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Qatar to quit OPEC to focus on gas; says decision not political

Doha to 'make big splash in oil and gas business', build Mideast's biggest ethane cracker

Zain: First 5G network ready to go live in Kuwait

KUWAIT: Zain Kuwait, the leading digital service provider in Kuwait announces that its huge investment in 5G has made lots of progress recently and the operator is ready to go live with the state-of-the-art service across all strategic and heavily populated areas of Kuwait. Zain will continue developing and expanding the 5G network gradually across Kuwait until the devices are available, expected during the course of 2019. The company also is awaiting approvals and spectrum allocation from the country's regulatory authorities.



most important sectors in accelerating economic growth and promoting trade. Existing mobile networks will not be able to satisfy the future needs of the telecommunications sector and 5G technologies will contribute to the digital transformation and prosperity of Kuwait supporting the leadership's future 2035 vision for the country and its people.

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DOHA: Qatar will leave OPEC next month in order to focus on gas production, the Gulf state's new Energy Minister Saad Al-Kaabi announced yesterday, denying the surprise move was a result of Doha's bitter feud with oil-rich Saudi Arabia. Qatar has been a member of OPEC since 1961 and the decision to pull out after more than five decades comes at a turbulent time in Gulf politics, with Doha under a boycott by former neighboring allies including Saudi Arabia for 18 months.

"Qatar has decided to withdraw its membership from OPEC effective January 2019 and this decision was communicated to OPEC this morning," Kaabi told a Doha press conference. Kaabi, who also heads state-owned Qatar Petroleum, denied however that the move was linked to the feud with Saudi Arabia and its allies. The decision was "technical and strategic" and had "nothing to do with the blockade", he said. However, he added: "We are not saying we are going to get out of the oil business but it is controlled by an organization managed by a country." He did not name the nation.

Qatar's still-influential former prime minister Hamad bin Jassim bin Jaber Al-Thani subsequently tweeted that OPEC was of "little use" and being "used only for aims that undermine our national interest". Qatar will continue to produce oil and seek deals in countries including Latin America's top oil producer Brazil, said Kaabi. In a first reaction to the Qatari announcement, UAE state minister for foreign affairs Anwar Gargash tweeted that the OPEC exit was an admission of "the



DOHA: Saad Sherida Al-Kaabi, Qatari Minister of State for Energy Affairs, speaks during a press conference yesterday. — AFP

decline of Qatar's role and influence in light of Doha's political isolation".

Kaabi said gas production would remain the top priority for Qatar, which is the world's biggest exporter of liquefied natural gas (LNG). "We don't have great potential (in oil), we are very realistic," said Kaabi, who described himself as "Mr Gas" during the conference. "Our potential is gas. I think it's inefficient to focus on something that's not

your core business and something that's not going to benefit you long-term."

In September, Qatar announced it plans to boost gas production to 110 million tonnes per year by 2024. Qatar's oil production is around 600,000 barrels per day, making it the world's 17th largest producer of crude, according to the specialist website, world data.info.

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News in brief

Sisi opens first arms exhibition

CAIRO: Egypt's President Abdel Fattah Al-Sisi inaugurated yesterday the first arms fair organized in Cairo, where hundreds of companies are exhibiting. Sisi was shown cutting the ribbon along with French Defense Minister Florence Parly to open the exhibition, held on the outskirts of Cairo. The three-day show by one of the region's top military powers will be attended by officials from 40 countries, according to Egyptian authorities. After the opening, Sisi was taken on a guided tour along with military officials of the massive fair, where according to authorities around 400 companies are exhibiting. Military cooperation between Cairo and Paris has significantly increased since Sisi took office in 2014. — AFP

Buhari denies dying, being replaced

ABUJA: Nigeria's President Muhammadu Buhari on Sunday denied claims that he had died and been replaced by a Sudanese impostor, breaking his silence on a rumor that has circulated on social media for months. Buhari, who is running for re-election in February, spent five months in Britain last year being treated for an undisclosed illness. One theory widely aired on social media - and by some political opponents - was that he had been replaced by a lookalike from Sudan called Jubril. "It's real me, I assure you. I will soon celebrate my 76th birthday and I will still go strong," Buhari told Nigerians in a town hall session in Poland, where he was attending a conference, when asked about Jubril. The presidency circulated Buhari's comments in an emailed statement entitled "It's Real Me, President Buhari Responds to Cloning Allegation". — Reuters

Duterte 'jokes' about marijuana use

MANILA: Philippine President Rodrigo Duterte, whose controversial war on drugs has killed nearly 5,000 suspected drug dealers and users since taking office in 2016, said yesterday he used marijuana to stay awake - and then said he was just joking. The comment is bound to upset families of the victims of his crackdown on narcotics. "I use marijuana to keep me awake," Duterte said in a speech, complaining about the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) summit in Singapore last month. In Singapore, he skipped some meetings and took "power naps" to catch up on sleep, according to his spokesman. Duterte, after his speech, told reporters he had been joking but a human rights activist criticized the attempt at humor. — Reuters

MPs insist on grilling oil minister

By B Izzak

KUWAIT: MP Khalil Abul, one of three lawmakers who have vowed to grill Oil Minister Bakheet Al-Rasheedi, reiterated yesterday that they will file to grill the minister or the person replacing him after reports that Rasheedi may have offered his resignation. The new warning comes following ambiguity whether he has sub-

mitted his resignation or not. Reports a few days ago said that the minister decided to quit, but informed sources said yesterday the minister has not resigned.

The minister came under sharp criticism after an investigation report allegedly implicated him and top oil executives of squandering public funds and committing violations. The report was prepared by a committee appointed by the government following a grilling against the minister in May in which the minister was accused of squandering billions of dinars of public funds and delays in mega projects. The minister had denied the allegations.

According to lawmakers, the report confirmed a number of violations. At the

opening session of the new National Assembly term in October, MPs demanded that the minister provide copies of the report to the Assembly. After initially refusing, the minister provided a copy to the Assembly secretariat for MPs to see it.

The Assembly's legal and legislative committee meanwhile said yesterday it has received the grilling against the prime minister filed by opposition MP Shuaib Al-Muwaizri. The Assembly decided on Nov 27 to refer the grilling to the committee to study if it is in line with the constitution after Prime Minister III Sheikh Jaber Al-Mubarak Al-Sabah told the Assembly the grilling was unconstitutional.

The grilling relates to the govern-

ment's failure in dealing with unprecedented heavy rains that caused severe damage in various areas of the country. Head of the committee MP Khaled Al-Shatti said the panel will say if the grilling is constitutional or not after meeting with the lawmaker who filed the grilling. It was not immediately known if Muwaizri will accept an invitation by the panel to explain his viewpoint, because he has rejected the referral, saying the move is against the law.

A committee formed by the Assembly to investigate what happened during the rains will discuss today with the health and awqaf ministers damage caused to health facilities and mosques and what should be done to avoid this in the future.



HERAT, Afghanistan: Afghan youths carry sacks of firewood during sunset on the outskirts of Herat on Sunday. — AFP

Trump seeks Khan's help in Afghanistan

ISLAMABAD: Pakistan said yesterday US President Donald Trump has sought its help with faltering Afghan peace talks, part of intensifying efforts by Trump to end one of America's longest wars. Trump, in a letter to new Prime Minister Imran Khan, asked for Pakistan's "support and facilitation" in negotiating an end to the war and offered to renew the strained relationship.

Pakistan's foreign ministry said. The overture to Khan represents a sea change from Trump's normally harsh rhetoric towards Pakistan, and will add to growing speculation that the United States is planning to pull out of Afghanistan in the near future.

The US president wants to bring to a close the 17-year-old conflict between Afghan security forces and the Taliban, who are fighting to drive out international forces and reestablish their version of strict Islamic law after their 2001 ouster. US officials have long been pushing Pakistan to lean on Taliban leaders, who Washington says are based inside Pakistan, to bring them to the negotiating table. "He has asked for Pakistan's cooperation to bring the Taliban into talks,"

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Gulf artworks show surprising historical mix

PARIS: A startling exhibition in Paris, drawn from the Arab world's biggest private art collection, shows the dizzying mix of cultures in the Gulf in the past with Chinese Qurans and Persian rugs of the Virgin Mary. The show at the Paris headquarters of UNESCO, the world cultural and scientific body, is taken from the vast treasury of artworks amassed by Qatari billionaire Sheikh Faisal bin Qassim Al-Thani. "The Majlis - Cultures in Dialogue" takes the name of the traditional spaces where guests were sat down and entertained in the Gulf to show how ideas were exchanged in the region, often in unexpected ways.

It shows how Islamic, Jewish, Indian, Christian, Buddhist and African imagery and symbolism was mixed and shared in an enormous number of objects and manuscripts over centuries. For the sheikh, a distant cousin of Qatar's amir, it proves that "the great religions are united by shared moral honesty and authenticity". It was a "lack of culture" that leads fanatics to destroy historic sites in Mali, Syria or Afghanistan, he told AFP.

"We think that globalization is new, but these works show the links between empires," said his daughter, Sheikha Alanoud bint Hamad Al-Thani, pointing to a rug showing Germany's Kaiser Wilhelm II and his family surrounded by the heads of Persian rulers. Another curious Persian rug from the first half of the 19th century shows "51 of the most eminent figures of the universe" including Confucius, Moses (PBUH), Socrates, Jesus (PBUH), Alexander the Great, Christopher Columbus and Napoleon. — AFP

Local

Crown Prince receives new ambassadors at Seif Palace

Prime Minister receives STC, VIVA CEOs



KUWAIT: His Highness the Crown Prince Sheikh Nawaf Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah meets with the new Russian Ambassador to Kuwait Nikolai Makarov. — KUNA photos



His Highness the Crown Prince Sheikh Nawaf Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah meets with the new Ambassador of Kyrgyzstan to Kuwait Samargyul Adamkulova.

KUWAIT: His Highness the Crown Prince Sheikh Nawaf Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah received at Seif Palace yesterday the new Russian Ambassador to Kuwait Nikolai Makarov. His Highness then met new Ambassador of Kyrgyzstan to Kuwait Samargyul Adamkulova. His Highness also received new Croatian Ambassador to Kuwait Amir Muharemi. The head of protocols at the Diwan of His Highness the Crown Prince Sheikh Mubarak Sabah Al-Salem Al-Humoud Al-Sabah attended the meetings.

In other news, His Highness the Prime Minister Sheikh Jaber Al-Mubarak Al-Hamad Al-Sabah received yesterday at Seif Palace, in presence of Minister of Commerce and Industry Khaled Al-Roudhan, Chief Executive Officer of the Saudi Telecom Company Nasser Al-Nasser and Chief Executive Officer of VIVA Dr Mahmoud Al-Kanderi and their accompanying delegations. Head of His Highness the Prime Minister's Diwan Sheikhha Etimad Khaled Al-Ahmad Al-Sabah attended the meeting. Meanwhile, His Highness the Prime Minister received at Seif Palace the Chairman of Scientific Advisory Board (SAB). The meeting was attended by Sheikhha Etimad



First Deputy Prime Minister and Defense Minister Sheikh Nasser Sabah Al-Ahmad Al-Sabah reads a letter from Qatar's Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of State for Defense Affairs Dr Khaled bin Mohammad Al-Attiyah, during his meeting with Ambassador of Qatar to Kuwait Dr Bandar bin Mohammad Al-Attiyah.

Al-Sabah and Director General of Dasman Diabetes Institute (DDI) Dr Qais Al-Duwairi.

Also yesterday, First Deputy Prime Minister and Defense Minister Sheikh Nasser Sabah Al-Ahmad Al-Sabah received yesterday at Seif Palace the Ambassador of Qatar to Kuwait Dr Bandar bin Mohammad Al-

Attiyah, who presented to Sheikh Nasser a letter from Qatar's Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of State for Defense Affairs Dr Khaled bin Mohammad Al-Attiyah. The Qatari defense minister congratulated his Kuwaiti counterpart on his return home from a recent treatment trip, and invited him to



His Highness the Crown Prince Sheikh Nawaf Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah meets with the new Croatian Ambassador to Kuwait Amir Muharemi.

attend Qatar's national day celebrations on December 18, 2018.

Separately, His Highness the Amir Sheikh Sabah Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah yesterday sent a cable of congratulations to Georgian President-elect Salome Zurbishvili on her election victory. In his

cable, His Highness the Amir wished the new President the best of luck and good health as well as further development of the two friendly countries' ties. His Highness the Crown Prince and His Highness the Prime Minister sent similar cables to the Georgian President-elect. — KUNA



His Highness the Prime Minister Sheikh Jaber Al-Mubarak Al-Hamad Al-Sabah meets with Chief Executive Officer of the Saudi Telecom Company Nasser Al-Nasser and Chief Executive Officer of VIVA Dr Mahmoud Al-Kanderi.



His Highness the Prime Minister Sheikh Jaber Al-Mubarak Al-Hamad Al-Sabah meets with Chairman of the Scientific Advisory Board (SAB).

Sixth e-Government Forum opens today

KUWAIT: Magdy Sabry, Executive Manager of NoufEXPO, announced that the sixth e-Government Forum and the accompanying technology exhibition would commence today at 6:30 pm at Al-Baraka Ballroom of Crowne Plaza Hotel. EGOV6 convenes under the patronage of His Highness the Prime Minister Sheikh Jaber Mubarak Al-Hamad Al-Sabah. Anas Khaled Al-Saleh, Deputy Prime Minister, Minister of State for Cabinet Affairs and the Chairman of the Board of the Central Agency for Information Technology, will be inaugurating the Forum. Sabry commented that NoufEXPO is overwhelmed by the patronage of His Highness the Prime Minister and with the support of His Excellency the Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of State for Cabinet Affairs. Government and legislative leaders, as well as, information technology managers and specialists of over 60 government agencies will attend EGOV6. Many global and local technology vendors will participate in EGOV6 since it provides an invaluable platform to promote their businesses in the Kuwaiti IT sector.

Commenting on the motto of EGOV6, Sabry said, "Last year's event discussed Digital Transformation as the necessary journey for the e-government program. EGOV6, this year, will focus on Change Management Towards Digitization as the safe path that ensures the success of the development and implementation of the e-government program. E-Government programs are considered, by far, one of the most complex automation projects that governments implement. The complexity stems from the need to destabilize the prevailing norm that ruled government procedures and agencies for decades. Business processes, in government agencies, have been paper-based or slightly partially automated silos. Each government agency has its processes independent from those of other government agencies. E-Government agencies have to deal with this complexity and bring everybody into a streamlined, integrated, automated, and always available government services. E-Government

agencies have, at the same time, to keep pace with ever-changing information and communications technologies."

Sabry said that EGOV6 became the destination of many global and technology vendors because they consider that the E-Government Forum a perfect platform to present their solutions and services to IT leaders and specialists of more than sixty government agencies. Sabry added, "This year, we are pleased to welcome many leading technology sponsors of the Platinum category, namely: Microsoft, Alghanim Industries, Gulf Cable and Electrical Industries Company, KFH, Zain, and Advanced Technology Company (ATC). We are also pleased with the participation of our sponsors of the Gold category, namely: Cisco, Qualitynet Group, and Fortinet. We also welcome our Silver sponsors: Symantec and Sultan Telecom. Finally, we are pleased with the participation of our exhibitors namely Xerox, X-Cite, Laserfiche, Kuwait Office and Print Services (KOPS), and Blackstone."

Sabry concluded his statement by extending sincere thanks to CAIT's management and teams and NoufEXPO's teams for hard work and relentless efforts. He also extended his gratitude to government agencies for their participation in the event's proceedings. He finally thanked participating technology vendors that make EGOV6 the key technology event in Kuwait year over year. Sabry wished all participants and sponsoring companies a successful event full of beneficial networking and successful business development opportunities.



Magdy Sabry

French-Kuwaiti friendship committee discusses ties



KUWAIT: MP Dr Abdulkareem Al-Kanderi (right) and French Ambassador to Kuwait Marie Masdupuy (second from right) with members of the delegation. — KUNA

KUWAIT: Kuwait's parliament committee of finance and economy yesterday considered ways of strengthening economic ties with a visiting French team of the joint parliamentary friendship committee. Head of the Kuwaiti delegation Salah Khorsheed said in a statement that the meeting discussed several cases concerning the two friendly countries and ways to boost the significant economic relationship between Kuwait and France.

Khorsheed pointed out His Highness the Amir Sheikh Sabah Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah's vision of Kuwait (2020-2035) and the huge investments that could take place in France or

Kuwait, as the committee asked for increasing these investments to benefit both countries. Kuwait has approximately KD 10 million (\$33 million) worth of investments in France and has the ability to increase those investments to reach billions if available opportunities there are seized.

The French-Kuwaiti parliamentary friendship committee arrived late Sunday to Kuwait on a four-day official visit. Head of the honorary delegation MP Dr Abdulkareem Al-Kanderi and French Ambassador to Kuwait Marie Masdupuy received the delegation, Al-Dustur network reported. — KUNA

Kuwait very helpful in making Yemen talks happen in Sweden soon: FM

Kuwait plays historic role in advocating for peaceful solutions: Minister Wallstrom



KUWAIT: His Highness the Amir Sheikh Sabah Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah meets with Swedish Minister of Foreign Affairs Margot Wallstrom. — Amiri Diwan and KUNA photos



His Highness the Prime Minister Sheikh Jaber Al-Mubarak Al-Hamad Al-Sabah meets with Swedish Minister of Foreign Affairs Margot Wallstrom.

KUWAIT: His Highness the Amir Sheikh Sabah Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah received yesterday at Seif Palace Deputy Premier and Foreign Minister Sheikh Sabah Al-Khaled Al-Hamad Al-Sabah. Sheikh Sabah Al-Khaled was escorting visiting Swedish Minister of Foreign Affairs Margot Wallstrom. The reception was attended by Minister of Amiri Diwan Affairs Sheikh Ali Jarrah Al-Sabah.

Kuwait has been very helpful in making the talks on Yemen happen in Sweden very soon, Wallstrom said after meeting His Highness the Amir. "This is my second visit to Kuwait in a few years. I'm honored to meet with His Highness. It was a very interesting conversation about the role that Kuwait placed in the region. Issues like what goes on in Syria and, I would say, in the wider region," were discussed, said Wallstrom.

"We enjoyed excellent cooperation in

the Security Council and we also have a good bilateral relation and we have agreed to strengthen that further," she noted. "I think there is an enormous potential for more of investments and business between our two countries. It was in a very positive spirit and I brought a big 'thank you' to Kuwait also for the way we have been working together both on the current issue of Yemen and for working together in the Security Council."

"Kuwait already plays a historic role in the region advocating for peaceful solutions, for dialogue and contacts and I think that has become an even more important role as the world looks today and of course surrounded by big and powerful neighbors but still being able to keep up that objective of creating dialogue," she said. Wallstrom concluded by hoping to "work together on that path in the future."

