gov. Ron DeSantis on

Wednesday, refusing to lower its courthouse flags to half-staff in honor of the late conservative broadcaster Rush Limbaugh.

The county's courthouse flags remained at full staff, ignoring Gov. Ron DeSantis' Tuesday afternoon order directing its U.S. and Florida flags to be flown at half-staff. He also ordered the Town of Palm Beach and the State Capitol in Tallahassee to fly their flags at half-staff from sunrise to sunset on Wednesday. Those flags were lowered.

Palm Beach County would only say it followed "normal protocols" on Wednesday, but Commissioner Melissa McKinlay posted a state-

ment on Twitter saying, "The lowering of flags should be a unifying gesture during solemn occasions, such as in remembrance of the young lives lost during the Parkland High School massacre or first responder line of duty deaths." She was referring to the 2018 shooting at Marjory Stoneman Douglas in nearby Parkland that left 17 dead. McKinlay continued: "Although Rush Limbaugh was a significant public figure, he was also an incredibly divisive one who hurt many people with his words and actions." Officials in the Town of Palm Beach, the wealthy island enclave where Limbaugh lived for two decades, is-

sued a statement saying its policy is to comply with governor's orders to lower the flags. The governor's press office did not immediately respond to an email seeking comment. Flags are typically lowered to honor prominent government officials, as well as law enforcement officers and members of the military killed in the line of duty. DeSantis has said Limbaugh's stature justified the honor. Limbaugh, 70, died of lung cancer on Feb. 17. DeSantis called Limbaugh a legend during a news conference two days later and indicated he would direct flags to be flown at half-staff to honor him. □

Putin warns of unnamed foreign efforts to destabilize Russia

By VLADIMIR ISACHENKOV

Associated Press

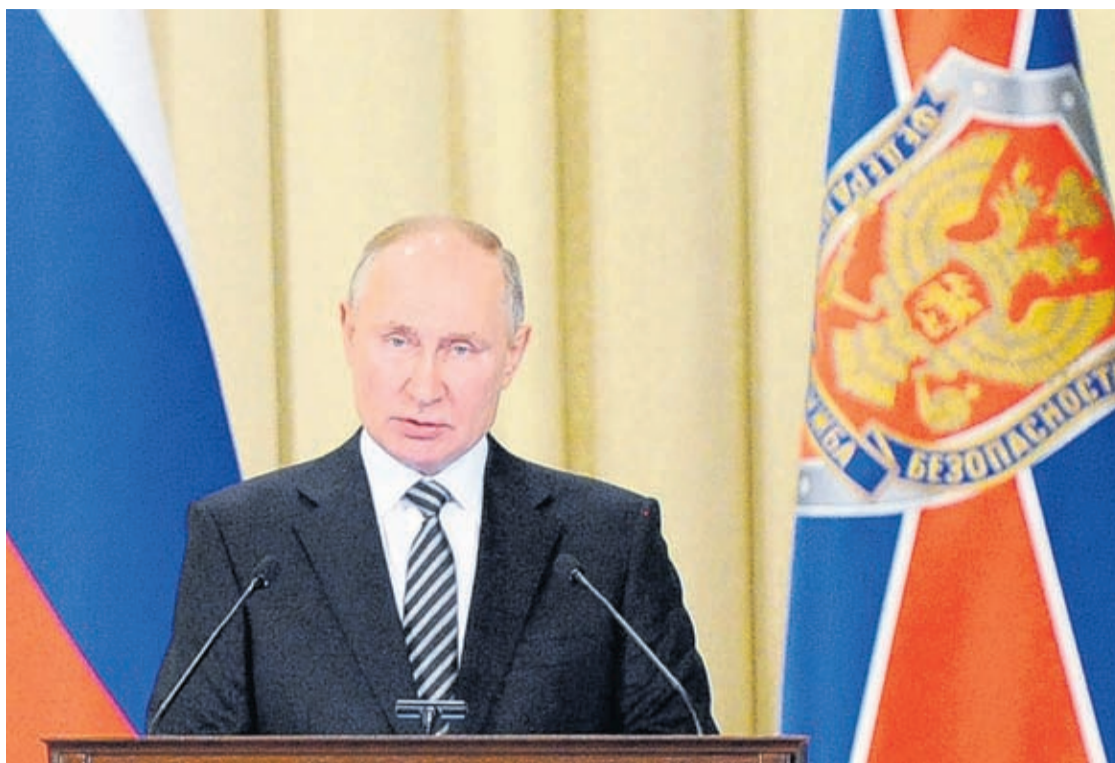
MOSCOW (AP) — Russian President Vladimir Putin ordered his nation's top counterintelligence agency Wednesday to redouble its efforts to address what he described as Western attempts to destabilize Russia.

Speaking at a meeting of top officials of the Federal Security Service, or FSB, the main KGB successor agency, Putin pointed at the "so-called policy of containment of Russia," charging that it includes efforts to "derail our development, slow it down, create problems alongside our borders, provoke internal instability and undermine the values that unite the Russian society."

The Russian president added that those activities by foreign powers, which he didn't name, are aimed at "weakening Russia and putting it under outside control."

The United States and its NATO allies have rejected similar previous claims by the Kremlin that they were seeking to undermine Russia.

Russia's relations with the



Russian President Vladimir Putin speaks during a meeting of the Federal Security Service (FSB) board in Moscow, Russia, on Wednesday, Feb. 24, 2021.

West plummeted to post-Cold War lows following Moscow's 2014 annexation of Ukraine's Crimea and Russian meddling in the 2016 U.S. presidential election. The recent arrest of Russian opposition leader Alexei Navalny and a sweeping crackdown on protesters demanding his release has been another source of tension.

Navalny, Putin's most prom-

inent critic, was arrested on Jan. 17 upon returning from Germany, where he spent five months recovering from a nerve-agent poisoning that he blames on the Kremlin. Russian authorities have rejected the accusation and accused Navalny of cooperating with Western intelligence agencies — claims which he has ridiculed.

Earlier this month, Navalny

was sentenced to 2 1/2 years in prison for violating terms of his probation while convalescing in Germany. The sentence stems from a 2014 embezzlement conviction that Navalny has rejected as fabricated and the European Court of Human Rights has ruled to be unlawful. Navalny's arrest has fueled a wave of protests that drew tens of thousands to the streets

Associated Press

across Russia. The authorities have detained about 11,000 people, many of whom were fined or given jail terms ranging from seven to 15 days.