National Assembly Speaker Marzouq Ali

Al-Ghanem also received Minister Wallstrom and her accompanying delegation. During the meeting, they discussed bilateral ties and ways to enhance and develop relations in all fields. They also tackled several issues, on top of them arrangements over talks that will be held in Sweden over the Yemen crisis. The meeting was attended by MPs Hamad Al-Harshani, Mubarak Al-Hurais and Kuwait ambassador to Sweden Nabeel Al-Dakheel.

Furthermore, the visiting Swedish Minister met with His Highness the Prime Minister Sheikh Jaber Al-Mubarak Al-Hamad Al-Sabah, in presence of Sheikh Sabah Al-Khaled. The meeting was attended by Head of His Highness the Prime Minister's Diwan Sheikha Etimad Khaled Al-Ahmad Al-Sabah, Assistant Foreign Minister for Europe Affairs, Ambassador Waleed Al-Khubaizi and Ambassador Dakheel. — KUNA



Kuwaiti National Assembly Speaker Marzouq Ali Al-Ghanem meets with Swedish Minister of Foreign Affairs Margot Wallstrom.

Kuwait, Sweden hold consultations over Yemen talks: Deputy FM



KUWAIT: Kuwait's Deputy Premier and Foreign Minister Sheikh Sabah Al-Khaled Al-Hamad Al-Sabah joins diplomats in cutting the cake during a reception by the UAE's Embassy on the country's national day.



Kuwait's Deputy Premier and Foreign Minister Sheikh Sabah Al-Khaled Al-Hamad Al-Sabah joins a traditional dance performance. — Photos by Joseph Shagra

KUWAIT: Kuwait and Stockholm are holding consultations over upcoming talks between the Yemeni parties in Sweden, Deputy Foreign Minister Khaled Al-Jarallah said Sunday. Jarallah was answering questions by reporters over Swedish Foreign Minister Margot Wallstrom's visit to Kuwait to ask for advice over Yemen peace talks. Wallstrom, he said, met with Deputy Premier and Foreign Minister Sheikh Sabah Al-Khaled Al-Hamad Al-Sabah and she was keen to visit Kuwait before the talks began. She wanted to have a clear picture over the upcoming talks because Kuwait had hosted the Yemeni parties for 100 days, said Jarallah, "so there is a background and knowledge in developments and nature of talks, and how the host country should deal with those parties." The two sides discussed Sweden's role as a facilitator of the talks, said Jarallah who was speaking on sidelines of a reception

by the UAE's Embassy on the country's national day. "We were open and conveyed to her our experience with the talks. We hope the talks be successful and we are optimistic they will," he said.

Pompeo's visit

Meanwhile, Jarallah said that the US Secretary of State Mike Pompeo's upcoming visit to Kuwait is part of strategic dialogue between the two countries. The last round of the strategic dialogue was held in Washington and the next will be in Kuwait next month, Jarallah told reporters on sidelines of the reception. Jarallah asserted importance of the strategic dialogue which dealt with economic, political, trade, investment, energy, education and cultural cooperation. Pompeo's visit will be a chance to exchange views over regional issues.

Asked about late US President George Bush, Jarallah said the 41st President "played a historic role. There were some great American people and we can say this man was one of them." The late Bush, he said, contributed to the 1991 liberation of Kuwait from the Iraqi occupation. His Highness the Amir Sheikh Sabah Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah sent a cable of condolences over Bush's demise, reflecting the historic bonds between the Kuwaiti and American people, said Jarallah.

In the meantime, Jarallah termed as 'excellent' the relations with the European Union (EU), adding that his recent visit to Brussels, Belgium, was successful. He said the talks with the EU officials covered a variety of issues of mutual interest, and activated a 2016 memorandum of understanding, the first between a Gulf country and the EU. Jarallah said European Foreign

Ministers would be visiting Kuwait, part of common desire to boost Gulf-EU relations.

'Solid' ties with UAE

Kuwait's Deputy Premier and Foreign Minister Sheikh Sabah Al-Khaled Al-Hamad Al-Sabah had described as 'solid' relations with the United Arab Emirates (UAE). "We admire the achievement in the United Arab Emirates which succeeded in a short period to be among the advanced countries, because of hard work, dedication and good management," Sheikh Sabah Al-Khaled told reporters on the sidelines of the reception. He paid tribute to late UAE President Sheikh Zayed bin Sultan Al-Nahyan who had a great role in building the country. Jarallah also commended the UAE for the numerous accomplishments. He wished success and progress for the UAE and its people. — KUNA



Designer Muntaha Al-Ajeel greets UAE Ambassador to Kuwait Rahma Al-Zaabi.



His Highness Sheikh Nasser Al-Mohammad Al-Sabah offers his greetings.

Prosecution rejects proposal to pardon state security inmates

Failure to allocate budget caused 'loose gravel'

By A Saleh

KUWAIT: The Amiri amnesty committees recently started reviewing the names of inmates matching the amnesty conditions pending submitting the final lists after excluding those convicted for murder, drug trafficking, financial crimes and violating others' rights without getting waivers. However, the public prosecution rejected a proposal by the Interior Ministry's correctional facilities sector to include inmates imprisoned in state security-related cases to benefit from the annual Amiri pardon during the national and liberation days, when they either get immediate release or have their time reduced to half or one quarter.

Loose gravel

Well-informed sources at the Ministry of Public Works (MPW) blamed the finance ministry for MPW's failure to solve the problem of 'loose gravel' along various streets over the past three years, because the finance ministry refused to allocate a KD 60 million budget for road maintenance. The sources explained that under former minister Ahmed Al-Jassar, MPW requested the budget, which was once rejected and then postponed. In a related development, official municipal sources said Kuwait Municipality has removed over 10,000 cubic meters of gravel over the past 20 days from various highways and roads. In other news, Kuwait Municipality Director Ahmed Al-Manfouhi said the municipality's executive body sees no problems in handing over the site located to the south of Um Al-Haiman to the public authority for housing welfare to build a new city there.

Maid hospitalized, children hurt in Oyoun house fire

By Hanan Al-Saadoun

KUWAIT: A domestic helper was hospitalized in a critical condition while two children were treated for smoke inhalation following a fire reported at a house in Al-Oyoun yesterday. Firefighters arrived to the scene five minutes after a fire was reported at 11:00 am. They found that workers had already rescued the victims after the maid reportedly asked for their help from the window of their third floor apartment. The two children were treated onsite, while the domestic helper was taken to Jahra Hospital where she was admitted inside the intensive care unit. A case was filed to investigate the causes of the fire.

4,882 settlement

The Interior Ministry's relations and security information department said 4,882 settlement orders were recorded in November related to minor traffic accidents - 1,272 were issued in the Capital security department, 1,401 in Hawally, 447 in Mubarak Al-Kabeer, 613 in Ahmadi, 837 in Farwaniya and 312 in Jahra.

Fire drill

The firefighting sector at Kuwait Fire Service Directorate (KFSD) carried out a mock drill about a fire in a 30-storey building under construction yesterday. In the scenario, the fire was on the 25th floor, so rescue and evacuation teams were formed, while other teams fought the fire, which was brought under control as planned.

Duo arrested for selling pork

Ahmadi inspection department of the Public Authority

Minister assures disabled people of unbridled support

KUWAIT: Kuwait is eager to cater to the needs of people with disabilities, Minister of Social Affairs and Labor Hind Al-Sabeeh said yesterday. While the Kuwaiti government has always supported special needs populations, there is still a lot of work that needs to be done, Sabeeh, who also serves as minister of state for economic affairs, said in a statement. She revealed that the Kuwait government has enlisted the aid of the United Nations Development Program as part of efforts to ensure that people with disabilities get a fair shake, with many of them getting access to jobs as of late.

Meanwhile, on Kuwait's sustainable development plan, the secretary general of the General Secretariat of the Supreme Council for Planning and Development Dr Khaled Mehdi said it entails goals related to the environment and the economy. He emphasized that the Kuwaiti government would spare no effort to make sure that the aforementioned goals come to fruition, which he said is an endeavor that requires collective effort. Echoing Sabeeh's remarks, he went on to say Kuwait is a proponent of all major global conventions that aim to protect the rights of people with special needs.

Meanwhile, United Nations Resident Coordinator and UNDP Resident Representative Kuwait Tarek Elsheikh announced the conclusion of implementing a project for Kuwait 2035 Vision towards persons with disabilities, jointly with UNDP and Public Authority of the Disabled. Elsheikh made the announcement during a ceremony held by the authority at the UN headquarters, marking the International Day of Disabled, which focuses this year on "Empowering persons with disabilities and ensuring inclusiveness and equality." The completion of this project aims to enhance opportunities for the integration of persons with disabilities in life and community activities and to ensure their participation in Kuwait's efforts to achieve sustainable development, Elsheikh said.

Director General of the Authority Dr Shafaeqa Al-Awadhi said meanwhile that highest quality standards have been achieved in the programs of early intervention, education, and giving persons with disabilities easy access to buildings and modern technologies. The partnership with UNDP and the Supreme Council for Planning and

Jahra labor city

Municipality's deputy director for engineering projects affairs Nadya Al-Shereda stressed that the municipality will honor its responsibilities. Responding to a proposal by Municipal Council members Humoud Al-Enezi and Abdul Wahab Borelli concerning subjecting the labor cities' projects to the manpower



Light to moderate rain tomorrow

authority, Shereda stressed it is an integral part of the municipality's responsibilities to support the state's plans to encourage more private sector contribution in developing government projects through partnerships. She added that Jahra labor city will be the first project to be offered for investment through a public-private-partnership (PPP) agreement by the end of 2019.

Health services

Health Minister Sheikh Dr Basel Al-Sabah stressed that the government plans to develop Kuwait's health system and services. Responding to an inquiry by MP Essa Al-Kandari, Sheikh Basel said development projects aim at boosting the health ministry's capabilities and readiness to



KUWAIT: Firemen participate in a mock drill in a 30-storey building under construction yesterday.

for Food and Nutrition arrested a man and a woman, both Asians, for selling pork to some restaurants and homes, Al-Rai reported yesterday. Department Director Saud Al-Jalal said a tip from a citizen led to coordination with the interior ministry to arrest the two with 25 kg of pork that was ready for delivery to a customer. Both were sent to concerned authorities.

Drunk couple caught

Hawally police arrested a citizen and his Egyptian girlfriend, who is in violation of the residency law, and both were intoxicated, reported Al-Rai. Policemen found an imported liquor bottle in the car along with a bag of ice and cups. Both were sent to concerned authorities.

Documents stolen

Detectives are looking for a thief who broke into a Pakistani man's apartment and stole important documents belonging to the company he works for. The man found the door of his apartment was broken and discovered the theft, then lodged a complaint at the police station, according to an Al-Rai report.



Hind Al-Sabeeh



Dr Shafaeqa Al-Awadhi



Tarek Elsheikh

Development has achieved remarkable results in the development of capacities at the level of institutions and individuals, which leads to the development of more efficient procedures to accelerate the full integration of persons with disabilities in the workplace, study, health care and other community facilities, she added. A range of standards has been issued to regulate and identify areas of support in education for people with disabilities to enable persons with disabilities to take advantage of modern technology and digital devices as part of initiatives to achieve their full integration, she added.

Awadhi appreciated the role of partnership with UNDP as an important factor in improving the situation of people with disabilities in all aspects of life. More than 42,000 people with disabilities have been registered in Kuwait, as the Authority is keen to continue its efforts to develop the quality of services provided. The authority allocated its 2018-2019 budget worth KD 171 million to provide people with disabilities necessary care. — KUNA

Legalese

Forced labor



By Attorney Fajer Ahmed

Forced labor or what many call modern-day slavery, is when employees are forced to work somewhere without the right to leave or object. This includes domestic helpers who do not have the right to leave the house, take days off, breaks and so on. The International Labor Organization (ILO), an agency under the United Nations, is currently running a huge campaign to end modern slavery. Kuwait and approximately 185 countries are members of this organization, so you can only imagine how huge the campaign is.

I usually do not write about international organizations or international campaigns, but I feel that this topic needs to be discussed more in Kuwait. As a lawyer who has been writing for more than six years, I have received a fair share of emails from young domestic workers stuck in houses in Kuwait. As a Kuwaiti citizen, I love my country and therefore would like to see it move forward, so it is important to not ignore the ugliness that does happen in Kuwait. It is important though to point out that this does not only happen in Kuwait - in fact, according to the ILO, there were 4.1 million people in slavery as of 2016, 70 percent of whom were non-nationals.

I have written multiple times on what you can do if you are in such a situation. Also, please do not hesitate at any point to email my office if you are dealing with such an issue.

Human trafficking

Question: I came to Kuwait thinking I would be working as a computer assistant, because that is what I am qualified for. I was shocked to learn when I arrived at the airport that I would be working as a domestic worker. I had no choice but to sign the documents provided to me at the airport. I am making a third of what I used to make back home. They have taken my phone away from me. I don't know what to do. How can I go back to my country?

Fajer: I see this all the time. Please know you are not the only one. There are some crazy things happening out there and they need to stop. This is human trafficking and it is absolutely illegal, yet unfortunately continues.

Please follow these steps:

1 Speak to your employer and ask them for a release or a ticket to go back home - some are nice enough to do so. If you feel that your agency will just take you back and send you to another employer, then don't do this.

2 Call your embassy - please find below numbers of some embassies:

Ethiopian Embassy in Kuwait: 2533-0128/2533-4291
Indian Embassy in Kuwait: 2253-0600
Pakistani Embassy in Kuwait: 2532 7649
Indonesian Embassy in Kuwait: 2253-1021
Philippine Embassy in Kuwait: 9955 8527
Sri Lankan Embassy in Kuwait: 2533-9142 / 43 / 48
Nepalese Embassy in Kuwait: 2524 3275

3 If your embassy number is not available above, please email me at ask@fajerthelawyer.com with the following information:

- How you are being mistreated
- Your name
- Your civil ID number
- Your sponsor's name
- Your sponsor's civil ID number

If you are an employer and you are reading this, please go home today and just say "thank you" kindly to the people who make sure you have food on your plate, keep your house clean and take care of your children. Also please make sure you are following the law with regards to your domestic workers. They have the right to the following and it is your responsibility to ensure they receive all their rights:

- An hour-long break after five hours of work.
- Not more than 12 hours of work a day.
- A full day off every week.
- The right to keep their passport.
- The right to leave the house on their day off (should never be locked in).
- The right to change jobs when their contract ends or to leave to work for another employer without paying a so-called 'transfer fee'.
- The right to receive their salary on time.

Being abused

Question: I am being abused. I work 19+ hours a day without rest. I am not allowed to have my phone (I am emailing you from the house's iPad) and I barely get food. Help me. What can I do?

Fajer: First thing first, assess your situation. If it is life-threatening, please go to the shelter. The Kuwaiti government has set up a beautiful and safe shelter for those who need it. If your case is not life-threatening yet critical, please contact your embassy. If you don't have an embassy, you can email me and I will forward your case to the Society of Social Workers. Please include the following details when emailing me:

- 1 Your name
- 2 Your civil ID number
- 3 The name of your boss

And any other information you think is vital. Please contact your country's embassy if there is one in Kuwait.

For questions or queries, please email us at info@tl-legal.com.

deal with various health contingencies and provide protection against various epidemics as per WHO's international health regulations (IHR) 2005. Sheikh Basel said more medical cooperation is in progress with international universities and hospitals by annually inviting over 250 consultants in various medical specialties, holding medical conferences and workshops to exchange expertise, update treatment protocols and implement medical and technical cooperation agreements, in addition to enhancing the role played by the private sector in providing health services by adjusting the private medical facilities law as well as updating various medical legislations.

University project

The State Audit Bureau expected the Sabah Al-Salem University City project to be concluded by 2025, explaining that the project had been delayed due to the time needed to have the necessary government approvals issued. In its report, the Audit Bureau listed a number of reasons for the delay, including the constant change of various colleges' requirements, the site's mismanagement and repeated fires, which cost the project budget an extra KD 3 billion.

Tomorrow's rain

Meteorologist Abdul Aziz Al-Qarawi stressed that the rain forecast for Wednesday evening through Friday morning will be light to moderate, and there is no need to warn about it except for regular precautions to be taken by motorists, campers and those who go out sailing or fishing. Qarawi said the cold weather officially started on Dec 3 and that temperatures will start falling.

Council member calls for demining

By Meshaal Al-Enezi

KUWAIT: Municipal Council member Humoud Oglal Al-Enezi announced filing a request to discuss the areas where landmines left over by Iraqi troops are most likely to appear after the recent flooding exposed them. Enezi warned that the growing number of reports about sighting strange objects and mines call for utmost precautions to be taken in collaboration with Kuwait Municipality, the defense ministry and all relevant bodies. Enezi called for revealing the maps of possible minefields and comparing them to those of campsites so that citizens and expats could avoid them.

Dasman Diabetes Institute concludes campaign

By Abdellatif Sharaa

KUWAIT: Dasman Diabetes Institute (DDI) held an honoring ceremony for all those who contributed to the success of its first campaign that was launched at the start of November under the slogan "I will fix you...sugar", which received a lot of attention. Director General of DDI Dr Qais Al-Duwairi said the institute works day and night with scientific activities including research and medical practice to control diabetes and limit its spread, while treating it by the most developed methods. He said "nothing will stop us, and our motive is to see patients happy in order to maintain the vision of the late Amir Sheikh Jaber Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah, through which DDI was established by Kuwait Foundation for the Advancement of Sciences (KFAS) in 2006."

He said DDI's efforts did not stop at the medical and treatment aspects; rather they went further to spread awareness and explain the disease's effects and how to prevent it, through research, trial and education, and highlight health problems related to it. DDI has presented more than 60 papers in accredited magazines, and more than 75 research projects are ongoing, including epidemiological and medical research, pediatric medicine and chemical research.

Dr Qais said DDI seeks to become a cooperative and reference center with the WHO regional office in the field of diabetes and research. He added the institute received the platinum accreditation from Accreditation Canada International. It also began the establishment of a gene center in cooperation with international centers and the Kuwaiti health ministry. It also seeks to contribute in creating a geographical atlas for diabetes in cooperation with Canberra University in Australia.

Dr Qais said DDI is a pioneer in the initiative of a national record of diabetics, which culminated in adopting a research strategy for five years that includes several initiatives and research projects, adding that these continued scientific achievements were made with the support of HHI the Amir Sheikh Sabah Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah.

He said Dasman is looking forward to be ahead and distinguished in controlling the disease and preventing its complications. He said DDI has four departments that form paths and means that take us towards a better future in treatment and medical performance. The departments are research, operations, general administration and the medical department. Dr Qais said due to cooperation between these departments, DDI gained accreditation from the American College of Pathology, and openness to trials around the world allowed the institute to participate and sign bilateral agreements with many research centers worldwide.



Dr Qais Al-Duwairi

Local

Kuwaitis remember the late George HW Bush as a 'war hero'

US Embassy receives condolences over former US President's death

By Ben Garcia

KUWAIT: The US Embassy in Kuwait opens its doors to the public today from 10 am to 2 pm to receive condolences over the death of former US President George HW Bush. Many Kuwaitis call Bush - the 41st president of the United States - a 'war hero', as he was the man who led a coalition of nations to liberate Kuwait in 1991. He died at the age of 94 on Dec 1, 2018 in his home in Houston, Texas.