Without naming Navalny, Putin assailed those in Russia who allegedly serve foreign interests.

"It's necessary to draw a line between natural political competition, competition between political parties, ideological platforms, various views on the country's development, and the activities that have nothing to do with democracy and are aimed at undermining stability and security of our state, at serving foreign interests," he said. The Russian president emphasized the need for the FSB to shield the parliamentary election set for September from any "provocations." Putin hailed the agency for disrupting the activities of foreign spies, maintaining it unmasked 72 foreign intelligence officers and 423 of their informants. He ordered the FSB to tighten the protection of the country's latest military technologies, saying, "You all understand that we have a lot to safeguard." □

Trash fills Bosnia river faster than workers can pull it out

By ELDAR EMRIC

Associated Press

VISEGRAD, Bosnia-Herzegovina (AP) — Environmental activists in Bosnia are warning that tons of garbage floating down the Balkan country's rivers are endangering the local ecosystem and people's health.

The Drina River, located on the border between Bosnia and Serbia, has been covered for weeks with trash that has piled up faster than the authorities can clear it out.

Weeks of wet winter weather that swelled the Drina and its tributaries pulled plastic bottles, rusty barrels, used tires, old furniture and other rubbish into the water.

Near the eastern Bosnian town of Visegrad, islands of garbage can be seen

floating on the emerald-colored water as they advance toward the dam of the local hydroelectric power plant.

Activists say the situation is similar for miles up and downstream from Visegrad.

"This is a problem of huge proportions," warned Dejan Furtula of the local environmental group Eko Centar Visegrad. "I am appealing on all institutions and everyone who can help to join the (clearing) process."

Local authorities have been working to remove the garbage, but more trash is constantly arriving from upstream, carried also by the Drina's tributaries in Serbia and Montenegro. The waste eventually piles up by the Visegrad dam. The 346-kilometer

long (215-mile-long) Drina later flows into the Sava River.

Furtula said that micro plastics and toxins from the garbage end up in the food chain, threatening both wildlife and humans.

"The entire ecosystem is in danger," he said. "We all eat fish here."

Waste management is a problem in many Balkans nations, where the economies are struggling and environmental issues often

come last, after efforts to step up employment and industry production.

Serbia recently faced a similar garbage-clogging emergency at an accumulation lake. Unauthorized waste dumps dot hills and valleys throughout the country, while trash litters roads and plastic bags hang from the trees.

The Drina clearing effort in Bosnia received a boost this week from a startup based in Germany that brought in a garbage-picking vessel dubbed Collectix.

Everwave co-founder Clemens Feigl said "shocking" images of the trash-covered river motivated the company to come over to help. "We will try in the next days to get as much waste as possible out of the water," he said. □



This aerial photo shows a dam garbage floating in the Drina river near Visegrad, eastern Bosnia, Wednesday, Feb. 24, 2021.

Associated Press

Sanctions prompt Venezuela to expel head of EU delegation

By JORGE RUEDA

Associated Press

CARACAS, Venezuela

(AP) — Venezuela's government on Wednesday ordered the expulsion of the head of the European Union delegation in the South American nation following the bloc's decision to impose sanctions on several Venezuelan officials accused of undermining democracy or violating human rights.

Isabel Brilhante Pedrosa was given 72 hours to leave the troubled country. Venezuelan Foreign Minister Jorge Arreaza said Brilhante Pedrosa was declared persona non grata by decision of President Nicolás Maduro.

"The circumstances of aggression leave no option" due to "disrespect for public international law" and in accordance with the Vienna Convention on diplomatic relations, Arreaza said in a statement after a meeting with the European diplomat in the capital of Caracas.

"We do it because there are already 55 decisions, of what they call sanctions in the European Union or in the US system, as if they had



European Union Ambassador to Venezuela Isabel Brilhante Pedrosa is presented with a letter of "persona non grata" from Venezuelan Foreign Minister Jorge Arreaza at his office in Caracas, Venezuela, Wednesday, Feb. 24, 2021.

Associated Press

a moral authority, which they do not have, nor legal, to impose any punishments on citizens of any other country," Arreaza said.

The move from the Venezuelan government came two days after the European Union's foreign ministers sanctioned 19 Venezuelan officials, freezing their assets and banning them from traveling to the bloc, citing

the deteriorating situation Venezuela faces after the December 2020 elections. The main opposition parties boycotted those elections. So far, 55 Venezuelan officials have been sanctioned by the European Union.

"The individuals added to the list are mainly responsible for undermining the electoral rights of the oppo-

sitions and the democratic functioning of the National Assembly and for serious violations of human rights and restrictions on fundamental freedoms," the EU ministers pointed out.

It is the second time in almost eight months that Brilhante Pedrosa has been declared persona non grata and ordered to leave Venezuela. The measures

both times have been related to the sanctions imposed by the European bloc against officials and allies of Maduro.

Last June, Brilhante Pedrosa was able to remain in Venezuela after the European Union High Representative for Foreign Affairs, Josep Borrell, and Arreaza agreed on the need to maintain a framework of diplomatic relations at a time when the parties "can facilitate the paths of political dialogue."

Arreaza on Wednesday lamented that the sanctions were imposed again after "last year it was possible to establish stable communication with the High Representative for Foreign Relations of the European Union."

"President Maduro was generous when he allowed the heads of missions to remain in Venezuela, and even the missions of European Union countries, when in February 2019 they ignored him" as the legitimate president of Venezuela, Arreaza said Wednesday in reference to the recognition then given to opposition leader Juan Guaidó. □

U.N.: Boat with Rohingya refugees adrift without food, water

By JULHAS ALAM

Associated Press

DHAKA, Bangladesh (AP)

— A group of Rohingya refugees is adrift in a boat in the Andaman Sea without food or water, the United Nations said Wednesday,

as their families worried that many may have already died.

The U.N. High Commissioner for Refugees, or UNHCR, said it understands that some of the refugees died after the boat left south-

ern Bangladesh about two weeks ago. It said it does not know the boat's exact current location. The U.N. and rights groups including Amnesty International have said many of the refugees were ill and suffering from acute dehydration.