"The outpouring of sympathy, gratitude and emotions, especially from the Kuwaiti people, are well received by the Bush family and American people. As an American, I am deeply touched and appreciate all these messages. Many were personal messages from the people of Kuwait, such as 'he was a father to all of us Kuwaitis'. These are very personal messages and as the US ambassador I value and appreciate these consoling words," US Ambassador to Kuwait Lawrence Silverman told the local media yesterday at his residence in Bayan.

The US envoy also confirmed the departure of Sheikh Nasser Al-Mohammad Al-Sabah yesterday morning to attend Bush's funeral and personally hand over HH the Amir's condolences to the Bush family and the American people. "We appreciate sending HH the Amir's representative to the US, Sheikh Nasser Al-Mohammad. He told me President Bush is in every Kuwaiti's heart. President Bush (when he was still alive) had also said he has a piece of Kuwait in his heart," Silverman said.

Silverman pointed out that President Bush did what every president should do. "At that time, he did what the president should've done and he was proud he did it. Not a very easy decision for the president to make, because he will be sending his sons (soldiers) to the battlefield. We have a memorial in the embassy premises with the names of 141 US soldiers who died while liberating Kuwait. But the president said this was the right thing to do. Let's not forget, there were Kuwaitis who died in the battle; there were civilians too; there were other coalition troops from other nations. He was a human being too - he was a parent and knew that it was a very difficult decision to make at that time. We needed to do it for the world order," the US envoy emphasized.

A press release by the embassy said: President George HW Bush dedicated his life to serving his country and the American public in the military, in domestic politics and foreign affairs. He was truly a "point of light" who inspired others to public service. He was a devoted husband and dedicated father, grandfather and great-grandfather. Sworn in as the 41st President of the United States on January 20, 1989, George Herbert Walker Bush helped usher in a more hopeful geopolitical era marked by the spread of freedom. Throughout his presidency, George Bush worked closely with his international counterparts in ways that advanced America's interests in peace and economic opportunity.

Kuwait figured prominently in Mr Bush's presidency. When President Bush learned of the invasion of Kuwait on August 2, 1990, he quickly responded, "This will not stand, this aggression against Kuwait. The legitimate government of Kuwait will be restored to its rightful place, and Kuwait will once again be free." After the Coalition that he had helped build achieved that goal, President Bush proudly told the US Congress, "We declared that the aggression against Kuwait would not stand. America and the world have kept their word. It is a victory for the rule of law and for what is right. Kuwait is liberated. Kuwait is once again in the hands of Kuwaitis in control of their destiny. The Kuwaiti flag flies above the capital of a free and sovereign nation."

He and Mrs Barbara Bush visited Kuwait on several occasions, and a piece of Kuwaiti history marking the bonds between our two countries sits proudly in the George HW Bush Presidential Library and Museum in College Station, Texas. Today, visitors to the Library can see a letter sent from 104 Kuwaiti children to President

Bush in 1991 to thank him for the liberation of their country and to wish him Happy Birthday.

The US Ambassador has also announced the naming of the embassy diwaniya tent to George HW Bush Diwaniya Tent to honor the 41st president. "I think President Bush will be just as proud of the fact that the relationship between the US and Kuwait has continued to grow. The world came in aid for the liberation of Kuwait, but I am sure he is pleased that we have this strategic dialogue and

“**Father to all Kuwaitis**”

that we are expanding our relationship - from defense and security, investment and education, cultural issues and all those things that we are doing proactively. Restoring the sovereignty of Kuwait is one thing, but what are we doing after that is building a strong bond for the security and well-being of the region," Silverman said.



KUWAIT: US Ambassador to Kuwait Lawrence Silverman bids farewell to His Highness Sheikh Nasser Al-Mohammad Al-Ahmad Al-Sabah before Sheikh Nasser's departure to participate in the George HW Bush's funeral. — Photos by Amiri Diwan and Joseph Shagra



Kuwaiti citizens pay tribute to former US President George HW Bush.



Minister of Amiri Diwan Affairs Sheikh Ali Al-Jarrah Al-Sabah conveys condolences of His Highness the Amir Sheikh Sabah Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah over the passing away of former US President George HW Bush.



US Ambassador to Kuwait Lawrence Silverman speaks to reporters at the embassy yesterday.



A memorial in the US Embassy premises bearing the names of 141 US soldiers who died during Kuwait's liberation war.

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ABET Computing Accreditation Commission

COMPUTER ENGINEERING (BE) DEGREE PROGRAM

ABET Engineering Accreditation Commission

INTENSIVE ENGLISH PROGRAM

AALE American Academy for Liberal Education

BUSINESS ADMINISTRATION (BBA) DEGREE PROGRAMS

ACBSP GLOBAL BUSINESS ACCREDITATION

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LEARN • THINK • BECOME



Journalist critical of Duterte surrenders

Macron seeks way out of crisis after Paris riots



ALEPPO: This picture shows a damaged building in the Syrian rebel-held Al-Rashidin district of western Aleppo's countryside near Idlib province. —AFP

Coalition kills IS leader linked to beheadings

Jihadist 'involved in the executions of Western hostages'

BEIRUT: The US-led coalition against the Islamic State group said yesterday it killed a senior jihadist involved in the executions of an American aid worker and other Western hostages. Abu Al-Umarayn was accused of involvement in the November 2014 beheading of Peter Kassig, a former US ranger who was doing volunteer humanitarian work when captured in 2013. "He was killed and more information will be available after a full assessment," Sean Ryan, spokesman for the US-led coalition, said in a statement issued after the Sunday strikes. "Al Umarayn had given indications of posing an imminent threat to coalition forces and he was involved in the killing of American citizen and former US Army Ranger, Peter Kassig," he said.

Ryan said the jihadist had also been involved in the execution of several other prisoners. It is the first time the coalition, which has been hunting down IS fighters in Iraq and Syria since 2014, has announced the killing of a jihadist leader linked to Kassig's death. At the time of the execution, IS released a video showing Kassig's severed head but did not publish footage of the decapitation, as it had done for other hostages. Syria's official Sana news agency had earlier Sunday accused the US-led coalition of firing on Syrian army positions in remote eastern regions.

Regime targeted?

"The American coalition forces launched around 8:00 pm this evening several missiles against some positions of our forces in the Ghorab mountains south of Sukhna," it said. Quoting a military source, it said the bombardment had caused only material damage. The Syrian Observatory for Human Rights said coalition forces fired "more than 14 missiles" at a Syrian army convoy as it was passing through the desert. "The group was lost in the middle of the desert around 35 kilometers from the Al-Tanf base", the Observatory's director Rami Abdel Rahman said.

The United States often uses this base to launch its strikes against IS jihadists. Coalition spokesman Sean Ryan denied any strikes targeted the Syrian army. "False, the strikes were as the report stated and directed at ISIS," he said, using another acronym for the jihadist organization. Kassig founded a humanitarian organization in 2012 that trained some 150 civilians to provide medical aid to people in Syria. His group also gave food, cooking supplies, clothing and medicine to the needy. He took the name Abdul Rahman after converting to Islam. His execution was part of a gruesome series of Western hostage beheadings that IS filmed and published to shock the world as it attempted to expand across the region.

2014 executions

Before Kassig's decapitation, which IS announced on November 16, four other hostages were executed by IS: British aid worker Alan Henning (video released on October 3); British aid worker David Haines (video released on September 13); US journalist Steven Sotloff (video released on September 2); US journalist James Foley (video released on August 19). Another hostage held at the time and whose execution was threatened was British journalist John Cantlie.

He later appeared in videos in which he uttered IS propaganda but, more than six years after his kidnapping, his fate remains unclear. The leader of the cell which was responsible for the executions and became known as "The Beatles" was believed to be Mohammed Emwazi, a British jihadist nicknamed "Jihadi John" who was killed in a drone strike in 2015. After expanding to control a self-styled "caliphate" straddling Syria and Iraq which was larger than Britain, IS suffered a string of military setbacks.

It has virtually no fixed positions left in Iraq and is now defending a few pockets in desert areas of Syria, including the region where Sunday's strikes were carried out. The other is the jihadists' main active front in the Hajin area of Deir Ezzor province, where coalition-backed Kurdish-led fighters have been



A file handout photo shows Peter Kassig with a truck, taken somewhere along the Syrian border. —AFP

struggling to flush out a group of die-hard jihadists making a fierce last stand. The coalition as well as the Syrian government and its Russian backers have all repeatedly vowed to carry on the fight until achieving a full victory over IS. But analysts have warned that fully eradicating the jihadists from those desert hideouts where the state has a very limited footprint could prove almost impossible. —AFP

Fire rips through refugee camp in Lebanon; 2 killed

YAMMOUNEH: A fire ripped through a refugee camp in Lebanon yesterday killing two Syrians, including a boy, and burning nearly two dozen tents, a local official said. Around 1.5 million Syrians have sought shelter in Lebanon from the seven-year civil war raging next door, with many living in camps in the Bekaa Valley in the east of the country. The fire in the northeastern town of Yammouneh yesterday "killed a 46-year-old man as well as a boy aged seven or eight", deputy mayor Hussein Shreif said. It "burnt down 23 of 70 tents in the camp," he said, adding it was not immediately clear what started the fire. But after the initial spark, "the explosion of a fuel container in one of the tents caused the fire to spread," he said.

Security forces and a UN team were dispatched to the area of the camp, he said. One of the refugees said: "At 3:00 am, we heard screaming. Then we saw flames (spreading) and we couldn't put them out." An AFP photographer saw people milling amid the cinders of former tents, nothing remaining of them but a few metal poles. Near a field of red earth, a young girl in a green hoodie picked through a pile of clothes that had survived the fire. Lebanon's national news agency, NNA, said "civil defense put out the fire with difficulty due to the low visibility, thick fog and smoke." Fires have often erupted in Syrian refugee camps,



YAMMOUNEH: Syrian refugees check the damage following a fire that ripped through their refugee camp in the village of Yammouneh in Lebanon's eastern Bekaa Valley yesterday. —AFP

where many depend on international aid for their survival.

Security forces also regularly sweep down on the informal settlements. On Wednesday, further to the east in the area of Aarsal, the army detained hundreds of Syrians, including over no or expired identity documents. Since the start of the year, thousands of Syrians have gone home to their country, according to an AFP tally, in returns coordinated between the authorities in Beirut and Damascus. Lebanese authorities waive late fines for those whose residency papers have expired if they agree to return to Syria.

The Syrian conflict has killed more than 360,000 people and forced millions from their homes since it started with the brutal repression of anti-government protests in 2011. —AFP

Hospital struggles with the number of malnourished Yemeni children

KHOKHA: Twenty Yemeni children huddle together outside Khokha hospital, hoping to be let into a clinic that serves as a lifeline for tens of thousands. On the narrow pavement, a boy dressed in purple leans limply against his mother. In her lap is a baby with expressionless eyes. The hospital, located in a government-controlled western province, is one of the war-torn country's better-resourced clinics.

It receives supplies and aid from the United Nations and donors including the United Arab Emirates, a main ally of the internationally recognized Yemeni authorities. But nearly four years into a war that has pushed 14 million Yemenis to the brink of starvation, even Khokha hospital cannot meet the needs of all the malnourished children who arrive daily. "We take the phone numbers of the patients when there aren't enough beds for them, and when a case is discharged, we call them back for treatment," says Abdullah Zuhair, a doctor in the children's ward.

Too weak to chew

The United Nations calls Yemen the world's worst humanitarian crisis. The long-impooverished country has been crippled by a blockade, economic collapse and the war between Iran-backed rebels and government forces propped up by a Saudi-led coalition. Khokha hospital is located just 100 kilometers—a two-hour drive—south of

port city Hodeida, the target of a pro-government offensive against Yemen's Houthi rebels which has sparked fears of a fresh humanitarian collapse.

The hospital serves as the main facility for health services in the district, home to 30,000 people, as well as Yemenis in neighboring areas. And every day, without fail, new cases of acutely malnourished children turn up for the doctors to treat. Inside the hospital, staff work around the clock, weighing children, taking measurements and injecting nutrients for those too weak to chew. One-year-old Yahia weighs in at 5.5 kilograms - nearly half the average weight of children his age. As the baby waits for emergency treatment, he cries inconsolably in his mother's arms.

'Appeal to everyone'

Cartoon characters adorn the walls of one hospital room that is painted pink and blue. Three mothers wearing niqabs, a veil that covers the face, sit on beds with their malnourished babies. "We receive a large number of cases regularly, most of them suffering severe malnutrition," says hospital director Yahia Zuhair. But the hospital's seven rooms "are not enough to meet demand". "We appeal to everyone... to intervene urgently," Zuhair says. UN agencies say half of Yemen's population of more than 28 million is at risk of starvation.

Twenty-two million Yemenis are dependent on aid for basic survival, the world body says, and the battle for Hodeida threatens to close the country's most important port. Yemen's airspace and maritime borders are controlled by the Saudi-led alliance, which accuses the Houthi rebels of smuggling arms from Iran through the country's ports. According to UN figures, nearly 10,000 people have been killed since Saudi Arabia and its allies joined the conflict in 2015 to bolster the government against the Houthis. After multiple failed rounds of negotiations between the warring parties, the UN aims to host peace talks in Sweden this month. —AFP

International

African migrants turn to deadly ocean route as options narrow

Migrants attempting perilous voyage to Canary Islands

DAKAR: Assane Diallo is making final preparations for a journey he knows could cost him his life: one thousand miles across open ocean from Senegal to the Canary Islands in a 50-foot wooden boat held together with rusty nails. The 35-year-old fisherman hopes to push off this week from a beach in the capital Dakar with water, dried food and potentially dozens of passengers. He just needs two motors and enough petrol for the week-long journey and also to patch up a three-foot gash in the hull.

Diallo is part of a resurgence in African migrants taking the treacherous Atlantic route to the Spanish territory this year in search of jobs and prosperity that they cannot find at home. Many migrants see the chain of islands off the Moroccan coast as the only viable option left as the European Union spends millions of dollars cutting off land routes through north Africa. They consider it a launchpad for asylum in mainland Europe.

"Some, if they see a canoe, do not even consider staying here. They will leave at all costs," said Diallo, looking over the litter-strewn beach where listless teenagers mill about at dusk, some fixing fishing nets or painting boats in bright reds and blues. Over 1,200 migrants arrived in

the Canary Islands between Jan 1 and Nov 14, Spanish Interior Ministry data show, the highest in nine years and a four-fold increase over the same period in 2017.

It marks the revival of a worrying trend. In 2006 - when 30,000 migrants managed to reach the Canary Islands - some 7,000 people died trying to make the crossing, rights groups say. In the decade that followed, Spanish patrols slowed the pace. Land routes through Niger and Libya to Italy became more popular. But the Italian government has focused on stopping the Libya route. With migrants detained in slave-like conditions in Libya, the numbers arriving in Italy have dropped off dramatically from a peak of 181,000 in 2016.

Still, migrants' will to leave remains. The fall in arrivals to Italy has corresponded with a surge in attempts to reach Spain, where a record number of migrants has reached the mainland in recent months.

"Managing... migratory flows is very much like squeezing a balloon. When one route closes, the flows increase on another," said Izabella Cooper, spokeswoman for EU border agency Frontex. "The only solution to migration is to eliminate the root causes: wars and poverty."

Gambians and Senegalese heading for the Canary Islands was rescued off Guinea Bissau after an engine failure.

One of the migrants, Alieu Gaye, said he went by boat because he heard that land routes had become too dangerous. "People are afraid to take the road. They prefer to take canoes to travel by the Atlantic Ocean," he said. Policing a coastline hundreds of miles long is a tough task, coast guards say. Spain's Guardia Civil has worked with the Senegalese Coast Guard since 2006 to intercept migrants. They have two 100-foot boats, one of which goes out every day, but crew members say they rarely find anything.

"The sea is very, very big. And they can leave from wherever in Senegal, Gambia or further south," said Rafael Carballo Abeger, an attache at the Spanish embassy in Dakar. Assane Diallo is confident he can evade the coast guard when he leaves before dawn in the coming days. It is worth the risk, he says. Fish stocks are depleting and he can no longer provide for his wife and two children. "It's hard to come back and bring nothing home," he said. "It hurts the heart, that's why I want to leave." —Reuters



Spanish-run islands seen as launchpad for EU asylum

'Very, very big' sea
Migrants face many dangers on the open ocean, including mountainous waves, blistering heat and starvation. While the numbers remain small compared to arrivals on the Spanish mainland, authorities in Senegal and Gambia said there has been a rise in boats attempting the crossing

to the Canary Islands this year. The lack of data on departures makes it impossible to calculate how many die. In October, Guinea Bissau's coastguard discovered the empty wreckage of a boat that had been carrying dozens of migrants. That same month, a boat with 72

Western Sahara North Africa's disputed thorn

GENEVA: Western Sahara is a former Spanish colony that is mostly under Morocco's control but is claimed by an Algerian-backed independence movement which has campaigned for a vote on self-determination through decades of war and deadlock. Here is some background on the sprawling, desert territory—the only one on the African continent whose post-colonial status has yet to be resolved—as the United Nations prepares to convene new talks in Geneva on Wednesday.

Between desert and ocean

The north African territory sits on the western edge of the vast Sahara desert, stretching along about 1,000 kilometers (620 miles) of Atlantic coastline. At 266,000 square kilometers it is relatively large but its inhospitable terrain supports only around half a million people. Bordering Morocco to the north, Algeria to the east and Mauritania to the south and southeast, it boasts large reserves of phosphate and rich offshore fisheries. Its largest city is Laayoune, which is administered by Morocco and where about 40 percent of its population lives.

As Spain withdrew in 1975, Morocco moved in, claiming that the territory was an integral part of the kingdom. It was opposed by the Polisario Front, which took up arms to fight for independence. The dispute was referred to the International Court of Justice in The Hague which ruled in favor of self-determination. In November 1975, 350,000 Moroccans, took part in the so-called Green March to the border to press the kingdom's claim. In February 1976, the Polisario Front proclaimed the Sahrawi Arab Democratic Republic (SADR), with the support of allies including Algeria and Cuba.

Separated by sand wall

The Polisario initially gained the upper hand before being pushed back into the interior. During the 1980s, Morocco built a series of concentric walls in the desert, most made of sand, to keep Polisario fighters out of territory where it had established control. The outermost



AL-MAHBES: Saharawi men hold up a Polisario Front flag in the Al-Mahbes area near Moroccan soldiers guarding the wall separating the Polisario controlled Western Sahara from Morocco. —AFP

defensive line runs for 2,700 kilometers across the desert, ringing the 80 percent of the Western Sahara now under Moroccan control.