Reports said about 90 refugees, including some children, started the journey to seek better lives. Human traffickers often lure refugees, promising them work in Southeast Asian nations. More than 1 million Rohingya refugees from Myanmar are living in crowded camps in Bangladesh, including more than 700,000 who fled after Myanmar's military conducted a harsh counterinsurgency operation in 2017 involving mass rape, murders and the torching of villages.

Authorities in Bangladesh said Tuesday they had no information about any boat that recently carried Rohingya refugees out of Bangladesh's waters.

"We have no idea," said Hafizur Rahman, police chief of Teknaf in Cox's Bazar district.

The UNHCR said the Indian coast guard has sent rescuers to look for the refugees.

"We appreciate the efforts of the Indian coast guard in deploying their search and rescue team," said Catherine Stubberfield, spokesperson for the UNHCR Regional Bureau for Asia and the Pacific.

"Given that the refugees are still adrift at sea, immediate disembarkation is absolutely critical to meeting their most basic human

needs and ensuring that their safety is no longer threatened," she said in an email. P.N. Anup, a spokesman for the Indian coast guard, said he had "nothing to say as of now."

The mother of a 25-year-old man on the boat said she was worried about his fate.

"Oh Allah, save all of the people that are stuck in the boat including my son with your divine magic. Put them somewhere on the coast of the river. Please fulfill the wishes of my son to go there," said Nasima Khatun. "Is my son alive? Has anything happened to him because of hunger? I do not know anything about what my son is doing, how he is surviving. He only took 4 liters of water," she said. □



In this Feb. 15, 2021, file photo, Rohingya refugees headed to the Bhasan Char island prepare to board navy vessels from the south eastern port city of Chattogram, Bangladesh.

Associated Press

Asylum seekers rush to register for U.S. border processing

By **MARÍA VERZA**

Associated Press

MEXICO CITY (AP) — In the first five days since the administration of U.S. President Joe Biden began to process the thousands of asylum seekers waiting in Mexico, the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees registered 12,000 people. That's nearly half the 25,000 active cases the U.S. government has cited.

Migrants who have waited in Mexico and elsewhere to get hearings on their U.S. asylum requests are dealing now with a mix of hope and frustration, along with overloaded websites and telephone lines that never stop ringing.

The hurdles are far better than the seemingly endless wait often in wretched conditions of tens of thousands of asylum seekers forced to choose between waiting in Mexico — or returning to Central America — under the Migrant Protection Protocols, or Remain in Mexico program. Instituted by the Trump administration in January 2019, the program sought to discourage



Asylum seekers receive food as they wait for news at the border, Friday, Feb. 19, 2021, in Tijuana, Mexico.

asylum seekers by making them wait in Mexico rather than releasing them with orders to appear for future court dates in the U.S.

On Wednesday, the U.S. Department of Homeland Security announced it would begin processing asylum seekers with registered cases who have been living in a tent encampment on the

banks of the Rio Grande in Matamoros, Mexico. Life in the camp has always been precarious, but it was especially hard hit by frigid winter weather that hit Texas and northern Mexico last week. Processing residents of the camp is a priority for the Biden administration, the statement said.

Last week, the U.S. govern-

ment began processing a small number of asylum seekers with active cases in San Diego. The processing is expected to expand to El Paso soon.

Some of that last group registered from the United States, suggesting that they may have entered the country illegally after making their initial asylum

petition. The others registered from Central America where they returned to their native countries rather than remain in the often dangerous Mexican cities at the border.

"I'm like I believe, I don't believe it, I have a mix of feelings," said a Cuban teacher from the border city of Reynosa where she has been waiting for almost two years. She requested anonymity because she had been kidnapped previously in the city.

After many frustrated attempts, she managed to register and received a WhatsApp message asking for her patience as technical difficulties were resolved. "Now just wait for the call," she said.

That call will be the third step in the process. Monica Vázquez, UNHCR's liaison to the migrants, said that first they have to check online to confirm their case is active.

Then they have to register with UNHCR where they will receive an email with a date and time for a telephone call. □

Associated Press

Number of women on UK corporate boards rises 50% in 5 years

LONDON (AP) — Women now hold more than a third of the seats on the boards of Britain's biggest companies, meeting a government target set five years ago.

The number of women on the boards of directors of

Britain's 350 top publicly traded firms has jumped by more than 50% since 2015, meaning that 34.3% of all board seats are now held by women, an independent panel said in a report published Wednesday. Women hold at least

one-third of the board seats at 220 companies, up from 53 five years ago. While companies met the target for board membership, women still lag behind in the competition for senior executive roles, particularly at smaller firms. Women hold 26.5% of executive committee seats at the 100 largest companies and just 21.7% of these seats at smaller companies.

"The progress has been strongest with non-executive positions on boards, but the coming years should see many more women taking top executive roles," said Philip Hampton, the former chairman of Royal Bank of Scotland who led the panel. "That's what is needed to sustain the changes made." □



People walk past the Bank of England in the City of London financial district of London, during England's third coronavirus lockdown, Tuesday, Feb. 23, 2021.

Associated Press

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Joe Davis, Managing Director Gloria:

“Gloria is an entertainment adventure and the most state-of-the-art movie theater in the Caribbean”

EAGLE BACH — Aruba now offers the most entertaining movie-going experience with heart-pounding audio, awe-inspiring images and an immersive experience. IMAX is the name. But, there is way more. Grande Dame Gloria is the newest entertainment complex and has 10 cinema theaters: an IMAX, 6 comfort class theaters and 3 VIP theaters. In total offering a capacity of 1132 seats. Gloria invites you to dine at any of its three restaurants. If you prefer, grab something quick at Lettuce Eat, Cold Fusion or the ubiquitous Starbucks. “If you vacation here, this is your perfect night out with the family,” says Joe Davis, Managing Director Gloria.

Davis manages not only in Aruba but also in Curacao. “Gloria is an entertainment destination. We try to create a place for people not only to watch movies but also have a night out whether that is eating dinner, enjoying drinks, watching a sport event in one of the bars downstairs or to do something with your family like see a movie and afterwards go to Stay & Play.” You can get pampered in the VIP sections which have a different entrance from the rest of the complex or just sit and have a coffee. Truly, Gloria has something for everyone. “This is the most state-of-the-art movie theater in the Caribbean.”