It is fortified with barbed wire and trenches and forms one of the world's largest minefields. A UN-brokered ceasefire in 1991 perpetuated the line of control. The SADR is a member of the African Union but controls just 20 percent of its territory, mostly empty desert. Morocco rejoined the African bloc last year after a 33-year absence under the cloud of the dispute. The conflict has long poisoned its relations with neighboring Algeria. Their common border has been closed since 1994, and between 100,000 and 200,000 Sahrawi refugees live in camps around the Algerian desert town of Tindouf.

UN setbacks

The United Nations has repeatedly failed to broker a settlement. It deployed its Minurso mission in 1991 to monitor the ceasefire and organise a referendum on the territory's future status. The vote was set for 1992 but was aborted when Morocco objected to the proposed

electoral register, saying it was biased. Headquartered in Laayoune, the mission has had strained relations with the Moroccan authorities. The authorities now refuse to accept any vote in which independence is an option and say only autonomy is on the table. Morocco and the Polisario have not held direct talks since 2012. In October, the UN Security Council voted to extend the mission for six months, setting a deadline for progress in a renewed push for a settlement.

The latest UN report on Western Sahara cited accounts of "serious human rights violations" committed by Moroccan police, such as arbitrary arrest, ill-treatment and torture against those pushing for self-determination. Last month's evaluation also referred to reports of "excessive surveillance operations" targeting journalists and human rights campaigners. It additionally highlighted the Polisario's de facto authority over the Tindouf camps and concerns over rights abuses there. The UN envoy to Western Sahara, former German president Horst Koehler, has invited the two sides along with Algeria and Mauritania to Geneva for talks on December 5-6. —AFP

Yemen's city fights to resurrect itself after Qaeda defeat

MUKALLA: In azure waters off Yemen, newly minted coastguards stormed a fishing boat in a mock exercise as part of a war-scarred city's struggle to resurrect state institutions two years after Al-Qaeda's ouster. In a nation torn by conflict, the former jihadist bastion of Mukalla stands out as an oasis of stability, offering what many call a blueprint for post-war Yemen. In a ceremony last week on a beach littered with rusted Soviet-era tanks, dozens of Yemeni officers took charge of securing the 350-kilometre coast of southern Hadramawt province, infested with drug and weapons smugglers.

The handover in Mukalla included management of local ports, with a Saudi-led military coalition giving maritime equipment and surveillance boats to the new coastguard trained by Saudi, Emirati and American officials. "The real answer to the humanitarian crisis (in Yemen) lies in bringing about an end to the conflict in a way that will restore the institutions of the state," said Matthew Tueller, the US ambassador to Yemen. "We cannot afford to see Yemen continue in this failed state status," he added at the ceremony also attended by Saudi envoy Mohammed al-Jaber.

Al-Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula (AQAP), seen by the United States as the militant network's most dangerous franchise, was expelled from Mukalla in April 2016. It was a rare success for coalition-backed Yemeni forces locked in a bloody stalemate with Iran-aligned Houthi rebels. Militants who stoned women adulterers and enforced an austere vision of Islam no longer roam Mukalla's corniche and its squares no longer serve as venues for public executions. But officials concede that the conditions that facilitated the militants' takeover of the poverty-stricken city of nearly 500,000 — mainly a lack of services and governance—still prevail. —AFP

Deadly invasion shows land-use conflicts in Kenya

NAIROBI: Renewed invasions of private ranches by herders in Kenya's northern Laikipia region a year after similar invasions led to deadly conflicts is a sign of cracks in the country's land use system, experts said. A herder was shot dead when police tried to confiscate his cattle after they invaded one of the ranches last week, police and ranchers said. "That herder was killed as a matter of self-defense by the police," Martin Evans, chairman of the Laikipia Farmers Association said. Dozens were killed and injured in Kenya's drought-stricken Laikipia region last year as armed herders searching for scarce grazing land drove tens of thousands of cattle onto private farms and ranches from poor-quality communal land.

"Right now, it is very dry out there," Evans said. "The November rains have failed and if it doesn't rain between now and April the situation is going to get worse." Francis Munyambu, the Rift Valley police commandant, said the shooting was under investigation but security in the region had returned to normal. Increased droughts due to climate change, as well as population growth and the enclosure of public lands, have pushed many traditional nomads to move onto grazing land on private ranches.

"This is really putting pressure on normal pastoralists in terms of where they are going to access pasture and water," said Nyangori Ohenjo, program manager at Centre for Minority Rights Development. Each cow needs at least 10 acres of land to be healthy, Evans said, but the large herds of cattle kept by pastoralists was leading to depletion of grazing land. "All the land in the north is already destroyed and that's why they are moving southwards," he said. The conflict in Laikipia highlights the struggle for land between indigenous communities and conservationists across the world, Ohenjo said, and is partly a legacy of Kenya's colonial past. —Reuters

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International

Air Force One collects Bush's casket for days-long homage

Trump declares Wednesday a national day of mourning

HOUSTON: America's national farewell to George HW Bush began yesterday with the transfer of his casket aboard the presidential plane from Texas to Washington, where he will lie in state in the rotunda of the US Capitol. The 41st US president died Friday at age 94, at his home in Houston—"a very gentle and peaceful passing," his lifelong friend and advisor James Baker said Sunday on ABC's "This Week." Bush—only the second president to see his son follow him to the Oval Office—will be honored with four days of services and tributes in Washington and in Texas, where he will be buried on Thursday.

The high point of the commemorations, planned with military precision by a Pentagon task force, will come with a state funeral at Washington National Cathedral—the first presidential funeral since Gerald Ford died in 2006. Bush was a decorated World War II fighter pilot, former head of the Central Intelligence Agency, and vice president to Ronald Reagan before winning the White House. President Donald Trump—who has often clashed with the Bush family—has declared tomorrow a national day of mourning, and said he will attend the funeral.



George Bush to be buried on Thursday

held dear from his time in the Navy, and one used by his family and friends to discreetly spread the news of his death. Bush's son George—the 43rd president of the United States—and other loved ones are expected to travel on the presidential jet.

Also reportedly expected to make the trip is his service dog Sully-McGrath posted a touching photo of the yellow Labrador near Bush's casket on Sunday with the phrase "Mission Complete." After a speech from Vice President Mike Pence, Bush will lie in state in the US Capitol from evening until tomorrow morning, under the watchful gaze of an around-the-clock honor guard. Thousands are expected to pay their respects. The casket will then be transported to the cathedral for tomorrow's funeral service—the fourth held there for a former president.

Dozens of foreign leaders and US luminaries are expected. Former Canadian prime minister Brian Mulroney told Politico he will deliver one of several eulogies, at Bush's request. The casket will then be flown back to Houston, where the former head of state will lie in repose at St Martin's Episcopal Church—where the Bushes worshipped for decades—until Thursday's funeral service. The remains will then be transported by train for interment at the George Bush Presidential Library in College Station, Texas. Bush will be buried next to his wife Barbara, who died in April, and their daughter Robin, who died of leukemia at age three.

Tributes from friends

Lying in state
The week's events began at 1630 GMT yesterday, when Bush's remains are to be flown aboard the presidential Boeing 747 - made available at Trump's direction—from Houston to Joint Base Andrews, Maryland. By tradition, the plane is only known as Air Force One when the sitting president is on board.

Family spokesman Jim McGrath said the flights to carry Bush are being dubbed "Special Air Mission 41." "A beautiful day in Texas—ceiling and visibility unlimited," Mr. President," he wrote—using a phrase that Bush

Baker, who served Bush as secretary of state, joined others in paying warm tribute on Sunday television talk shows. Baker called him "far and away the best one-term president we have ever had," alluding to



WASHINGTON: The catafalque is prepared where the casket of the late former President George HW Bush will lie in state sits inside the Rotunda of the US Capitol. —AFP

Bush's single biggest political failure—his loss in the 1992 election to Bill Clinton. Baker instead emphasized his friend's foreign policy successes: navigating the end of the Cold War, negotiating two nuclear arms reduction treaties, and summoning a global coalition to eject Iraqi troops from Kuwait in the first Gulf War. Colin Powell, who was chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff during that war, said he was confident in Bush's leadership because "he knew what combat was all about. He knew it meant the death of people... He wanted to avoid a war."

The former president had struggled for years with Parkinson's disease, which left him wheelchair-bound and often hospitalized—including after Barbara's death. Last week, things took a decided turn for the worse, Baker said on ABC. When an aide told Bush that Baker was visiting Friday, "he perked up. He opened his eyes. He looked at me, he says, 'Hey, Bake. Where we going?'" "We're going to heaven," Baker said. Bush replied: "Good, that's where I want to go." Baker said Bush's last words, in a phone conversation with son George, were: "I love you, too." —AFP

News in brief

Eight extremists on trial

DHAKA: Eight alleged Islamist extremists went on trial in Bangladesh yesterday over a savage 2016 attack claimed by Islamic State that killed 22 people including 18 foreigners at a Dhaka cafe popular with Westerners. Prosecutors say that the eight members of a homegrown extremist outfit were "associates" of the five attackers killed when police stormed the Holey Artisan Bakery cafe. The eight, who face the death penalty if convicted, "helped mastermind the attack and supplied arms and ammunition," prosecutor Jahangir Alam Chowdhury said. Six defendants were present with two having absconded. More than 200 witnesses have been called in a special anti-terrorism court in the old part of the capital Dhaka under tight security. The brazen assault in July 2016 saw young men armed with assault rifles and machetes lay siege to the cafe in Dhaka's well-heeled Gulshan neighborhood. —AFP

Clashes kill 18 in Congo

BUKAVU: Clashes between the army and rebels loyal to a renegade former general in eastern DR Congo have killed at least 18 people, military sources said yesterday. Fighting killed 14 rebels and four soldiers in Fizi, a region of South Kivu, a mineral-rich province which is prone to ethnic tensions, the sources said. The unrest is another front by rebels opposed to President Joseph Kabila as the poverty-stricken Democratic Republic of Congo prepares for a much-delayed presidential election on December 23. The military sources said one soldier and two rebels were killed early Monday in fighting. Earlier, regional army spokesman Captain Dieudonne Kaserek said 12 rebel fighters had been killed including a deputy commander known as Alida. He said three of the soldiers drowned in a river during combat. —AFP

Italian student's murder

CAIRO: Egypt refuses to accuse police officers suspected by Italy of involvement in the grisly murder of an Italian student because of a lack of evidence, the authorities said. Giulio Regeni, a 28-year-old doctoral researcher at Britain's Cambridge University, disappeared in Cairo in January 2016. His body was found by a roadside bearing extensive marks of torture in a case that strained the traditionally close relations between Cairo and Rome, which accused Egypt of insufficient cooperation in the probe. According to Italian media, Italian prosecutors could open a formal investigation into several Egyptian secret service agents. Egypt has always denied suggestions that its security services were involved in the death of Regeni, who was researching trade unions in Egypt. —AFP

UN, doctors blast Australia

SYDNEY: Australia's under-pressure government received a double blow yesterday from the United Nations and a leading doctors' group over harsh treatment of refugees on off-shore island camps. In an unusual broadside, a top official for the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees accused "bureaucrats and politicians" of overruling doctors and putting lives at risk at camps on Nauru and Manus. Australia holds unauthorized migrants who try to reach the island continent by boat in "off-shore detention"—part of a harsh policy designed to deter would-be asylum-seekers. UNHCR's Catherine Stubberfield decried the policy as "sold too simplistically" and said changing it was now a matter of "basic human treatment and decency." —AFP

The world 'way off course', UN warns at climate summit

KATOWICE: The world is "way off course" in its plan to prevent catastrophic climate change, the United Nations warned yesterday as nations gathered in Poland to chart a way for mankind to avert runaway global warming. After a string of damning scientific reports showing humanity must drastically slash its greenhouse gas emissions within the next decade, UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres told delegates at the opening of a UN climate summit: "We are still not doing enough, nor moving fast enough".

Leaders from at-risk nations such as Fiji, Nigeria and Nepal pleaded their case at the COP24 climate talks, which aim to flesh out the promises agreed in the 2015 Paris climate accord. But host Poland - heavily reliant on energy from coal - will push its own agenda: a "just transition" from fossil fuels that critics say could allow it to continue polluting for decades. Nor are any of the world's largest emitters represented at the highest level in Poland. The Paris deal saw nations agree to limit global temperature rises to below two degrees Celsius (3.6 Fahrenheit) and under 1.5C if possible.

Officials from nearly 200 countries now have two weeks to finalize how those goals work in practice, even as sci-

ence suggests the pace of climate change is rapidly outstripping mankind's response. One of the key disputes is finance. Under Paris, richer nations - responsible for the majority of historic greenhouse gas emissions - are expected to contribute funding that developing nations can access to make their economies greener. But US President Donald Trump's decision to withdraw from the Paris accord has dented trust among vulnerable nations, who fear there is not enough cash available to help them adapt to our heating planet.

\$200 billion pledged

The World Bank yesterday announced \$200 billion (175 billion euros) in climate action investment for 2021-25 - a major shot in the arm for green initiatives but one which needs bolstering by state funding. The background to summit could hardly be bleaker: with just one degree Celsius of warming so far, Earth is bombarded with raging wildfires, widespread crop failures and super-storms exacerbated by rising sea levels. "Even as we witness devastating climate impacts causing havoc across the world, we are still not doing enough, nor moving fast enough, to prevent irreversible and catastrophic climate disruption," Guterres said.

The UN's own expert climate panel in October issued its starkest warning to date. To have any hope of reaching the 1.5C goal by the end of the century, it said emissions from fossil fuel use must be halved by 2030. Poland is one



KATOWICE: An artist performs during the opening of the Indonesian pavilion during the COP24 summit on climate change in Katowice, Poland yesterday. —AFP

of many nations heavily reliant on coal and wants this round of talks to reflect the role fossil fuels play in its economy. Yesterday, it unveiled a declaration calling on states to "recognize the challenges faced by sectors, cities and regions in transition from fossil fuels... and the importance to ensure a decent future for workers impacted by the transition."

'Humanity betrayed'

As Poland pushed the continued use of coal, it fell to the president of Nauru, a Pacific island nation that is critically

threatened by rising sea-levels, to point out the most obvious barrier to climate action: fossil fuel use. Baron Divavesi Waqa said the Paris agreement "doesn't radically disrupt the fossil fuel industry... these powerful interests emerged from Paris unscathed and we ignore that reality at our peril." Frank Bainimarama, prime minister of Fiji and president of last year's COP, said developed nations must act now to save the planet. "Or, God forbid, (we) ignore the irrefutable evidence and become the generation that betrayed humanity," he said. —AFP

French president seeks way out of crisis after riots

PARIS: French leader Emmanuel Macron faced growing pressure yesterday to find a way out of the worst crisis of his presidency after shocking scenes of rioting in Paris at the weekend. As more than 100 people prepared to appear in court over the worst clashes in central Paris in decades on Saturday, Macron's government was preparing its response. Prime Minister Edouard Philippe, who cancelled a scheduled trip to Poland, was set to meet the heads of the main political parties, many of whom sense opportunities in Macron's woes. But the 40-year-old president appeared determined not to roll back the unpopular hikes in fuel tax which sparked the protests, or announce state handouts for poor families.

"Thinking that, as we have always done for 30 years, that you make a little symbolic gesture and then we sweep the dust under the carpet, that doesn't resolve the fundamental, structural problem," spokesman Benjamin Griveaux said on France Inter radio. The protests erupted over fuel taxes but have since morphed into a wider wave of resistance to Macron's economic reforms, with a third round of demonstrations called for Saturday in Paris. Macron, a 40-year-old centrist, was elected in May 2017 on a pro-business platform that promised measures to entice companies to invest to create jobs.

Immediately after coming to power, he pushed through tax cuts for entrepreneurs and

high-earners — policies that have become a lightning rod for anger among the so-called "gilets jaunes" or "yellow vests". Macron's task now is also complicated by his own desire not to yield to France's street protests, which in the past have repeatedly forced his predecessors into U-turns. Jaeline Mouraud, one of the protest movement's prime instigators, told AFP that scrapping the fuel tax was a "prerequisite for any discussion" with the government.

Government paralysis?

After his meeting political rivals on Monday, Prime Minister Philippe is set to hold talks with representatives of the "yellow vests" on Tuesday. He would then announce "measures" aimed at taking the heat out of the protests, his office said. "Mr President, we need a response," demanded the front-page headline of Le Parisien newspaper on Monday. "Swamped" read the headline of left-leaning Liberation newspaper which said the government seemed "paralyzed by the yellow vest movement that it can't stop and that risks boiling over".

Amid criticism of policing methods on Saturday that saw dozens of cars torched and shops vandalized, the government ruled out imposing a state of emergency which had been mooted. Deputy interior minister Laurent Nunez said that emergency measures were "one option among others," but he said it was "not on the table for now". Economy Minister Bruno Le Maire said that solution for tackling low purchasing power for struggling families lay in reducing the tax burden in France, which is among the highest in Europe. "We must speed up the reduction of taxes," he said. "But for that we must speed up the decrease in public spending."



AUBERVILLIERS: A car burns outside the Lycee Professionnel Jean-Pierre Timbaud high school after being set ablaze by students protesting against French government Education reforms yesterday in the north of Paris' suburb of Aubervilliers. —AFP

Business losses

Macron, a former investment banker, was booed on Sunday by onlookers while surveying the damage caused during the rioting. The president assessed the Arc de Triomphe, the massive monument to France's war dead at the top of the Champs-Elysees avenue, where rioters scrawled graffiti and ransacked the ticketing and reception areas. He also saw the wreckage of burnt-out cars and damaged buildings from rioting at other sites but has not spoken publicly about the destruction since his

return from a G20 summit in Argentina. Paris police said 412 people were arrested on Saturday during the worst clashes for years in the capital and 363 remained in custody, according to the latest figures.

A total of 263 people were injured nationwide, including 133 in the capital, 23 of them members of the security forces. The violence has caused deep concern in the French business community which claims it has already lost billions of euros, and representatives are set to attend a meeting at the economy ministry yesterday. —AFP

International

Gaza military court sentences 6 people to death by hanging

Convicts accused of 'collaborating' with Israel

GAZA: A military court in the Hamas-run Gaza Strip yesterday sentenced six people, including a woman, to death by hanging for "collaborating" with Israel, authorities said. In total 14 people were sentenced for "collaborating with the occupation," with six sentenced to be hanged and the rest sentenced to hard labor, the interior ministry in Gaza said.

The rulings came three weeks after eight people were killed when an alleged Israeli army cell in Gaza was uncovered on November 11, leading to a vicious fire fight. Hamas fired hundreds of rockets at Israel in response, with the Jewish state striking dozens of targets in Gaza before a November 13 ceasefire agreement.

The six sentenced to death yesterday were not directly related to the flareup, officials said. Iyad Al-Bozum, the spokesman of the interior ministry in Gaza said they were linked "to a communications and eavesdropping device planted by the (Israeli) occupation".