Downstairs

IMAX is a brand, Gloria agreed to



a franchise where they purchased the proprietary equipment and thus offering to show movies in that format. Davis: “A larger screen, dynamic sound, amazing image that is IMAX.” Upon entering the complex you encounter a food court offering P.F. Chang's (Asian food), Italian Mangiamo and the sports bar Sizzle. Starbucks, Lettuce Eat and Cold Fusion are welcoming you and for the children there's Play & Stay play court.

Sizzle is introducing their new menu, if you are looking for the best wings and burgers in town, stop by this sports bar. You will love it!

VIP

If you want an upscale experience, use the separate entrance to the VIP theatres. “Here you relax in a full recliner with a particular headrest, your waiter comes into the auditorium and takes your order to

serve you there. If you do not want to watch a movie and just enjoy your steak and seafood we offer a very nice lounge to sit and eat, your choice. Seats are state of the art, brand-new and super comfortable with built-in tray tables, illuminated menus and a call-button for service,” Davis says. Eventually they will offer valet parking as well.

Upstairs

The escalator brings you to the first floor with IMAX and 6 comfort class theaters. “Ease in very comfortable leather rockers and enjoy the large and wide screens plus perfect sound. IMAX offers wide huge chairs and a screen of 22 meters wide (71 feet) and 13 meters tall with a 10.1 Dolby Surround Sound System, amazing.” Gloria takes you inside the movie, you are living it!

Covid-19 safety in place

Because of the current pandemic



Gloria has the required Covid-19 safety protocol in place. Social distancing is required, seats are separated and complete sanitizing is done after each movie.

Unique points

- Parking with 310 spots, near the hotels
- VIP experience
- IMAX super cinema experience
- 6 comfort class theaters
- Food Court
- Mingle with the locals
- Fun for your teens and small children (Stay & Play)
- Something different than your standard restaurant night

The company behind Gloria

Eddie de Veer is the owner of MetaCorp, a 100% Aruban company existing for 100 years and owner of Gloria. “Gloria was the first cinema theater we started on Aruba, now we do it again and we make the circle round. This is spectacular.” If you visit Gloria, take a look at the short wall video showing the history of MetaCorp and their significance to the Aruban community. De Veer: “In difficult times like these we do invest in our local economy showing confidence and giving hope.” □



Hand4addicts: Lending a helping hand



ORANJESTAD — Hand4Addicts is a foundation consisting of a group of volunteers who help the addicted in the city of Oranjestad. The help they provide is by giving them warm meals, clean clothes, a chance to bathe and a haircut once

a month. This way they can show to these people that they are still part of the community. The foundation wants to change the way our community views and interacts with the people who struggle with addiction. They are also someone's friend or family member and many times their basic needs are neglected. This is where Hand4addicts comes in.

The foundation is a non-profit organization that does not receive any help from the government. They are completely dependent

on donations_ with most being done from our everyday people. They welcome all sorts of donations such as hygiene products, clothing, shoes, towels etc.

March 18th, edition
Their next event called "March 18th Edition" will be held on Sunday, March 14th, 2021 at the parking lot behind mango in Downtown mainstreet, from 10am till 2pm.

For this event they are in need of your cooperation. They want to provide their clients with a warm meal consisting of some local food and dessert. Beverages, cups, ice are of great help. They also need



clothes (shirts, shorts, underwear, socks, shoes) for their clients. If you are a barber and willing to help their

clients with a haircut, lend them a helping hand. All donations are welcome.

Being able to see them 'grateful' for a meal, shower, clean clothes and a haircut is priceless!

For more information on how to lend a helping hand to this foundation please call 5931816 /5929224 or email them at hand4addicts@gmail.com or check out their facebook page Hand4Addicts.□



Ten years of sun, fun and flamingos

ORANJESTAD — Recently, Kimberley Richardson of the Aruba Tourism Authority had the great pleasure to honor Aruba's loyal and friendly visitors as Distinguished Visitors of Aruba. The Distinguished visitor certificate is presented on behalf of the Minister of Tourism, as a token of appreciation to the guests who visit Aruba 10 years and more consecutively.

The honorees were Mrs. Karen Ballard & Mr. Francis Linsky from USA.

Linsky was unable to be present for the ceremony, however, we still wanted to honor his 10 years of consecutive visits to the island of Aruba!

Ballard and Linsky both stated that they love the island very much, especially for its year-round sunny weather, nice sandy beaches and picturesque sunsets, its safety, Aruba's warm and friendly people, and the Flamingos they get to see each year on the Renaissance island.

Richardson together with the representatives of the Renaissance Ocean Suites presented the certificate to the honorees, handed over some presents and also thanked them for choosing Aruba as their favorite vacation destination and as their home-away-from-home.□



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*Offer cannot be combined with any other discounts or promotions.

Hooked on Seafood

PALM BEACH — For sublime seafood in Aruba go to the island's Premiere Seafood restaurant: Aqua-Grill. This seafood-heaven place is already a statement for years with a consistency in upscale dining and top service. If you like to savor your seafood, this is your plunge. We promise you that you will get hooked.

The glow of Aqua-Grill is obvious by entering the restaurant. The eclectic of a modern and a traditional New England fish house style appeal and the open-view kitchen adds to the thrill. Let's see what is on the menu. Deep down delicious seafood is what you are craving for and that is exactly what you will get. Welcome in the theatre of the sea, let us entertain you.

Providing Aqua-Grills loyal guests abroad with the latest happenings

Aqua-Grill recently started a joint partnership with Aruba Tourist Channel. The Tourist Channel is a cutting edge digital-platform to communicate Aruba's art, culture, culinary experiences and history through motion picture using a 24/7, 365 day-a-year broadcast that can be accessed on any phone, tablet, TV, website, and social media. Aqua-Grill's culinary content and special on-off offers will be displayed that tourist can benefit from when visiting Aruba. The information will reach various states and big give-aways will shake things up and make readers excited for an unforgettable experience. Have a look at their Facebook page Aqua-Grill and/or Aruba Tourist Channel to connect and stay informed.

How Aqua-Grill keeps their guests coming back for more

Secretly, we all know that the success of a restaurant has its core in the kitchen. That is where the chef creates his magic and for Aqua Grill the culinary team won a range of awards for their continuous delivery of haute-cuisine del mar. Classic seafood is mingled with contemporary ideas resulting in surprising dishes that soon made the restaurant a must-dine, confirmed by established travel media specialists like Fodor's.