Six Hamas members were killed when the device apparently exploded after detection near Deir al-Balah in central Gaza in May. Among those sentenced was a woman living inside Israel, named only as Amal, who was sentenced in absentia and is alleged to have encouraged her nephew in Gaza to collaborate with Israeli intelligence, according to the interior ministry. Bozum hailed the rulings as a "clear message" to those who would

cooperate with Israel. "Collaborators must realise the (Israeli) occupation will not be able to protect them," he told a news conference.

The verdicts drew condemnation from Human Rights Watch. "Rushing to sentence people to death smacks of militia rule, not the rule of law," said Omar Shakir, the watchdog's director for Israel and the Palestinian territories. "The death penalty is a barbaric practice and always wrong, no matter the circumstance," he told AFP. It was not clear when the executions of those in custody would take place. According to the Palestinian Centre for Human Rights, 28 executions have been carried out in Gaza since Hamas seized control of the coastal

enclave in 2007 from rival faction Fatah. In May 2017, Hamas security forces invited journalists to attend the hanging in Gaza City of three men convicted over the assassination of a senior military commander of the Islamist movement. During the 2014 war with Israel, a firing squad from Hamas's armed wing killed six men accused of collaborating with the Jewish state.

Hamas and its allies have fought three wars with Israel since 2008 and the Gaza Strip has been under an Israeli blockade for a decade. Israel says the measure is necessary to isolate Hamas, though critics say they amount to collective punishment of the territory's two million residents. — AFP

Journalist critical of Duterte surrenders

MANILA: The journalist who leads a news site that has battled Philippine President Rodrigo Duterte turned herself in yesterday to face what she termed a "manufactured" tax fraud case that carries the threat of a decade behind bars. A day after Rappler CEO Maria Ressa fled home to the Philippines under the threat of an arrest warrant, she surrendered at a Manila court and was allowed to remain free after paying a cash bail.

Rappler has been hit by a string of government efforts to shut it down since the site took a critical tone on Duterte, in particular his internationally condemned drug war that has killed thousands. Ressa now faces the prospect of a trial in an overburdened court system that is notoriously susceptible to influence from powerful elites. "They (the charges) are politically motivated and... they are manufactured," she told journalists outside court. "Rappler pays the right taxes."

If found guilty of the charge that Rappler provided false information to tax authorities, she risks up to 10 years behind bars. She posted a bail equivalent of \$1,100 (970 euros). Campaigners condemned the charge, which is one of several tax fraud cases the government filed against Rappler and Ressa last week while she was out of the country to attend a series of prominent journalism events. The charges are "part of the Duterte administration's campaign to harass, threaten and intimi-

date critics," said Human Rights Watch Philippines researcher Carlos Conde.

'Journalist, not a criminal'

"The attacks on Rappler are consistent with the way the Duterte administration has treated other 'drug war' critics," he said. Duterte bristles at attacks on his signature campaign to rid the nation of drugs, which police say has killed nearly 5,000 alleged dealers and users who resisted arrest. Some of the crackdown's highest profile critics have wound up behind bars, including Senator Leila de Lima, who was jailed on drug charges she insists were fabricated to silence her.

The government accuses Rappler Holdings Corp, Ressa and the site's accountant of failing to pay taxes on 2015 bond sales that it alleges netted gains of 162.5 million pesos (\$3 million). The bonds, called Philippine Depositary Receipts, are at the heart of a case that led the Philippines' corporate watchdog to void the news site's corporate license in January. Duterte has attacked other media outfits that criticize him, including top newspaper, The Philippine Daily Inquirer and major broadcaster ABS-CBN, threatening to also go after their owners over alleged unpaid taxes.

The government said the charges against Ressa were the consequence of wrongdoing, not retribution. "You violate tax laws, then you will be prosecuted," Duterte's spokesman Salvador Panelo told reporters. When Ressa returned to the Philippines Sunday night she told a crowd of TV news cameras at the airport that she would keep fighting. "I am going to hold my government accountable for publicly calling me a criminal. I am not a criminal," she said. "I have been a journalist my entire life. I will continue to hold the government accountable," she added. — AFP

HK democrats 'furious' over election ban

HONG KONG: A Hong Kong (HK) legislator has been barred from standing in a local election after being accused of supporting independence from China, sparking fury yesterday among the city's pro-democracy camp who warn of tightening ideological control. The disqualification of popular lawmaker Eddie Chu is the latest blow to the democratic movement as room for opposition in semi-autonomous Hong Kong shrinks under an assertive China. Chu is the first person to be blocked from standing in rural village elections, after poll officials decided he is pro-independence - a red line for Beijing.

While he has supported self-determination for Hong Kong, he maintains he does not advocate its separation from China. Voices for self-determination emerged from the 2014 Umbrella Movement protests, and believe in the right of Hong Kongers to decide their own fate, including how the city should be governed. Chu said the decision to ban him reveals a Cultural Revolution-style approach that everyone has to be "thought police".

"Not only must a person in Hong Kong not advocate independence themselves... But if you didn't oppose the right of others to advocate it, then your own political rights

will be taken away," he said. Pro-democracy lawmaker Claudia Mo told reporters yesterday the decision to bar Chu from rural elections "makes a mockery of Hong Kong in the international community." "We express our fury and our strongest condemnation." She was one of a group of democratic legislators who accused the government of destroying the constitutionally protected right to free speech. "Now they've literally, practically put a noose around our necks," Mo said.

Though Hong Kong democrats or self-determination activists do not themselves campaign for independence, many including Chu have defended others' rights to express their support or freely discuss the subject. Chu earlier told an election official that "the peaceful proposition for Hong Kong independence" was "a right of the Hong Kong people as protected by the Basic Law", referring to the city's mini-constitution. The official said in a letter to Chu late Sunday that his views "could be understood as implicitly confirming that he supports that independence could be an option for Hong Kong people."

Chinese President Xi Jinping warned on a high-profile visit to the semi-autonomous city last year that any threat to China's sovereignty is "absolutely impermissible". Authorities have since turned the screws on pro-independence advocates. The Hong Kong government said Sunday it supports the decision not to let Chu run and that it was not a case of political censorship. Democracy lawmakers also warned yesterday that Hong Kong's special economic status and participation in global trade as a "separate customs territory" could be undermined as the city's autonomy comes under "severe attacks". — AFP



MANILA: Maria Ressa, CEO and executive editor of online portal Rappler gestures after posting bail at a court in Manila yesterday. — AFP

'Hundreds' of Aussie convictions in doubt

SYDNEY: Hundreds of criminal convictions - including those meted out to some of Australia's most notorious gangland figures - hang in the balance, after their defense lawyer was revealed as a police informant yesterday. Court documents disclosed that a high-profile Melbourne barrister had for years been giving information to Victoria Police, while representing clients like crime boss Tony Mokbel and six of his associates. The revelation came after court injunctions were lifted yesterday, blowing the lid off one of the biggest legal scandals to hit the country in years and prompting the authorities to immediately announce a public inquiry.

In a secret court battle spanning more than two years, police had tried to stop state prosecutors from informing the seven people about their barrister's supergrass role. They were finally knocked back by Australia's highest court last month. The High Court blasted police as being "guilty of reprehensible conduct" and said they were "involved in sanctioning atrocious breaches of the sworn duty of every police officer". "The prosecution of each convicted person was corrupted in a manner which debased fundamental premises of the criminal justice system," the High Court added in a scathing judgment. The lawyer - given the code name 3838 by police when she was working as an informant between

2005-2009 - kept in daily contact with her handlers, who passed on information provided by her to various police taskforces, court documents stated. While the courts only mentioned Mokbel and his associates, more than 600 cases could be tainted, according to Melbourne's Herald Sun. Mokbel was jailed in 2012 for a minimum of 22 years for masterminding a drug trafficking empire. The High Court decision means criminals would be notified that their barrister, who still cannot be named, was a police informant, thus possibly affecting their cases. It would mean these criminals could then appeal their convictions.

Victoria's Director of Public Prosecutions Kerri Judd said she has written to 20 individuals about their cases, and was assessing others. "If appropriate, I will also write to those affected individuals," she said in a statement. Victoria Premier Daniel Andrews meanwhile announced a royal commission into the scandal, saying the public had a "right to know that every part of the justice system acts fairly and lawfully at all times". Victoria Police Chief Commissioner Graham Ashton said the force changed how it managed informants in 2009, so such incidents cannot be repeated today.

Ashton said while police would cooperate with the probe, what was happening in the underworld at that time should be taken into account. "Melbourne was in the grip of what is now rightly known as the gangland wars," he told reporters. "The risk to the community at this time was significant." Legal advocacy group The Human Rights Law Centre said an independent investigative body should also be established to probe all allegations of police misconduct. — AFP

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Forecasting trouble: How South Sudan weather service is failing farmers

In Shirkat cattle camp on the outskirts of Juba, farmers say South Sudan's increasingly unpredictable weather has turned their lives into a series of dilemmas. Unexpected showers during the cold season can cause cows to contract East Coast Fever, a potentially fatal illness. Farmers then have to choose between paying for medicine that costs nearly \$40 per dose or leaving their cattle untreated and hoping they survive, said camp leader Deng Bul. When the dry season comes early or lasts longer than usual, pastoralists face another tough decision: Do they stay and wait for rain - possibly losing some animals to starvation - or move to other pastures and risk getting caught up in the country's ongoing civil war?

If they knew when heavy rain or drought were coming, the farmers said, they could make better decisions about their cattle and crops. But in South Sudan, where two of the main economic activities - farming and pastoralism - rely heavily on sufficient and regular rainfall, the essential service of weather forecasting has been largely missing since the young nation attained its independence from Sudan in 2011.

Decimated by civil war, South Sudan's meteorology department is now barely running, with inadequate funding, outdated equipment and untrained staff, experts say. As a result, it is unable to provide even the most basic weather information to the public, they say, with some people even unaware it exists. When told there was a meteorological station nearby in Juba dedicated to predicting the weather, the farmers in Shirkat cattle camp said they had no idea the service even existed. "I've never heard of this witch doctor you are talking about. Maybe it is for the educated," Bul said.

More data, better decisions

Achiku Rashid Wani, a farmer in Juba's Gudele suburb, said he had heard of South Sudan's weather service, but said it is useless for most farmers. He grows vegetables during the dry season using a petrol-powered water pump. "The factor that is affecting me is the fuel prices; it is expensive," he told the Thomson Reuters Foundation. "If I could get information from this (meteorological) department, it would help me plan when to spend money on fuel."

Before the start of the second Sudanese civil war in 1983, southern Sudan had just over 40 meteorological stations, said Nihal Titmamer, a senior researcher at the Sudd Institute, a Juba-based research organization. They generated data made available to the public, making them essential to farmers, Titmamer said. But most were destroyed in the fighting, with the war playing "a huge role (in) reducing the capacity" of the remaining stations, Titmamer said.

Of the five weather bases still standing, only three are operational, according to Mojwok Ogawi Modo, director-general of the South Sudan Meteorological Department (SSMD). Since South Sudan gained its independence, the bases have come under management of the new nation's own meteorological department. While there are smaller weather stations around the country, set up by various international organizations, and many farmers keep their own records of the local weather, there is no way to collate, analyze or share the data with the public, experts say.

Old and spoiled

South Sudan's largest weather station is run out of one small, crowded room on the second floor of the control tower at the Juba International Airport. The space is so tight that its employees have trouble moving in and out of the room. It "is not a favorable working environment," Modo said. Most of the computers are old, some are broken, and some sit unused because there are not enough people qualified to operate them, he said. The department does not have enough devices to accurately observe or forecast the weather, Modo said. "The few we have are old and many are spoiled."

With no money to buy modern electronic weather-monitoring equipment, the SSMD relies on older methods. Attached to a metal pole just outside the control tower is a white wooden box with slatted sides, called a Stevenson screen, with wet and dry barometers and a thermometer inside it. Two rain gauges sit in an overgrown okra garden, but only one of them works, said a member of the met department staff who asked not to be named.

And nearby, there is a Campbell-Stokes sunshine recorder. Based on antique technology, the gadget consists of a solid glass sphere that concentrates the sun's rays onto a piece of calibrated paper to make scorch marks indicating the time and intensity of the sunshine. This machine, however, has no paper. Nearby, the skeletal remains of a radar antenna serve as a reminder that Juba once had a fully functioning weather surveillance system. With no equipment to detect precipitation, South Sudan's meteorologists say they can't perform the basic service of predicting the timing, intensity or location of incoming rainfall. Using the few resources it does have, the Juba met station provides weather information to aircraft traveling in and out of the capital. But to make that data more widely available, the SSMD needs more funding, Modo said. The department has a website, but can't afford to keep it updated. — Reuters



Western Sahara talks an 'ice-breaker'

A UN envoy is set to host an "initial round-table" in Geneva this week between Morocco and the Polisario Front in a bid to kick-start dialogue on the disputed Western Sahara region. "It is time to open a new chapter in the political process", said UN envoy Horst Koehler in an October invitation letter. Six years after direct talks broke down, the meeting is expected to take place tomorrow and Thursday, with neighboring Algeria and Mauritania also attending.

A former Spanish colony, phosphate-rich Western Sahara sits on the western edge of the vast eponymous desert, stretching around 1,000 km along the fish-abundant Atlantic coastline. When Spain withdrew from the North African territory in 1975, Rabat sent thousands of people across the border and claimed it was an integral part of Morocco. The following year the Polisario Front declared Western Sahara the Sahrawi Arab Democratic Republic (SADR), with support from Algeria and Libya, and demanded a referendum on self-determination to resolve the dispute.

But as the stalemate continued, Morocco built razor-wire-topped concentric sand walls in the desert that still ring 80 percent of the territory it controls. A 1991 ceasefire saw the UN deploy a peacekeeping mission which has perpetuated the line of control, but the international community has long intended a referendum to be held to decide the territory's status. Rabat currently rejects any vote in which independence is an option, arguing that only granti-

ng autonomy is on the table and that this is necessary for regional security.

Living in limbo

Awaiting a settlement, between 100,000 and 200,000 refugees live precariously in camps in western Algeria, near the city of Tindouf. The last round of direct talks were launched by the UN in 2007 but got bogged down 2012, as the opposing sides proved unable to compromise over the territory's status and the proposed referendum. Leading the diplomatic efforts since 2017, Koehler - a former president of Germany - has already met the key protagonists several times, albeit separately.

His efforts have paved the way for the Polisario, Morocco, Algeria and Mauritania to sit at the same table, even if the format has not been unanimously agreed. Algeria wants to participate only as an "observer country", but Rabat considers it a "stakeholder" in the discussions, since Algiers is the Polisario's main backer. A UN briefing note says the Geneva meeting represents "a first step... with the aim of reaching a just, lasting, and mutually acceptable solution which will provide for the self-determination of the people of Western Sahara".

But the itinerary remains vague, outlining the delegations will take "stock of recent developments, address regional issues, and discuss the next steps in the political process on Western Sahara". According to one diplomatic source, the plan is not to put too much pressure on this

first meeting. Instead, it should be considered more of a "warming up" exercise aimed at "breaking the ice", especially given still-poor relations between Rabat and Algiers.

The situation remains "generally calm" along the line of control, despite tensions that resurfaced in early 2018, according to a UN report. For the Polisario, a recent reduction in the UN peacekeepers' mandate from 12 months to six months is part of a "dynamic" created by Koehler's appointment. The UN Security Council adopted a US-drafted resolution in October to renew the peacekeeping mission and throw its weight behind the planned talks.

But ahead of the Geneva meeting, all sides are sticking to their positions, even as they signal their goodwill. While supporting a "durable" political solution marked by a "spirit of compromise", King Mohammed VI said in a recent speech that Morocco will not yield on its "territorial integrity", including control over Western Sahara. Key Polisario official Mhamed Khadad told AFP ahead of attending the Geneva talks "everything can be negotiated except the inalienable and imprescriptible right of our people to self-determination".

Reflecting its status as the Polisario's main supporter, Algeria likewise speaks of this "inalienable and imprescriptible" right. In a recent official statement, Algiers said it would head to Geneva favoring "frank and fair" direct negotiations between the Polisario and Morocco aimed at building a definitive solution. — AFP

Weibo eyes expansion to 'Chinese speaking world'

Chinese social media giant Weibo is making a push into foreign markets and is considering launching new products in different languages, a senior executive told AFP, brushing off concerns over censorship and credibility. The Twitter-style platform has long been prominent in China, known for its heavy censorship and Great Firewall, but it now wants to reach Chinese audiences overseas, Weibo Sports senior operations director Zhang Zhe said. "We want everyone in the Chinese-speaking world to use Weibo," he said on the sidelines of the Sports Connects sport-business conference in Dongguan, southern China.

Zhang added that Weibo is also looking into hiving off new, more niche products in different languages including English. TikTok, a short-form video-sharing app, has proved wildly popular this year. Its Beijing-based creator, ByteDance, this week announced a global tie-up with basketball's NBA that will allow it to show highlights in several countries, including the US.

"Weibo is a very comprehensively developed product. We not only have videos, we also have images, graphics, articles, even live streams. So we've got everything," said Zhang, speaking through a translator. "We can't just introduce Weibo outside the country, because there's already Twitter, Facebook. It doesn't really make sense to compete directly so if Weibo is going abroad, we think maybe if we have just one dedicated area of the product, we can really cut into the market, like TikTok did."

Zhang's comments and the ByteDance announcement show how Chinese internet companies, no longer content with the domestic market in the world's most populous nation, are beginning to look abroad. But Chinese tech firms are not always welcomed overseas, with surveillance and data security chief among the concerns. Last

week, New Zealand blocked China's Huawei from its roll-out of 5G services, a move its largest telecoms carrier, Spark, blamed on national security worries.

Fake news

Foreign expansion would bring added scrutiny for Weibo, as Chinese social media are known not only for their censorship, but also fake news. Zhang said Weibo had a team of more than 1,000 people verifying content on the network, and insisted it had strong editorial principles to keep its credibility intact. "That's not something we're really worried about at the moment," he said, when asked whether censorship would affect the image of any new products launched abroad.

"Because Weibo comes from SINA, which is a big media company with very strong principles like every news company in the world. We also have a huge team working on the content to make sure the news credibility is good, so we don't think that's an issue," Zhang said that despite its ambitions overseas, China remained the main focus for Weibo, which launched in 2009 and has more than 400 million monthly active users, making it the country's second biggest platform behind Tencent's WeChat.

Weibo has an unbeatable competitive advantage over Twitter and Facebook in China: the two US titans are among a number of foreign websites blocked by the Communist-led country's Great Firewall. "In China, we want to go deep to tier three, tier four cities to get more users. On the other hand, we want to go abroad and find new countries and people who are waiting to use Weibo," said Zhang.

He added that Weibo could follow ByteDance by buying the rights to show sports footage, although its main strategy remained receiving free content from leagues keen to reach Chinese consumers. "But in the future, depending on how the audience is evolving as well, we might actually tap in the market and buy media rights, for broadcasting via Weibo directly," he said. Zhang added: "We want to go step by step. We don't want to take a big jump so that's why we don't have concrete plans for international expansion yet. We also believe that the Chinese in China and globally are a very huge market and our main focus now is really to make sure that we deliver in this market." — AFP

India politicians spar over dodgy economic data

It may be the world's sixth largest, but most other things about India's economy are up for debate. The ruling Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) is under fire for the release of new historical GDP figures that significantly downgraded growth during the years the opposition Congress party was in power, replacing old government estimates and those prepared by an independent committee. The figures, released by the government's Central Statistics Office (CSO), showed growth in the 10 years of Congress rule to 2014 averaged 6.7 percent, below an average of 7.4 percent under the current government. A previous government estimate had growth under Congress at 7.8 percent.

P Chidambaram, a former Congress finance minister, called the release "a joke". In response India's current finance minister, the BJP's Arun Jaitley, said the CSO was a credible organization. The fallout comes at a critical time for Prime Minister Narendra Modi. India's economy grew a weaker-than-expected 7.1 percent in the July-September quarter, from a more than two-year high of 8.2 percent in the previous quarter, government data showed on Friday.

Modi faces a general election next year, when the performance of the economy under his pro-business administration compared with the Congress era is likely to dominate campaigning. The spat has also alarmed India's top statisticians, who have long faced the difficult task of estimating growth and unemployment in an economy with hundreds of millions of informal workers, and dominated its financial press and political cartoons in recent days. "The entire episode threatens to bring disrepute to India's statistical services," said an

editorial in Mint, one of the country's leading business newspapers, on Friday. A joke widely circulated on WhatsApp said the government would soon be reinterpreting the last cricket World Cup, in which India crashed out in the semifinals, to say the country won based on a new methodology.

Competing interests

Unlike many major economies, India lacks an independent statistical body. An organization called the National Statistics Commission (NSC) was formed in 2005 with that intention, though it is yet to be recognized as the official body for generating statistics. Last year the NSC set up a committee, chaired by economist Sudipto Mundle, to come up with a new set of historical GDP figures. Its report, published in July, showed growth averaged 8.1 percent in the decade before the BJP took power.

After the figures were cheered by the Congress, the government issued a clarification saying the report "had not yet been finalized and various alternative methods are being explored". Shortly after, the report was pulled from the government's website. "The whole thing has unfortunately become very political," said Mundle, on the battle between the two parties. "It is very troubling."

Attempts to formalize the NSC's role have been successively stonewalled by both Congress and the BJP, said N R Bhanumurthy, who sat on the committee chaired by Mundle. "They have not shown much interest in making it independent from our government," he said. The debate over India's true level of growth is the latest to frustrate economists looking to measure the performance of the country of 1.3 billion people. India has not published its official employment survey since 2015, while a smaller quarterly survey on companies employing more than 10 workers has not been released since March while the government comes up with new methodology. India's large informal sector made calculating employment "almost impossible", Bhanumurthy said, leading to a vacuum that was filled with competing political interests. — Reuters

Business

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QINGDAO: A worker inspects imported cars at a port in Qingdao, Shandong province in China. — Reuters

Trump says China to cut car tariffs

President unveils another potential breakthrough in a trade war truce

BEIJING: China will roll back tariffs on US-made cars, US President Donald Trump said, unveiling another potential breakthrough in a trade war truce that cheered stock markets yesterday.

Trump's surprise announcement late Sunday came a day after he and Chinese President Xi Jinping agreed to suspend any new tariffs and give negotiators 90 days to strike a deal. The ceasefire follows months of tensions and tit-for-tat custom duties on hundreds of billions of dollars' worth of goods that raised fears of an escalation harmful to the global economy.

Both sides gained from hitting the pause button, with Trump securing a Chinese pledge to import more US goods and Xi staving off the further pressure that higher tariffs would place on his country's slowing economy.

Trump tweeted that China had agreed to "reduce and remove" tariffs of 40 percent on cars, though Beijing has yet to confirm the move.

China's foreign ministry declined to confirm Trump's assertion yesterday, instead saying: "On December 1 President Xi and President Trump reached an important consensus on trade issues."

"They agreed to hold off on the imposition of new tariffs and came up with a series of constructive arrangements on how to address the existing differences and

problems," spokesman Geng Shuang told reporters. Trump's tweet did not explain which tariffs would be reduced or removed, or when China would act.

William Zarit, chairman of the American Chamber of Commerce in China, said the car announcement, if confirmed, was "certainly movement in the right direction, and hopefully a sign of more things to come". Beijing had reduced auto import duties from 25 percent to 15 percent in July. But it later added a 25 percent tariff on US-made cars as trade tensions soared, bringing them to 40 percent.

Many US automakers build their cars in China for the local market, but the tariff hikes have hit sales and profits for some companies including electric car-maker Tesla and US-made models from BMW and Ford.

IP theft

One expert said China would have to address US complaints about China's forced transfer of intellectual property rights—a major issue at the core of a US "301" trade investigation—for Washington to drop its tariffs. "Any action which increases market access or better ensures a level playing field will certainly be welcomed and could lead to continued discussions," Steven Okun, a Singapore-based senior advisor at strategic advisory firm McLarty Associates, told AFP.

"Still, one must presume that as the existing and proposed tariffs are to spur China to address the US' IPR concerns, only action directly related to that would ultimately impact the 301 tariffs," he said.

The White House said Saturday the two sides would "immediately" begin talks on "structural changes" affecting forced technology transfer, intellectual property protection and cyber theft.

China reaffirmed that the agreement held "great significance". "It prevents the economic and trade frictions from expanding and opens new prospects for cooperation," Geng said.

'No magic wand'

Asian and European stock markets jumped on Monday, with Hong Kong and Shanghai closing sharply higher and the yuan strengthening after months of trade-war turbulence.

After being spooked by the conflict, investors returned to buying following the long-awaited meeting between the two presidents. But observers warned there were still major issues that needed to be resolved, including access for US companies and intellectual property protection.

"In order to really make a difference, China needs to enact more sweeping comprehensive reforms in the short

term," Zarit said. China's state-run media cautiously welcomed the Buenos Aires agreement.

The nationalist Global Times tabloid called it a "momentous step forward" that brings "huge potential for fair trade". "It is hoped that the trade teams from both countries will reach as many practical agreements as possible and as quickly as possible to hasten China-US cooperation," the daily said. Under the agreement, Trump is shelving a plan to raise tariffs on \$200 billion worth of Chinese imports from 10 percent to 25 percent from the start of next year—but the hike will kick in if negotiators fail to reach a final deal within 90 days.

The United States has imposed 25 percent tariffs on another \$50 billion worth of Chinese imports and they remain in effect despite the truce.

China has hit back with similar tariffs on \$110 billion worth of goods made in the US. "No magic wand has been waved to make the differences between the United States and China vanish overnight," the state-run China Daily warned. "Given the complexity of interactions between the two economies, the rest of the world will still be holding its collective breath while it waits to see if the series of constructive plans that are in the works can put bilateral relations back on a cooperative rather than confrontational track," it said. — AFP

'Yellow vest' knocks wind out of French business, economy

PARIS: Three weeks of "yellow vest" protests have hit the French economy hard with trade in retailers, hotel chains, high-street stores and restaurants falling significantly, Finance Minister Bruno Le Maire said yesterday.

Speaking after a meeting with industry groups and business federations affected by the protest movement, Le Maire said sector revenues had been hit by between 15 and 50 percent. While not providing a precise breakdown, Le Maire said small retailers had seen a fall in revenue of between 20 and 40 percent,

the hotel industry was seeing reservations down 15 to 25 percent. Restaurants, depending on their location, had seen takings collapse by between 20 and 50 percent.

"The impact is severe and ongoing," Le Maire said, emphasising that it was nationwide, although Paris, after riots and looting in some of its most upmarket districts on Saturday afternoon and evening, was particularly affected. The movement began on Nov. 17 as a social-media-planned protest against fuel-tax rises but has since morphed into an anti-Macron uprising. The ministry was not able to say what sort of impact the unrest would have on gross domestic product, but having hoped for a pick-up in the fourth quarter on the back of rising consumer spending, that now appears less likely.

Holiday season shopping has started poorly, according to industry group Federation du Commerce et de la Distribution, which expects a slump in hirings and a transfer of shopping to e-commerce, mainly on Amazon,

a spokeswoman said. Amazon was not immediately available to comment but CDiscout, the e-commerce arm of retailer Casino, attributed the record number of visits to its websites partly to "demonstrations or blockades organized outside some shops". During Saturday's disturbances in Paris, tourists were left shocked, with some saying they would cut short their visit.

When they started, the "yellow vests" protests were focused on denouncing a squeeze on household spending brought about by President Emmanuel Macron's taxes on diesel, which he says are necessary to combat climate change and protect the environment. But for the past two weekends there have also been violent demonstrations and clashes with security forces in Paris and other major cities, with protesters calling for Macron to resign. Some call it a revolution against a president who they see as out of touch with the concerns of ordinary people. — Reuters

Oil prices surge on output cut pledge, US-China deal

SINGAPORE: Oil prices soared yesterday after Russia and Saudi Arabia renewed a pact to cap output, while the US agreed to halt raising tariffs on Chinese imports, stalling a trade row that many feared could hit demand for the commodity.

Russian President Vladimir Putin said Saturday he and Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman "have agreed to extend our agreement" to limit production as prices

slump on global markets. An existing deal committing OPEC and non-members to cuts expires this year. While there was no announcement on how much would be cut and for how long, the pact between the world's two biggest crude exporters was cheered by oil traders, with Brent jumping \$2.60 to \$62.06 and West Texas Intermediate up \$2.42 to \$53.35 yesterday.

There was a slight paring of prices after Qatar announced it would be leaving OPEC next year as it looks to concentrate on its gas production, though it would continue to pump crude. The country contributes a fraction of the entire output from the group. "While we still need to know by how much OPEC will curb its production, Putin's comment does clear a barrier for OPEC in stabilizing prices as Russia has been ambiguous about its stance," Ahn Yea Ha, a commodities analyst at Kiwoom Securities told Bloomberg News. — AFP

Business

Development of new industries explored in 2018 report on Kuwait

OBG launches latest publication on country's economy

KUWAIT: A new report from the global research and consultancy firm Oxford Business Group (OBG) looks in detail at Kuwait's efforts to diversify its economy and develop key sectors earmarked for growth, including manufacturing and telecoms.

The Report: Kuwait 2018 tracks the drive under way to boost the role played by the private sector in a raft of infrastructure projects, which are needed to support the country's industrial development.

It features in-depth coverage of the myriad transport initiatives in the pipeline, including roads, bridges, ports and airport expansion plans, which will be pivotal in helping Kuwait to address congestion and connectivity issues. OBG also shines a spotlight on the country's rail transit system, which, together with other transport initiatives, is expected to be instrumental in helping the country make the most of its strategic location and

carve a niche as a regional hub for international trade.

In addition, the report considers the rising demand for homes that are needed to accommodate Kuwait's growing population and the positive impact this is having on the country's construction sector.

With ICT development identified in Kuwait's 2035 strategy as a sector ripe for investment, OBG's report examines the key developments that are expected to support tech growth, such as the rollout of 5G, which will pave the way for the launch of new network services and further innovation. The publication also highlights the opportunities that are continuing to emerge across the energy sector, on the back of the government's ambitious production targets for oil, gas and refining operations, and increased focus on the petrochemicals segment.

The Report: Kuwait 2018 contains a contribution

from His Highness the Amir Sheikh Sabah Al-Ahmed Al-Jaber Al-Sabah, together with a detailed sector-by-sector guide for investors.

It also features a wide range of contributions from other high-profile personalities, including: Sheikh Meshaal Jaber Al-Sabah, Director-General, Kuwait Direct Investment Promotion Agency; Mohammad Y Al-Hashel, Governor, Central Bank of Kuwait; and Sheikh Yousef Al-Abdullah Al-Sabah Al-Nasser Al-Sabah, Director-General, Kuwait Ports Authority.

Commenting ahead of the launch, OBG's Editor in Chief and Managing Editor for the Middle East, Oliver Cornock, said that Kuwait's longstanding practice of using oil revenue to build a deep portfolio of global investments had ensured it was in a strong position to push forward with its diversification drive and attract foreign investment for the country's projects, even

when oil prices were falling.

"Having maintained its capital spending plans in challenging times, Kuwait is now well placed to develop the new industries identified in its 2035 strategy and move towards greater global integration," he said. "The recovery in oil prices has also enabled the government to return the current account balance to a surplus, which bodes well for the next phase of the country's economic expansion." The Report: Kuwait 2018 marks the culmination of more than 12 months of field research by a team of analysts from Oxford Business Group. The publication assesses trends and developments across the country, including those in macroeconomics, infrastructure, banking and others.

The Report: Kuwait 2018 has been produced with Kuwait Direct Investment Promotion Agency and Al-Tamimi & Co. It is available online and in print.

Sticking points in US-China trade talks

BEIJING: The US and Chinese leaders have agreed to a truce in their trade war. Now comes the hard part for negotiators who will have 90 days to resolve major differences.

The White House announced after talks between President Donald Trump and Chinese counterpart Xi Jinping on Saturday that a tariff hike that had been due on January 1 would be suspended for three months while the two sides negotiate a resolution.

Here are four key issues that could be stumbling blocks in efforts between the world's two biggest economies to reach an agreement:

Deficit gap

Trump desperately wants China to reduce its \$335 billion trade surplus. US officials say China unfairly uses subsidies and other tactics to flood US markets with goods too cheap for American companies to compete with, including steel and aluminium.

As part of the truce, China has agreed to purchase substantial amounts of agricultural, energy, and industrial products from the US to reduce the huge trade gap, according to the White House.

But no target dollar amount was announced—an omission that shows the two sides will have to haggle over how much China is willing to import from the United States. China's agreement to "immediately" restart buying products from US farmers could prove a boon to Trump, who needs the support of his rural base as the 2020 Presidential election approaches.

Beijing had in July announced a 25 percent increase in tariffs on soybeans, dealing a blow to Trump's rural electoral base.

Intellectual property

The US side will likely look for reassurances from China that it will crack down on the alleged theft of intellectual property. Trump in March imposed tariffs on \$50 billion worth of imports from China for punishment over alleged IP theft, which the US says costs its companies as much as \$600 billion a year—which China has denied.

A recent report by US Trade Representative Robert Lighthizer's office accused China of continuing a campaign of state-backed cyber-attacks on American companies.

Seeking to shake its reputation for counterfeit goods, China has in recent years taken steps to improve IP protections, including establishing specialised IP courts to handle matters including patent disputes, copyright and trademark infringement. China also launched a nationwide campaign to protect foreign firms' international property rights in 2017.

Know-how transfer

The United States and European nations have also long accused China of forcing foreign firms to transfer their know-how to local partners in order to do business in the country.

Lighthizer's report accused China of using foreign ownership restrictions, administrative licensing and approvals, as well as a "non-transparent and discretionary" foreign investment approvals system to pressure firms to transfer technology. Xi vowed on Wednesday to boost protection of intellectual property, but foreign firms in China complain that the promise is too routine and rings hollow.

China's high-tech ambitions

China is dependent on countries such as the US and South Korea for high-end microchips, a weakness in its bid to become a global tech leader. The trade truce makes no mention of China's "Made in China 2025" plan to develop high-tech prowess to a level rivaling the United States.

But Oxford Economics said in a note that it is "possible that China has hinted at a willingness to change certain aspects of the 'Made in China 2025' plan".

Aiming to reduce reliance on foreign technology, the policy targets key sectors including robotics, new energy vehicles, and telecommunications equipment. The US has targeted Chinese tech companies, citing national security concerns. In October the US restricted sales of crucial technology to state-owned chipmaker Fujian Jinhua, accusing it of stealing trade secrets.

Telecoms equipment maker ZTE collapsed 40 percent in June after Washington banned US companies from selling crucial hardware and software components to it for seven years, though the ban was lifted after it agreed to pay a huge fine. According to the White House, China is open to reconsidering Qualcomm's bid to buy Dutch chip rival NXP, which it previously blocked. —AFP

Macron to call on US funds to build French start-ups, not steal them

PARIS: French President Emmanuel Macron will urge a visiting group of top Silicon Valley venture capitalists this week to invest in the nation's start-ups while calling on them not to "steal" the best creations, four sources told Reuters. The discreet event, not mentioned in Macron's official schedule, comes at a tough time for the French leader after rioters looted and ransacked boutiques and businesses in central Paris, chaotic images beamed around the world.

Executives from some of the biggest names in US tech funding, including Andreessen Horowitz, Sequoia Capital and General Atlantic, are among the 40 expected in Paris tomorrow and Thursday for a tour of the French startup scene. The two-day roadshow includes presentations from what sources called tech 'superstars' already investing in France as well as visits to hubs such as the Station F tech incubator in eastern Paris.

But instead of simply urging them to invest in France, Macron, who is scheduled to host the investors at the Elysee palace on Thursday evening, will also tell the US funds to help French businesses to flourish rather than pushing the best French entrepreneurs to move to the United States.

"Today, many French companies raise money in the US, and the usual reflex of US venture capitalists is to tell them: 'come to the United States then,'" a source at Macron's office told Reuters. "We will tell them: it's an ecosystem, your best interest is to do like in Britain and Israel: invest here and don't move everything (to the US)," the source said.

The event was scheduled before the nationwide protests that turned the French capital into a battle zone and the format of Macron's appearance has yet to be finalised, sources said.

With his authority challenged by the "yellow vest" protesters, who sprawled anti-capitalist slogans on banks and luxury boutiques on Saturday,

Unilever buys GSK Asian health drinks arm for \$3.7 billion

THE HAGUE: Anglo-Dutch food giant Unilever said yesterday it is buying GlaxoSmithKline's health drinks portfolio in Asia for a total of 3.3 billion euros (\$3.7 billion), including iconic night-time hot drink Horlicks.

The deal includes GSK's business in "India, Bangladesh and 20 other predominantly Asian markets... and is aligned with (our) strategy of increasing presence in health food categories and in high-growth emerging markets," Unilever said in a statement.

"GSK's health drinks portfolio is the undisputed leader... in India, with iconic brands such as Horlicks and Boost and a product portfolio supported by strong nutritional claims," the London and Rotterdam-based group added.

Horlicks has a long history in India—which accounts for almost 90 percent of the GSK arm's turnover in Asia—having been introduced there in the 1930s.

"Horlicks products have been an everyday staple in South Asian households across generations," Unilever said, adding GSK's health drinks portfolio has grown by double digits in the last 15 years.

"Despite this, the category still remains underpenetrated in India," it said.

Turkey inflation drops from 15-year high

ANKARA: Inflation in Turkey dropped for the first time to nearly 22 percent last month after surging to a 15-year high in October, official statistics showed yesterday.

The increase in consumer prices fell to

21.62 percent in November compared with the same month last year, still very high in relative terms but down from the 25.24 percent rate recorded in October and the first drop since March this year, according to the Turkish statistics office (TUIK). The figure was also lower than the Bloomberg consensus forecast of 23 percent. The better figures reflect the likely effects of an aggressive rate hike in September when the central bank raised the one week repo rate 625 basis points to 24 percent. Compared with October, November consumer prices fell 1.44 percent. The value of the

Turkish lira—which has been rallying against the US dollar since an Ankara-Washington spat ended last month—firmed after the announcement. The currency was at 5.16 against the greenback after 0800 GMT, gaining nearly one percent.