Aqua Grill invites you to get hooked on the largest raw bar of the island and dive into the wine list of over one hundred selected choices. Local and international catches create an impressive menu including snapper, grouper, mahi-mahi, Chilean salmon, sashimi tuna, Main lobster and Alaskan king crabs. Non-seafood options are part of the menu selection as well. Many locals and visitors are already a regular, we are convinced you want to join that group after your first experience. □

Aqua Grill

J.E. Irausquin Blvd. 374

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Shopping online eases isolation for older adults

By ANNE D'INNOCENZIO

AP Retail Writer

NEW YORK (AP) — In November, Paula Mont did something new: The 86-year-old, who hasn't left her New Jersey senior living community in nearly a year, went shopping — online. Mont used an iPad, equipped with a stylus to help her shaky hands, to buy a toy grand piano for her great-granddaughter. She picked it out from more than a dozen versions of the instrument on Amazon. "It is like a wow feeling. I found it!" Mont said.

The internet has become a crucial link to the outside world during the pandemic, one that millions of people still don't have access to. Among older adults, the lack of internet has even impeded their ability to get vaccinated.

But the pandemic has also motivated many who have been isolated at home or unable to leave their senior communities to learn something they may have resisted until now: how to buy groceries and more online.

People 65 and older rang up nearly \$187 per month online last year, up 60% from a year earlier, according to market research firm NPD Group's Checkout Tracking. They still spend less than the total population, who paid about \$238 per month, but they are



Lynette White uses her tablet in San Francisco, Tuesday, Feb. 16, 2021.

Associated Press

the fastest-growing group of online shoppers by age group.

Shopping is one of a slew of activities that older Americans now have to do over the internet, like doctor's appointments and socializing via digital video like FaceTime. Such behavior was forced by necessity older people face the biggest risk of infection, so it's more dangerous for them to go out.

The transition online hasn't always been easy, and children and senior living staff often have to help, an experience that can be both gratifying and difficult. Barbara Moran, director of

social programs for Atria Senior Living where Mont lives, says one of the biggest challenges residents face with their devices is that they are used to pushing, not tapping, as if they're using a touch-tone telephone. She has to repeat tips often.

"I would lie if I didn't say I was frustrated sometimes," said Moran, who sits with Mont masked and gloved in the facility's dining room for weekly shopping sessions.

Internet retailers and delivery services hope people over 65 keep up the online shopping habit. Freshly, which delivers prepared

meals, is adding smaller portions and low-sodium options aimed at seniors; grocery delivery service Instacart set up a phone support line; Target's delivery service, Shipt, is scrapping its \$99-a-year fee for some low-income seniors.

Diane Shein, 73, from Bonita Springs, Florida, turned to Instacart and Amazon-owned Whole Foods for groceries because of the pandemic. Instacart president Nilam Ganenthiran predicted that online groceries will be a "new normal" for older people even when the pandemic ends. Still, there are many barriers, from struggling to use

new technology to high prices to access.

People 65 and older are less likely than younger people to have home internet or a smartphone. Nearly 22 million, or 42% of Americans 65 and older, lack broadband at home, according to a 2021 study from non-profit Older Adults Technology Services. Low-income and Black and Latino older adults are more likely to be left out, the study says.

"We are asking them to stay at home, and yet a lot of seniors are not connected," said Lauren Cotter of the Community Tech Network, a San Francisco nonprofit that trains low-income residents on technology and provides free tablets and hotspots.

Those with devices and internet may wrestle with how to use an app or fear giving out personal information because they worry about fraudsters.

Online shopping scams cost Americans \$245.9 million last year, according to the Federal Trade Commission. And online grocery shopping, which includes tips and delivery charges, costs more than going to stores.

The pandemic has also exposed the shortcomings of the internet, which often fails to accommodate people with disabilities or an aging population with visual and hearing issues. □

Chinese official calls for 'joint efforts' in China-U.S. trade



People wearing face masks to help curb the spread of the coronavirus look at iPad devices at an Apple store at the capital city's popular shopping mall in Beijing on Wednesday, Feb. 24, 2021.

Associated Press

BEIJING (AP) — China's commerce minister appealed to Washington for "joint efforts" to revive trade but gave no indication Wednesday when tariff war talks might resume or whether Beijing might offer concessions. "Cooperation is the only correct choice," Wang Wentao said at a news conference.

President Joe Biden has yet to announce a strategy for dealing with Beijing but is widely expected to renew pressure on trade and technology complaints that prompted his predecessor, Donald Trump, to

raise taxes on Chinese imports. Wang said he looked forward to "joint efforts" to "push bilateral economic and trade relations back to the track of cooperation." He noted President Xi Jinping talked with Biden by phone on Feb. 11 but gave no indication when negotiations might resume.

Washington and Beijing have raised tariffs on billions of dollars of each other's goods, disrupting global trade. They agreed last January to postpone further penalties but most taxes already imposed stayed in place.

Beijing agreed to narrow its trade surplus with the United States by purchasing more American soybeans and other exports. It fell short of the targets set due to the coronavirus pandemic and bought about 55% of the promised goods. China's foreign trade situation is "severe and complicated," Wang said. He said Beijing is launching e-commerce and other initiatives to encourage sales. One focus will be markets in its "Belt and Road Initiative" to build ports, railways and other trade-related infrastructure. □

Bone cancer survivor to join billionaire on SpaceX flight

By **MARCIA DUNN**
AP Aerospace Writer
CAPE CANAVERAL, Fla.

(AP) — After beating bone cancer, Hayley Arceneaux figures rocketing into orbit on SpaceX's first private flight should be a piece of cosmic cake.

St. Jude Children's Research Hospital announced Monday that the 29-year-old physician assistant — a former patient hired last spring — will launch later this year alongside a billionaire who's using his purchased spaceflight as a charitable fundraiser.

Arceneaux will become the youngest American in space — beating NASA record-holder Sally Ride by over two years — when she blasts off this fall with entrepreneur Jared Isaacman and two yet-to-be-chosen contest winners.

She'll also be the first to launch with a prosthesis. When she was 10, she had surgery at St. Jude to replace her knee and get a titanium rod in her left thigh bone. She still limps and suffers occasional leg pain, but has been cleared for flight by SpaceX. She'll serve as the crew's medical officer.