Earlier this year, the lira fell sharply amid tensions between Turkey and NATO ally the United States and worries over President Recep Tayyip Erdogan's economic policies.

But in the past few weeks following improved relations with Washington and indications Ankara will follow economic orthodoxy,

the lira has firmed from below six against the dollar. At one point in August, the lira was trading at seven to the greenback. The Turkish government has promised to fight inflation with a series of measures, including encouraging voluntary price cuts by businesses. Turkish Finance Minister Berat Albayrak welcomed the data in a series of tweets.

"This shows that the decline in inflation has begun strongly and that the downward trend will continue," Albayrak said. He added that Turkey would continue to support "strong" monetary and financial policies. —AFP



PARIS: French President Emmanuel Macron speaks to participants at the Viva Tech start-up technology summit in Paris. —Reuters

Macron has his work cut out to counter the damage done to France's image.

Brexit benefit

The French tech scene has seen a boom in recent years, helped by Macron's efforts to turn France into a "startup nation", as a new generation of tech-savvy entrepreneurs less interested in government careers tap into the large pool of engineers that France's top universities produce every year.

Macron aides say France's tech sector is poised to take advantage of Britain's planned exit from the EU to overtake its major European rival.

"We think the French ecosystem will outgrow the one in England in the coming years," is one of the messages the US investors will hear, the Elysee source said. Goldman Sachs and private equity fund KKR are also among the attendees.

But French companies say the most promising start-

ups need access to bigger funding rounds if they are to stay. Investments are not large enough to create "unicorns" worth more than \$1 billion. So far this year, only two French firms have closed investment rounds of more than 100 million euros.

Instead, successful French startups get snapped up by US rivals, with social mapping firm Zenly's acquisition by SnapChat last year particularly riling the French tech scene. Investors on the two-day visit will tour Station F, a startup campus funded by telecoms billionaire Xavier Niel. They will meet entrepreneurs such as David Gurle, boss of US encrypted messaging service Symphony, who moved its research centre to a technology park in southeastern France.

Among other US tech figures who have chosen to relocate to France and who will make pitches are Tony Fadell, a developer of Apple's iPhone, and Ian Rogers, a former executive at its media player iTunes, now chief digital officer of luxury group LVMH. —Reuters



The logo of food company Unilever at the headquarters in Rotterdam. —AFP

"Unilever is well positioned to further develop the market given its reach and capabilities," it added.

Unilever, which employs some 169,000 people around the world, owns more than 400 household brands, including Knorr soups, Lipton, Magnum and

Marmite. Yesterday's acquisition is the first since Unilever chief Paul Polman announced his retirement at the helm of the consumer products giant last week, after a failed plan to move the firm's headquarters from London to the Netherlands. —AFP

Business

Ooredoo launches eSIM with latest Apple Watch series 4 GPS+Cellular

Launch part of Ooredoo's digital transformation strategy: Al-Thani



KUWAIT: (From right): Mijbil Al-Ayoub, Fatma Dashti and Tapan Tripathi during the press conference. —Photos by Yasser Al-Zayyat



Ooredoo CEO Sheikh Mohammed bin Abdullah Al-Thani during the launch event.

By Nawara Fattahova

KUWAIT: For the first time in Kuwait, exclusively for its clients, Ooredoo launched the eSIM with the latest Apple Watch series 4 GPS+Cellular. The launch was announced yesterday during a press conference held at its premises. Ooredoo is the first company to launch this service in Kuwait market. It will be available in all its branches and online from Dec 7, 2018.

Ooredoo CEO Sheikh Mohammed bin Abdullah Al-Thani said during the press conference that launching this service in Kuwait is another new achievement this year. "This launch is part of our digital transformation strategy to provide innovative products and services for our clients to enrich their experience. We aim to support the vision of HH the Amir Sheikh Sabah Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah (New Kuwait 2035) through digital transformation and launching the latest products in IT and telecommunication," he said.

Mijbil Al-Ayoub, Senior Director Corporate Communications, noted that Ooredoo is keen to always be the first to announce launching new products. "Ooredoo was the first telecommunication company to launch the eSIM in the Kuwaiti market on September 24. Today we announce the commercial launch of the eSIM in the local market for all our clients. This product will provide a complete and excellent digital experience without using the regular SIM. We will continue developing our network and always provide the latest products," he said.

Ooredoo was awarded for the best organizing, marketing and advertising for the launch event of iPhone X in 2017 by Stevie Organization. "This is one of the most

important awards that is given to excelling companies worldwide. This was achieved through the trust of our clients and their suggestions. And we aim to keep their trust in our company and to always be leaders in the world of technology and telecommunication," Ayoub added.

Tapan Tripathi, Chief Marketing Officer, said Ooredoo clients can activate the eSIM without using the old SIM. "The client can activate the service on his watch from his number, and will be able to make and receive calls no matter if he is near or far from his mobile phone. This service is available on all models from iPhone 6 to the latest models (iOS.12.1.1). Both postpaid and prepaid clients can benefit from this service," he explained.

The eSIM is very useful when travelling. "It's available for old and new clients of Ooredoo, and it will only charge for the calls or services as part of the monthly package of the mobile phone. During roaming, the client can use all the features through connecting by Bluetooth, apart from making and receiving calls without any additional charges. A manual of the watch will be provided for our clients for easy operation and connecting," added Tripathi.

The new Apple Watch series 4 will be available in the market from Friday. "This service will be free for Ooredoo customers for the first six months, and after June 6, 2019, they will pay KD 3 monthly, while it will be deducted from the balance of prepaid customers," he said. "If the customer wants to cancel the service, he can do it easily through the app on his mobile without any conditions. In case of theft or losing the watch, the client can disconnect the connection of his watch with his mobile and the eSIM will be automatically canceled," Tripathi said.

The eSIM can operate up to five Apple Watches at once

for postpaid clients, while prepaid customers can only use their eSIM for one Apple Watch. This watch can be used without the mobile phone, so it's suitable for swimming or training at the gym. It is designed with an LTPO OLED screen and Force Touch. Its battery can last up to 18 hours and is available in different colors.



Emirates, Etihad, flydubai and Air Arabia in epic flypast for UAE national day

KUWAIT: Emirates, Etihad, flydubai, Air Arabia and Al-Fursan took to the skies in unison to celebrate the UAE's 47th National Day, as well as commemorate the legacy and values of HH Sheikh Zayed, the late founding father of the UAE.

The formation flight aims to showcase the country's aviation success story to the nation and world.

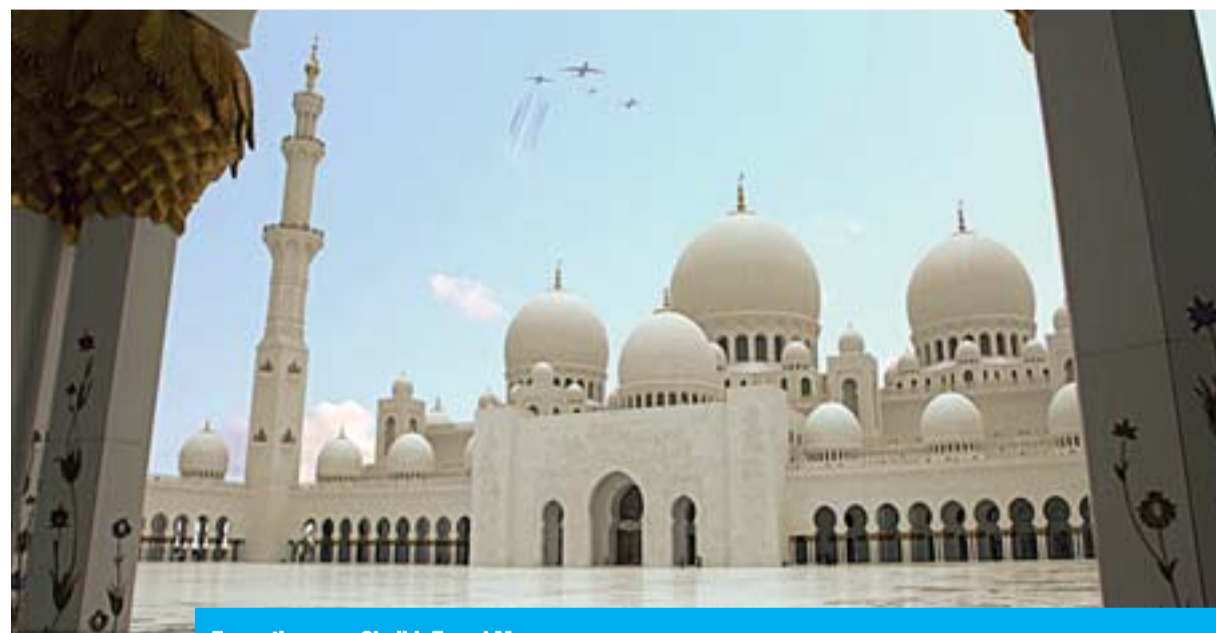
The spectacular flypast - a world-first and a UAE civil aviation milestone - involved over 11 aircraft: a flydubai Boeing 737 MAX 8 (Zayed 1), an Air Arabia Airbus A320 (Zayed 2), an Etihad Airways Airbus A380 (Zayed 3) and an Emirates Airline Airbus A380 (Zayed 4), as well as seven Al Fursan aerobatic display jets from the UAE Air Force. All of the commercial aircraft within the formation were emblazoned with 'Year of Zayed' decals. This is also the first time this unique combination of aircraft types fly in formation.

The aircraft were proudly commanded by Captain Adrian Smith from flydubai, Nadhem Al-Hamad from Air Arabia, Captain Richard Dyson from Etihad Airways and Captain Abbas Shaban from Emirates Airline. The Al Fursan team was led by Lieutenant Colonel Nasser Al-Obaidli.

Formation and flight path

The carefully choreographed 'stair step' aerial formation began at 12:00 pm, when the aircraft took-off from Dubai World Central Al-Maktoum International Airport. Once all of the aircraft established their holding positions with altitudes ranging from 2,000 feet to 5,000 feet with a 1,000 foot vertical separation, the formation commenced. Over the skies of Ras Al-Khaimah, each aircraft adjusted its speed and turned to achieve a trail formation. The aircraft then descended into their positions and vertical separation was reduced to 300 feet.

Flying first in the 'Year of Zayed' formation was flydubai, cruising at an altitude of 1,000 feet and an air-speed of 210 knots, closely followed by Air Arabia, in line astern and stepped up at an altitude of 1,300 feet. Next came the Etihad Airbus A380 double-decker, trailing the first two aircraft and flying at 1,600 feet,



Formation over Sheikh Zayed Mosque

stepped up by the Emirates Airbus A380 flying at the highest altitude at 1,900 feet to make room for the seven Al Fursan jets set in an arrow formation ready to release their signature smoke trails in the colours of the UAE flag.

Together, the stunning UAE carrier formation flew with impressive precision across the coastline of the UAE, starting at Ras Al-Khaimah, continuing on to Um Al-Quwain and Ajman, and then passing landmarks including the Sharjah Corniche, Dubai's Palm and World Islands with the Burj Khalifa skyline in the background, and finally crossing the Abu Dhabi Corniche and the Sheikh Zayed Mosque, where all aircraft then split and continued on to their respective airports for landing.

Sheikh Ahmed bin Saeed Al-Maktoum, Chairman and Chief Executive, Emirates Airline & Group, and Chairman of flydubai said: "Sheikh Zayed was a true pioneer and one of the most inspirational leaders of our time. It is fitting that on UAE National Day, such a spectacular aerial display be done to honour his legacy. This ground-breaking initiative showcases how unity and a shared vision can achieve outstanding results. I am immensely proud of all of the teams across every airline, the UAE General Civil Aviation Authority, and all the organizations who came together to plan and execute today's unprecedented flight formation which will go down as an extraordinary moment for UAE civil aviation."

Mohamed Mubarak Fadhel Al-Mazrouei, Chairman of Etihad Aviation Group, said: "Today's



Formation of UAE carriers

historic formation flight by the UAE's airlines demonstrates the collective strength and immense capabilities of our country's aviation sector. The strong foundations of the UAE's aviation sector, established less than 50 years ago, enabled the breath-taking feat to take place and we look forward to more occasions like this in years to come. The four carriers annually connect more than 100 million air travellers using a combined fleet of more than 450 aircraft, via our UAE home, to 500 destinations in all corners of the globe. The UAE is the world's leading hub, facilitating the flow of international trade and commerce between east and west. Etihad Aviation Group is proud to be a member of the great family of UAE carriers and to contribute to the UAE's economy as well as those around the world."

World outlook darkens as factory activity slips, orders fall

LONDON/TOKYO: Global economic prospects appear gloomy as year-end approaches after factory activity and export orders weakened in November, prompting analysts to predict no quick rebound amid persistent global trade tensions.

In a sign that corporate sentiment is taking a hit from the worries over protectionism, manufacturing activity slipped in November in countries as varied as France, Germany, Indonesia and South Korea, IHS Markit Purchasing Managers' Indexes showed yesterday. British factories bucked the trend but the approach of Brexit was felt as companies stocked up on parts to counter any border delays, while exports suffered a rare back-to-back fall. —Reuters

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Business

Ahmad Al-Kandari wins 'Best Facilities Management Executive Award 2018'

Accolade in recognition for Kandari's success in running UFM as a mainstream industry provider

KUWAIT: United Facilities Management Company K.S.C.C (UFM), a subsidiary of United Real Estate Company K.S.C.P (URC), one of the leading real estate development companies in the Middle East and North Africa; announced to its Vice Chairman and Chief Executive Officer Ahmad Yousef Al-Kandari the title award winner of "Best Facilities Management Executive Award 2018" by Dubai-based Middle East Facilities Management Magazine specialized in regional facilities management industry.

The title award was awarded to Al-Kandari after thorough evaluations and reviews by a panel of independent judges and industry experts in both facilities management and real estate. More than 16 international government and private sector contenders competed in this annual award.

In addition, Al-Kandari's achieved accolade was in recognition for his notable success in running UFM as a mainstream industry provider in facilities management for more than 10 years of catering towards government and private sector. Al-Kandari is UFM's driv-

ing force in positioning the company as the leading national recruiter with more than 40 percent of its Kuwaiti workforce as high skilled calibers.

Over the years, Al-Kandari has not only directed UFM towards providing facilities operation and maintenance services, but also defined strategic planning in facilities management effectively from design stage to operational requirements, not to mention sustainability and environmental conservation.

"We are delighted to accept this title award as we are relentlessly keen to position UFM amongst Kuwait's leading industry operator in facilities management," commented Al-Kandari. "I would like to extend my sincere thanks and appreciation to the panel of independent judges and industry experts as well as the organizers for choosing me as a title award winner."

UFM manages several utilities in various vital sectors, including oil, telecommunications and banking, as well as the government sector.

United Real Estate Co. K.S.C.P (URC) is one of the Middle East and North Africa's leading real estate

developers, with consolidated assets of KD 622 million (\$2 billion as of 30 September 2018). Headquartered in Kuwait, URC was founded in 1973 and was listed on the Kuwait Stock Exchange in 1984.

URC primarily operates through a number of operating subsidiaries and investment arms across the MENA region. The company's core business is real estate development and operations and enjoys a diversified portfolio of assets that include retail complexes, hotels, residential properties, and high-rise office buildings.

URC's operations extend to construction and contracting, facility management, and project management through its several subsidiaries. The company's portfolio of assets and businesses are geographically spread across a number of countries through several assets such as Marina World, Marina Hotel, and KIPCO Tower in Kuwait, Salalah Gardens Mall & Residences in Oman, Abdali Mall in Jordan, Raouche View 1090 in Lebanon, Aswar Residences in Egypt, and Assoufid in Morocco.



Al Mulla Exchange concludes 'Everyone wins with Al Mulla Exchange' promotion

KUWAIT: Al Mulla Exchange, the leading money remittance company in Kuwait concluded their instant online promotion "Everyone Wins with Al Mulla Exchange" launched in October 2018.

The exciting marketing promotion which ran for two months saw one winner daily being selected on completing the transaction through mobile app or online. There were a total of 62 winners who won exciting electronic items that included Samsung Note 9, 40 Inch LED TV, FIT BIT watch, Samsung Gear IconX Ear buds, JBL Speakers FLIP 4, Alba watches, 2 TB Hard drive, Wireless Mobile Charger and an Antitheft bag.

On this occasion Divisional General Manager of Al Mulla Exchange Praveen Singh said, "It is the company's endeavor to keep customers happy, satisfied and more than delighted. Al Mulla Exchange always launch encouraging and out of the box promotions. We have got a very positive feedback of the promotion as customers win instantly in amidst of doing a transaction."

"I'd like to congratulate all customers who have won the prizes and I wish the others best of luck in the coming promotions," Singh said adding "Al Mulla Exchange always appreciates the loyalty of the customers and their trust."

Al Mulla Exchange Remittance App was the first remittance app in Kuwait and has other new features to the app such as add beneficiary, notification hub and place order feature making it one of the most convenient app to transfer money. The same facility is available on the online portal as well.



Gulf Bank announces winners of Al-Danah weekly draw

KUWAIT: Gulf Bank held its Al-Danah weekly draw on the 2nd of December 2018 announcing the names of its winners for the week from the 25th November till the 29th of November 2018, in which five winners will receive KD 1,000 each, every week.

The winners this week are:

- Nadiah Bint Mehrez Al-Ayyashi
- Shaheen Abdulaziz Khaled Al-Shaheen Al-Ghanim
- Rafi Toros Baghdasarian
- Haitham Khaled Bokour
- Bashar Mazen Al Tarazy

Gulf Bank's Al-Danah 1st quarterly draw for KD 200,000 prize was held on 28 March, and the 2nd Al-Danah quarterly draw, for the prize of KD 250,000 was held on 27th June and the 3rd quarterly draw for the prize of KD 500,000 was held on 26th September. The final Al-Danah draw for KD 1 million will be held on the 10th January 2019, where the Al-Danah millionaire will be announced.

Gulf Bank encourages customers to increase their chances of winning with Al-Danah by depositing more into their Gulf Bank accounts using the new ePay (Self-Pay) service, which is available on Gulf Bank's online and mobile banking services.

Al-Danah offers a number of unique services to customers, including the Al-Danah Deposit Only ATM card, which allows account holders to deposit money into their accounts at their convenience. Account holders can also calculate their daily, weekly and yearly chances of winning the draws through the 'Al-Danah Chances' calculator available on the Gulf Bank website and app.

Gulf Bank's Al-Danah account is open to Kuwaiti and non-Kuwaiti residents of Kuwait. Customers require a minimum of KD 200 to open an account and the same amount should be maintained for customers to be eligible for the upcoming Al-Danah draws. If the customer's account balance falls below KD 200 at any given time, a KD 2 fee will be charged to their account monthly until the minimum balance is met. Customers who open an account and/or deposit more will enter the daily draw within two days. To take part in the Al-Danah 2018 upcoming quarterly and yearly draws, customers must meet the required hold period for each draw.