"My battle with cancer really prepared me for space travel," Arceneaux said in an interview with The Associated Press. "It made me tough, and then also I think it really taught me to expect the unexpected and



This Wednesday, Feb. 10, 2021 photo provided by St. Jude Children's Research Hospital shows Hayley Arceneaux at the hospital in Memphis, Tenn.

go along for the ride." She wants to show her young patients and other cancer survivors that "the sky is not even the limit anymore."

"It's going to mean so much to these kids to see a survivor in space," she said. Isaacman announced his space mission Feb. 1, pledging to raise \$200 million for St. Jude, half of that his own contribution. As the flight's self-appointed commander, he offered one of the four SpaceX Dragon capsule seats to St. Jude. Without alerting the staff, St. Jude chose Arceneaux from among the "scores" of hospital and fundraising

employees who had once been patients and could represent the next generation, said Rick Shadyac, president of St. Jude's fundraising organization.

Arceneaux was at home in Memphis, Tennessee, when she got the "out of the blue" call in January asking if she'd represent St. Jude in space.

Her immediate response: "Yes! Yes! Please!" But first

she wanted to run it past her mother in St. Francisville, Louisiana. (Her father died of kidney cancer in 2018.) Next she reached out to her brother and sister-in-law, both of them aerospace engineers in Huntsville, Alabama, who "reassured me how safe space travel is."

A lifelong space fan who embraces adventure, Arceneaux insists those who

know her won't be surprised. She's plunged on a bungee swing in New Zealand and ridden camels in Morocco. And she loves roller-coasters.

Isaacman, who flies fighter jets for a hobby, considers her a perfect fit.

"It's not all supposed to be about getting people excited to be astronauts someday, which is certainly cool," Isaacman, 38, said last week. "It's also supposed to be about an inspiring message of what we can accomplish here on Earth."

He has two more crew members to select, and he plans to reveal them in March. One will be a sweepstakes winner; anyone donating to St. Jude this month is eligible. So far, more than \$9 million has come in, according to Shadyac. The other seat will go to a business owner who uses Shift4Payments, Isaacman's Allentown, Pennsylvania, credit card-processing company.

Liftoff is targeted around October at NASA's Kennedy Space Center, with the capsule orbiting Earth two to four days. He's not divulging the cost. □

Associated Press

Mars rover's giant parachute carried secret message

By **MARCIA DUNN**
AP Aerospace Writer
CAPE CANAVERAL, Fla.

(AP) — The huge parachute used by NASA's Perseverance rover to land on Mars contained a secret message, thanks to a puzzle lover on the spacecraft team.

Systems engineer Ian Clark used a binary code to spell out "Dare Mighty Things" in the orange and white strips of the 70-foot (21-meter) parachute. He also included the GPS coordinates for the mission's headquarters at the Jet Propulsion Laboratory in Pasadena, California.

Clark, a crossword hobbyist, came up with the idea two years ago. Engineers wanted an unusual pattern in the nylon fabric to know how the parachute was oriented during descent. Turning it into a secret message was "super fun," he said Tuesday. Only about six people knew about the encoded message before Thursday's landing, according to Clark. They waited until the parachute images came back before putting out a teaser during a televised news confer-



This illustration provided by NASA shows a diagram added over the parachute deployed during the descent of the Mars Perseverance rover as it approaches the surface of the planet on Thursday, Feb. 18, 2021.

Associated Press

ence Monday. It took just a few hours for space fans to figure it out, Clark said. Next time, he noted, "I'll have to be a little bit more creative."

"Dare Mighty Things" — a line from President Theodore Roosevelt — is a mantra at JPL and adorns many of the center's walls. The trick was "trying to come up with a way of encoding it but not making it too obvious," Clark said. □

Conceptis Sudoku

By Dave Green

5				3				
6		8	2					
			9	8			1	5
	6					2		
9		5				4		1
		4					5	
1	2			9	6			
					7	3		2
				2				8

Difficulty Level ★★★

2/25

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La Vie Boheme: ‘Rent’ musical celebrates 25th anniversary



This combination photo shows notable cast members from the musical “Rent,” from left, Taye Diggs, Jesse L. Martin, Idina Menzel, Adam Pascal, Anthony Rapp and Daphne Rubin-Vega.

Associated Press

By MARK KENNEDY
AP Entertainment Writer
NEW YORK (AP) — Twenty-five years ago, stage actors Adam Pascal and Daphne Rubin-Vega had been cast in a new, edgy musical downtown and wondered if anyone would remember it.

“Can you imagine us in 25 years talking about this show and singing these songs?” Pascal wondered to his co-star. “We laughed about it, as if like, ‘Oh, my God, that’s crazy. That’ll never happen.’”

Well, it’s happening.

The musical was “Rent” and it’s celebrating its silver anniversary this year with an online gala and a lot of gratitude from generations of fans.

Jonathan Larson’s tale of free-spirited artists and street people in New York’s gritty drug- and AIDS-plagued East Village of the early 1990s was inspired by Puccini’s “La Boheme” and found a ready-made audience in young people.

“It gives people hope who

feel that ‘I’m different’ and ‘I don’t fit.’ This says ‘It doesn’t matter,’” says James Nicola, artistic director of New York Theater Workshop, which nurtured “Rent.” “It says, ‘You can go out and make your own community.’”

New York Theater Workshop will celebrate “Rent” with a gala on March 2 that will be available to stream through March 6. Original cast members will be joined by theater stars such as Lin-Manuel Miranda, Neil Patrick Harris, Ben Platt, Billy Porter, Ali Stroker, Eva Noblezada and Christopher Jackson. Tickets begin at \$25.

“Rent” won Tony Awards for best musical, score and book and a Pulitzer Prize. It lasted on Broadway for 12 years and more than 5,000 performances, launching the careers of Pascal, Rubin-Vega, Taye Diggs, Jesse L. Martin, Idina Menzel, Wilson Jermaine Heredia and Anthony Rapp.

There was a 2005 film version, several tours, an off-Broadway revival, international productions, a Hollywood Bowl concert and a live staging on Fox in 2019, all fueled by songs such as “Take Me or Leave Me,” “Out Tonight” and the crowd-pleasing “Seasons of Love.”

“Rent” has since been referenced in everything from “The Big Bang Theory” to “The Simpsons” to “I Am Legend.” In the film “Team America: World Police,” puppets act out a show called “Lease.”

Larson never lived to see his triumph: He died at age 35

of an aortic aneurysm after its final dress rehearsal in January 1996.

The 15 original actors stay in touch and share a text thread.

“We really kind of immediately fell into a rapport and trust with each other, especially after the tragedy,” said Heredia. “There’s nothing that bonds people more than tragedy.”

The musical had an unpretentious start. New York Theater Workshop had just moved into its space in the East Village in the summer of 1992 and was undergoing construction. Larson rode by on his bike and poked his head in.

“He was curious because he’d written this musical for the East Village and was looking for a home for it that was in the East Village,” said Nicola.

A few days later, Larson dropped off a script and a cassette tape of him singing all the songs.

The timing was perfect.

“We were looking for something to do about our neighborhood in the literal sense and in walks this musical,” said Nicola.

It was quickly clear that Larson was steeped in classical music, pop and everything in between, what Pascal calls an “incredibly unique, eclectic influence soup.”

Larson’s musical went to the top of the company’s list.

“People can write music. People can write words. Not so many people can write words and music together,” says Nicola. “And then even fewer can understand putting words

and music into a dramatic context.”

The show attracted Rubin-Vega, who usually wasn’t interested in musical theater.

“This was talking to me,” she recalled. “I knew these people.

These are the kind of people that I hung out with.” It was, she adds, a musical that she herself wanted to see.

She would earn a Tony nomination for her Mimi, an HIV-positive heroin addict and stripper.

She recalls looking out and seeing audiences singing along — weeks before a cast album was even available. They were repeat customers.

“It was a supernova,” she said.

Just being in “Rent” was lifechanging for Heredia, a then-24-year-old who never thought he’d be in a musical, much less one that made the leap to Broadway.

“I never saw my face in the faces of people that were on Broadway,” says Heredia, who played the doomed drag queen Angel.

It was Heredia, a self-described hyperactive club kid, who one day during a break in rehearsal leaped onto a table in heels — to the astonishment of director Michael Greif.

That move was put in the show.

“The trick of that whole number wasn’t the jumping on the table.

It was the jumping off of the table,” Heredia says, laughing. “My back and

my knees are paying for it now.”

Heredia won a Tony for his work, but he says he cherishes more the dozens of people who have approached him to say Angel helped them come out to their parents, accept their son or just inspired them.

“The impact that it’s had on the generations to me has affected me even more than the Tony,” he says.

“It’s one of the best thing that’s ever happened to my life.”

“Rent” also helped put New York Theatre Workshop on the map, where it has continued to nurture shows like “Hadestown,” “Once” and “Slave Play.”

“You really can look at the history of New York Theater Workshop divided neatly between before ‘Rent’ and after ‘Rent,’” said Nicola. “It’s that significant. It transformed the organization.”

One “Rent” fan is Miranda, the visionary behind “Hamilton,” noted Rubin-Vega.

“In no uncertain terms, he is a legacy of Jonathan’s, just like Jonathan was a legacy of Sondheim,” she said.

Adds Pascal: “It’s a gift that continues to give.” □

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NBA chooses All-Star reserves, with Zion among first-timers

By **TIM REYNOLDS**
AP Basketball Writer

New Orleans forward Zion Williamson now can be called an NBA All-Star, and only three others in the game's 70-year history have gotten there at a younger age.

Williamson is one of four first-time All-Stars, all revealed Tuesday night when the league announced the reserves for the March 7 game in Atlanta. Joining him as fellow All-Star rookies: Boston's Jaylen Brown, New York's Julius Randle and Chicago's Zach LaVine.

Phoenix's Chris Paul is an All-Star for the 11th time, and Brooklyn's James Harden is one for the ninth consecutive year. The rest of the reserves include Philadelphia's Ben Simmons, Boston's Jayson Tatum and Orlando's Nikola Vucevic from the Eastern Conference, along with the Los Angeles Lakers' Anthony Davis, the Los Angeles Clippers' Paul George, Utah teammates Donovan Mitchell and Rudy Gobert, and Portland's Damian Lillard from the Western Conference.

Team captains LeBron James of the Los Angeles Lakers and Kevin Durant of the Brooklyn Nets will draft their teams next week, with the rosters to be unveiled March 4. Starters, revealed last week, were chosen through a combination of voting by fans, NBA players and a media panel.

Reserves were chosen through voting by the league's head coaches.

"You do the best that you can," Orlando coach Steve Clifford said. "It's not easy. ... Every year, it is hard, and when you look at this year in the East there were a number of guys who are worthy of making it. So, it's difficult every year." Atlanta's Trae Young, an All-Star last season, is not one this year despite averaging 26.9 points entering Tuesday, the most among anyone not selected. Miami forwards Bam Adebayo and Jimmy Butler didn't make the cut, nor did Phoenix's Devin Book-



New Orleans Pelicans forward Zion Williamson (1) goes to the basket in the first half of an NBA basketball game against the Boston Celtics in New Orleans, Sunday, Feb. 21, 2021.

Associated Press

er. "Devin Booker is the most disrespected player in our league!!!! Simple as that," James tweeted.

Utah's Mike Conley — someone the NBA-leading Jazz desperately wanted

to see get there for what would have been the first time — also missed out on the nod.

"For a guy like him who's done so many things in his career, on and off the floor,

he deserves this," Mitchell said of Conley. Not enough coaches agreed. There's still a chance for Conley, because Davis is likely to miss the game because of injury. NBA Commissioner Adam Silver will choose any injury replacements; a player who bows out will be replaced by someone else from his respective conference.

Williamson is 20, and only Kobe Bryant, James and Magic Johnson were younger in their All-Star debuts. There have been six other 20-year-olds chosen for past All-Star Games, but all were closer to their 21st birthday at the time than Williamson is now.

Randle has been the best player for the Knicks, who are trying to make the play-

offs for the first time since 2013. Brown is averaging a career-best 25.5 points for Boston. And LaVine has been to All-Star weekend plenty of times before, winning two dunk contests and an MVP award at the Rising Stars game. But this will be his first time in the All-Star Game itself.

STARTERS POOL

James and Durant will choose from eight other starters for their teams first when the draft takes place: Milwaukee's Giannis Antetokounmpo, Washington's Bradley Beal, Golden State's Stephen Curry, Dallas' Luka Dončić, Philadelphia's Joel Embiid, Brooklyn's Kyrie Irving, Denver's Nikola Jokić and the Los Angeles Clippers' Kawhi Leonard. □

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Playing tag is no kids' game for NFL teams



In this Sunday, Oct. 4, 2020 file photo, Dallas Cowboys quarterback Dak Prescott drops back to pass in the first half of an NFL football game against the Cleveland Browns in Arlington, Texas.

By **BARRY WILNER**
AP Pro Football Writer

NFL teams could begin playing tag on Tuesday, and it's no kids' game for the 32 teams.

Applying franchise and even transition tags to players can have major ramifications on a team's present and future. That was never more of a consideration than this year, with the salary cap decreasing for now by \$18 million. That's the first time the cap has gone down, which is due to lost revenues caused by the COVID-19 pandemic.

"It has always gone up," says Bill Polian, a Pro Football Hall of Fame executive. "So have the expectations of the players and agents. This is the first time this is not happening. That is a sea change."

While this mini-tidal wave likely is only for the upcoming season — the league's broadcast deals should be solidified soon and will bolster future caps — it certainly could have a significant impact.

Consider the Super Bowl champs. The Buccaneers don't relish losing the likes of linebackers Shaq Barrett and Lavonte David, wide receiver Chris Godwin, running back Leonard Fournette, tight end Rob Gronkowski or defensive tackle Ndamukong Suh.

Look for one of them, probably sackmaster Barrett or dynamic pass catcher Godwin, to get tagged for a one-year, guaranteed contract. Barrett was a franchise player in 2020 and would get about \$19 million if tagged again.

Associated Press

Godwin would get nearly \$16 million.

Bucs coach Bruce Arians said after winning the NFL title that the team would find ways to keep key players. It will take some financial imagination.

"I'm very, very confident," Arians said. "I have all the trust in the world in (GM Jason Licht) and what he will do. There will be dollars involved, but I think this group is so close that sometimes dollars don't matter. But we're going to do everything we can to get the dollars right, too."

The biggest name — if not the best player — who might wind up tagged is Cowboys quarterback Dak Prescott. His ankle injury early last season muddled the picture in Dallas, but the team insists Prescott is the guy, even if it means a second straight franchise player designation — at nearly \$38 million.

Polian, now an analyst for SiriusXM NFL Radio, notes that the higher-end players rarely reach total freedom. "The 'A' players don't get to free agency," he says. "So what is out there on the market, even in this untoward year, are going to be 'B' players looking for 'A' players' money."

Others positions and who could wind up tagged:

RUNNING BACK

Aaron Jones, Packers — Tagging runners sometimes seems wise because long-term contracts at such a punishingly physical position aren't attractive for teams. Jones is a very attractive guy for the Packers because of his versatil-

ity, production, age (26) and strong relationship with MVP Aaron Rodgers. Green Bay doesn't have much cap room, though, and the franchise tag will be approximately \$11 million.

WIDE RECEIVER

Kenny Golladay, Lions — The \$15.81 million cost as of now isn't prohibitive for this team. Golladay is a genuine No. 1 wideout and would get plenty of attention on the open market. New QB Jared Goff had a talented group of targets in Los Angeles and sure could benefit from Golladay sticking around.

Allen Robinson, Bears — When healthy, Robinson is a stud. Like Golladay, he would be coveted as a free agent, and he's in his prime at 27. The uncertain quarterback situation in Chicago makes it likely Robinson leaves if he doesn't get tagged.

DEFENSIVE LINEMEN

Yannick Ngakoue and Matt Judon, Ravens — A pair of solid, sometimes dynamic defenders, and one of them probably will leave. Judon was tagged in 2020, so he would be due at least \$20 million for next season. Leonard Williams, Giants — The 2015 first-round pick by the Jets has found a home and his game with the other New York team. The Giants have professed their strong desire to keep Williams. Coming off his best year, he could get tagged a second straight time.

LINEBACKERS

Haason Reddick, Cardinals — This is a difficult one because Reddick was mediocre in his previous seasons before being moved outside and flourishing. Was it an aberration or is Reddick the real thing for Arizona? Paying him about \$14.5 million for one season to find out might be worth it.

Pittsburgh Steelers

LB Bud Dupree, Steelers — Pittsburgh's tag went to Dupree last year and he would cost \$19 million in '21 for a team so cash strapped it is pondering not bringing back Ben Roethlisberger for one more season. Dupree figures to move on. □

Licht: Buccaneers open to giving Brady a contract extension



By **FRED GOODALL**
AP Sports Writer

TAMPA, Fla. (AP) — The Tampa Bay Buccaneers are open to giving Tom Brady a contract extension.

General manager Jason Licht reiterated Wednesday that the Super Bowl champions would like to keep the 43-year-old quarterback in uniform for as long as Brady wants to play. Licht declined to characterize any conversations the team's had about that prospect.

"We don't typically talk about those discussions publicly," Licht said during a video conference call in which he and coach Bruce Arians discussed free agency and efforts to retain several potential free agents instrumental to the team's championship run. "Bruce and I both have a great relationship with Tom. I have a good relationship with his agents. We thought Tom played incredibly well this year, along with the entire team, and we would love to have Tom play here — and I can speak for Bruce, I think — as long as he continues to want to play," the GM added. "If that comes to fruition at some point, then we'd be elated. But I'd like to keep those conversations private that we have right now."

Despite not having normal offseason workouts and preseason games to prepare for his first season in Tampa Bay, Brady threw for 4,633 yards and 40 touchdowns to lead the Bucs to their first playoff appearance since 2007.

The seven-time Super Bowl champion signed a two-year, \$50 million contract in free agency last March following a historic 20-season stint with the New England Patriots. He'll turn 44 in August and has said he's liked to play until he's at least 45.

The Bucs, meanwhile, are hoping to keep as much of the championship roster intact as possible.

Signing Brady to an extension could provide some flexibility in efforts to re-sign a group of upcoming free agents that includes linebackers Lavonte David and Shaquil Barrett, receivers Chris Godwin and Antonio Brown, tight end Rob Gronkowski, defensive tackle Ndamukong Suh, and running Leonard Fournette.

Licht is optimistic.

"We don't want to do anything that's going to mortgage or completely disrupt the future, but we have flexibility ... and the ability to keep this team together," the general manager said. □