South Africa faces more power cuts, raising Ramaphosa reform risk

JOHANNESBURG: South Africa faces more power cuts, electricity utility Eskom warned yesterday as it sought to prevent the collapse of its power grid in a test for President Cyril Ramaphosa's reforms.

Eskom implemented a fifth day of controlled power cuts yesterday, putting more strain on an economy already mired in recession only months before a nation-

al election. "The entire week could be severely constrained if we are unable to replenish the diesel and water reserves, and reduce the high unplanned outages," Eskom spokesman Khulu Phasiwe said.

Eskom, which is battling a severe financial crisis, coal shortages and breakdowns of its power plants, said it would cut up to 2,000 megawatts of power from the grid yesterday. The utility, which last week called for a bailout or debt relief, began the controlled cuts, known as load-shedding, on Thursday as demand for power outstripped available capacity. "Eskom teams are working hard to salvage the situation but the process is going to be hard, long and costly," Phasiwe said.

Ramaphosa has made reforming Eskom a priority, but he has been hampered by fiscal constraints in a blow to his plan to woo investors who can help grow the economy ahead of an election likely to be held in May next year.

"Eskom as an institution and its ability to provide stable power supply is the single biggest risk to @CyrilRamaphosa's investment drive and the South Africa fiscus," Isaaq Mhlanga, executive chief economist at Alexander Forbes Investments said on Twitter.

BNP Paribas South Africa senior economist Jeff Schultz said prolonged power cuts would likely hurt economic growth in the first quarter of 2019, although a slowdown in manufacturing over the Christmas period will buy Eskom some time.

"But come mid-January, if we are still facing load-shedding, that is when it is going to be a much more pressing issue for the economy," Schultz said.

South Africa entered recession in the second quarter for the first time since 2009. Third-quarter gross domestic product numbers are due out on Tuesday, with analysts polled by Reuters predicting quarter-on-quarter GDP growth of 1.6 percent. —Reuters

G20 sealed landmark deal on WTO reform by ducking 'taboo words'

BUENOS AIRES: Many delegates from the world's 20 largest economies arrived at a summit in Argentina this week determined to clinch an agreement to reform the global trade system, pushed to a breaking point by tensions between the United States and China.

To do so, they had to bow to US and Chinese demands to drop some of the pledges that have become hallmarks of the Group of 20 industrialized nations, which represents two-thirds of the global population.

But they left with a communique committing for the first time to reform the dysfunctional World Trade Organization (WTO), the body supposed to regulate global trade disputes. "A number of words that we used to have always in G7 and G20 summit communique became kind of taboos," a European official said on Saturday in the midst of the negotiations. "We have American taboos and Chinese taboos."

First among those taboos is "protectionism". The US administration has become sensitive to criticisms after President Donald Trump has imposed

tariffs not only on \$250 billion of Chinese goods but also on steel and aluminum imports that hit several of his G20 partners. As a result, for the first time since G20 leaders held their inaugural meeting in Washington in 2008, their communique did not contain a pledge to fight protectionism.

China, meanwhile, steadfastly opposed the inclusion of the usual calls for "fair trade practices," delegates said. Beijing rejects criticisms from the United States, Europe and Japan for dumping, industrial subsidies, abuse of intellectual property rights and technology transfers, amongst other practices. Even the word "multilateralism" itself has fallen out of favor in a group designed to foster international cooperation.

Central to getting the United States to sign up to a phrase recognizing the importance of "multilateral trading system" was acknowledging that the system was falling short of its objectives, delegates said.

The United States is unhappy with what it says is the WTO's failure to hold Beijing to account for not opening up its economy as envisioned when China joined the body in 2001. To force reform at the WTO, Trump's team has blocked new appointments to the world's top trade court, which is rapidly running out of judges, meaning it will be unable to issue binding rulings in trade disputes. He has even threatened to withdraw the United States from the global body.

"There was an attempt from a lot of the other countries ... to get the United States to commit to certain language with regard to the multilateral system," said one senior US official.

"We commit to multilateralism where it works ... Is it achieving its intended objectives? In a lot of areas it's falling short," said the US official, who asked not to be identified because of the confidential nature of the talks. The final statement said the group supports the "necessary reform of the WTO to improve its functioning", allowing US officials to claim a victory. While there were no details of the proposed reform, many delegates hailed a breakthrough in committing Washington to global solutions.

"For the first time China and the United States agreed to engage on the WTO," said one delegate closely involved in drafting the communique. "Given Trump's earlier threats, to end up with the G20 saying it would work together on WTO reform is interesting."

China was key

European Union officials said that a key step in clinching a deal was getting China and major emerging economies to commit to language on trade early this week. "The idea was to bring the Chinese into the discussion almost immediately," said a second European official. "After APEC, we knew it would be important for the Chinese to feel there was no ganging up on them." At the Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC) summit in mid-November, leaders failed to agree on a joint communique for the first time in the group's 30-year history.

After APEC, Washington and Beijing traded accusations of blame but, with global markets

increasingly roiled by trade tensions, both sides appeared more ready for compromise in Buenos Aires. After the G20 talks ended, Trump and his Chinese counterpart Xi Jinping agreed over dinner on Saturday to a ceasefire in their trade conflict, calling off higher U.S. tariffs that were to go into effect on Jan. 1.

"The spirit wasn't adversarial," said the delegate closely involved in the G20 drafting, adding that perhaps because of the fallout after APEC, officials at least tried to work things out.

Delegates worked until 6:30 a.m. on Saturday, the final day of the summit, watering down language on migration and refugees in the face of resistance from the United States and others, European and Argentine officials said. And they still had not tackled one of the thorniest issues: climate change. "That was what they discussed (Saturday) morning till noon," an Argentine government spokeswoman said, just hours before the communique was made public.

In the end, members agreed to disagree. The United States reaffirmed its commitment to withdraw from the Paris Climate Accord - as it had at the previous G20 summit in Germany last year - while other members said they would fully implement it. Veteran negotiators were phlegmatic about the difficulties in agreeing on a text.

"There is always at least one overnighter in sessions like these," said the delegate closely involved in the drafting, adding "sometimes it was tough to find the right word to stick to the middle ground." —Reuters

Technology

Soyuz rocket heads to ISS on first manned mission since Oct failure

Russian, American and Canadian crew blast off for a six-and-a-half month mission

BAIKONUR: A Soyuz rocket carrying Russian, American and Canadian astronauts took off from Kazakhstan and reached orbit yesterday, in the first manned mission since a failed launch in October. Russian cosmonaut Oleg Kononenko, Anne McClain of NASA and David Saint-Jacques of the Canadian Space Agency blasted off for a six-and-a-half month mission on the International Space Station at the expected time of 1131 GMT.

A few minutes after their rocket lifted off from the Baikonur Cosmodrome, Russian space agency Roscosmos announced that the capsule was "successfully launched into orbit". NASA administrator Jim Bridenstine confirmed on Twitter that the crew were "safely in orbit" and thanked the US and Russian teams "for their dedication to making this launch a success".

It was the first manned launch for the Soviet-era Soyuz since October 11, when a rocket carrying Russia's Aleksey Ovchinin and US astronaut Nick Hague failed just minutes after blast-off, forcing the pair to make an emergency landing. They escaped unharmed but the failed launch—the first such incident in Russia's post-Soviet history—raised concerns about the state of the Soyuz program. The Soyuz is the only means of reaching the ISS since the United States retired the space shuttle in 2011.

Kononenko, McClain and Saint-Jacques showed no signs of worry as they boarded a bus to take them to the launch. They smiled and waved, with Saint-Jacques blowing kisses and giving the thumbs-up to a crowd of well-wishers. At a press conference on the eve of the launch, crew commander Kononenko said the astronauts "absolutely" trusted teams preparing for the flight.

on board." McClain, a 39-year-old former military pilot, said the crew looked forward to going up. "We feel very ready for it," she said.

Saint-Jacques, 48, described the Soyuz spacecraft as "incredibly safe". The accident highlighted the "smart design of the Soyuz and the incredible work that the search and rescue people here on the ground are ready to do every launch," he said. In a successful rehearsal for yesterday's flight, a Soyuz cargo vessel took off on November 16 from Baikonur and delivered several tons of food, fuel and supplies to the ISS.

Russia said last month the October launch had failed because of a sensor that was damaged during assembly at the Baikonur cosmodrome but insisted the spacecraft remained reliable.

Ahead of yesterday's launch a Russian Orthodox priest blessed the spaceship on its launchpad, in accordance with tradition. Of the trio set to reach the ISS six hours after blast-off, both Saint-Jacques and McClain are flying for the first time. Kononenko is beginning his fourth mission to add to an impressive 533 days in space. The veteran said the crew would conduct a spacewalk on December 11 as part of an investigation into a mysterious hole that has caused an air leak on the ISS.

Saint-Jacques will be the first Canadian astronaut to visit the space station since Chris Hadfield, who recorded a version of David Bowie's "Space Oddity" on board in 2013. Saint-Jacques joked that he had received so much training ahead of the flight "that I felt at the end that I could build a Soyuz in my backyard."



BAIKONUR: Russia's Soyuz MS-11 spacecraft carrying the members of the International Space Station (ISS) expedition 58/59, Russian cosmonaut Oleg Kononenko, NASA astronaut Anne McClain and David Saint-Jacques of the Canadian Space Agency, blasts off to the ISS from the launch pad at the Russian-leased Baikonur cosmodrome yesterday. — AFP

Risk 'part of our profession'

"Risk is part of our profession," the 54-year-old said. "We are psychologically and technically prepared for blast-off and any situation which, God forbid, may occur

'Spacewalking like rugby'

McClain served in Iraq and has represented the United States in women's rugby. She has said that training to spacewalk resembled the sport since it demands "grit, toughness, mental focus, and more".

Russia-US cooperation in space has remained one of the few areas not affected by a crisis in ties between the former Cold War enemies. But comments by the combative chief of the Russian space agency, Dmitry Rogozin, have increasingly raised eyebrows.

He recently joked Russia would send a mission to the Moon to "verify" whether or not NASA lunar landings ever took place. In recent years Russia's debt-laden space industry has suffered a number of mishaps including the loss of cargo spacecraft and satellites. — AFP

Turning the page: Japan's last pager service ends after 50 years

TOKYO: The end of the pager era is nigh in Japan after five decades as the country's last provider announced yesterday it would be scrapping its service next year.

Tokyo Telemessage, the only pager service provider left standing, said it had decided to terminate its service to Tokyo and three neighboring regions in September 2019 — describing the development as "very regrettable".

"Pagers were once a huge hit... but the number of users is now down to 1,500," the company said in a statement, adding it had stopped manufacturing the hardware device 20 years ago.

Pagers-known as "poke-beru" (pocket bell) in Japan-became very popular in the 1990s especially among high school girls obsessed by their primitive text messaging functions. At break time, long queues of high school girls would form outside public phones as they frantically punched in numbers which were then converted into short messages to classmates and boyfriends.

At the 1996 peak for the technology, the number of users reached more than 10 million, according to government data. But mobile phones quickly consigned pagers to the technology dustbin.

Major telecoms company NTT, which

introduced pagers back in 1968, stopped its service in 2007.

Visitors to Japan are often surprised at the contrasting use of technology in Japan. On the one hand, Japan is a land of high-tech and futuristic gadgets but can also sometimes be bizarrely old school—for example, faxes are still routinely used as a method of communication.

When the last North Korean missile flew over Japan, one of the more surreal moments was TV footage showing Prime Minister Shinzo Abe learning about the emergency-on his flip-phone.

And the Japanese minister in charge of cyber security recently made international headlines when he admitted that he delegated computer work to others. Yoshitaka Sakurada, 68, who is also in charge of the 2020 Olympics, also appeared confused by the concept of a USB drive. — AFP



A Nippon Iridium employee displays a pager of Iridium satellites telephone service, made by Japan's electronics giant Kyocera in Tokyo. — AFP

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What's On



Abdullah Al-Mubarak Foundation's Representative Sheikh Mubarak Abdullah Al-Mubarak Al-Sabah delivers a speech.



Kuwait Ambassador to the United Kingdom Khaled Al-Duwaisan speaks during the ceremony.



The prize winners with the Kuwaiti Ambassador Khaled Al-Duwaisan, Foundation's Representative Sheikh Mubarak Abdullah Al-Mubarak Al-Sabah, and the organizing committee's chairwoman.

Abdullah Al-Mubarak Foundation awards prizes for best Middle East books

The British-Kuwaiti Friendship Society held a Book Prize Award ceremony for the best scholarly books on Middle Eastern studies, written in English. The Award, sponsored by the Abdullah Al-Mubarak Foundation, is based on the historic value of research and information regarding the Middle East region. Names of winning books were announced during the ceremony,

which was held at the British Academy in London last night and coincided with the 20th anniversary of Abdullah Al-Mubarak Foundation's establishment.

Kuwait's Ambassador to the United Kingdom Khaled Al-Duwaisan lauded, in his speech at the event, Abdullah Al-Mubarak Foundation's role in boosting Arab-British ties, particularly on scientific and cultural domains.

Celebrating the 20th anniversary of launching the award, the attendance of a large number of writers and academics has reflected the event's success, he said.

Duwaisan added the initiative was prompted by the belief that culture could help handle major global issues, extending bridges of understanding among nations and supporting dialogue of civilizations. Initiatives have a sig-

nificant role in increasing British institutions and organizations' interest to understand Middle Eastern nations, the Kuwaiti diplomat said, adding they also contribute effectively in the efforts aimed to narrow the gap between Middle Eastern and Western countries. Such efforts would eventually lead to achieving peace and stability in the world, said the Kuwaiti diplomat. — KUNA



Autism center's chair participates in world meeting

Head of Kuwait Center for Autism Dr Samira Al-Saad recently presided the World Autism Organization Congress Meeting, held at the sidelines of celebrating the World Autism Day in Houston, USA. The meeting witnessed electing a new board of directors presided by Dr Saad. Notably, The World Autism Organization (WAO) was founded in Norway in 1988 to defend the rights of autistic people worldwide. It holds an international congress every four years in one of the member countries, starting with South Africa in 2006, Mexico in 2010, Kuwait in 2014, Houston in 2018, while the next conference will be held in Malaysia in 2022.



Head of Kuwait Center for Autism Dr Samira Al-Saad speaks at the World Autism Organization Congress.

Dasman institute hosts geospatial health workshop

Associate Professor Neil Coffee from the University of Canberra (UC), Australia and Dr Saad Al-Sharrah from Dasman Diabetes Institute (DDI), which was founded by Kuwait Foundation for the Advancement of Sciences (KFAS) ran a one-day intensive workshop in GeoHealth on the 25th of November 2018. The workshop, which was held at DDI, introduced basic principles of Geographic Information Systems (GIS) and the application for researching the associations between health and place. Participants at the workshop were selected from the Public Authority of Civil Information (PACI), Kuwait University, Ministry of Health, Public Authority for Food and Nutrition (PAFN) and DDI. The program for the day included two lectures and two practical sessions where all 20 participants were provided with a computer for hands-

on practical applications of GIS to health.

The workshop had three main aims:

- To provide a networking opportunity for professionals and researchers interested in health and place;
- Guided practical experience in applying GIS to problem-solving; and
- Details of the DDI-UC GeoHealth Initiative.

The DDI-UC are building a GeoHealth Lab to develop knowledge and understanding of the spatial associations of the diabetes epidemic in Kuwait. DDI-UC GeoHealth Initiative was recently signed by both parties and will run for the next three and a half years. Aims of the initiative include GIS infrastructure (GeoHealth Lab) which will be used to identify and integrate data on behaviour, lifestyle and the built environment to investigate the spatial variations in the prevalence of diabetes in Kuwait and characterise the magnitude and the extent of the problem. Over the course of the project, the GeoHealth Lab and analysis will be used to plan, implement and evaluate diabetes prevention and develop initiatives based on evidence-based geospatial inference to support tailored intervention and treatment programs



KANA Kuwait presents new drama 'Mazha'

Kerala Arts and Nataka Academy, Kuwait, presented its third theatre production 'Mazha', a drama based on William Shakespeare's great tragedy 'Othello' at Boy Scouts Association Hall, Hawally. The first show was staged on Thursday evening which was inaugurated by well-known Kuwaiti producer, writer and film-maker Abdulaziz Ali Al-Dhager. The inaugural ceremony was presided over by KANA Kuwait Vice president Punnoose Ancheril which was also attended by renowned writer and playwright Hemant Kumar, the author of the play 'Mazha', stage designer Vijayan Kademperi, costume and makeup artist Vakkom Maheen and light designer Chirackal Raju. In his brief inaugural address, Ali

Al-Dhager applauded KANA Kuwait for its commendable efforts in producing a play based on Shakespeare's great tragedy 'Othello'. "Music, cinema and drama transcend time, space and culture and bring people together," Al-Dhager said.

Ladies Wing Convenor Sindhu Babu Chakola presented a memento to KANA Technical Advisor Idiculla Mathews in recognition of his contribution to the association as he is leaving Kuwait for good after working in Kuwait for more than 30 years. General Secretary Jiju Kalayil welcomed the gathering while Idiculla Mathews proposed a vote of thanks. Madhu Raveendran released a souvenir by handing over the first copy to Mathews. Ali Al-Dhager, Hemant Kumar, Kademperi and Chirackal Raju were honored on the occasion. KANA Advisor K P Balakrishnan, PRO Reji Mathew and Sony Paravoor were also present on the occasion. Rajeshwari Subbaraman anchored the inaugural segment. A large number of theatre-lovers were present to watch the inaugural show.



LAPA hosts concert for Crew Percussion Band

LOYAC's Academy for Performance Arts (LAPA) recently organized a special concert for the American Crew Percussion Band, on concluding its Modern Heritage Festival at the Shaheed Park. The concert was attended by LOYAC's Chairperson Fare'a Al-Saqaf and US Ambassador to Kuwait Laurence Silverman, who was invited to stage to introduce the band and give a speech before the performance.



Notably, Crew Percussion is a percussion ensemble that creates percussive music with unconventional instruments. Crew Percussion has been performing since 1999 and has captivated audiences all around with their high energy performance. The band performed for corporate shows, theme parks, educational programs, private parties, half time shows, and community events. The concert attracted a large audience.



Lifestyle

TUESDAY, DECEMBER 4, 2018



Pakistani men wear traditional Sindhi caps as they gather to celebrate Sindhi Topi Ajrak Day in Karachi. — AFP

FINLAND'S 'ODE' TO A NEW ERA IN LIBRARIES

What do you give the world's most literate country for its 100th birthday? For Finland's politicians and public, the answer was simple: a vast, state-of-the-art library, a new "living room for the nation". Twenty years in the planning, Helsinki's central library officially opens on December 5 at the end of a year of festivities marking the centenary of Finland's independence after breaking with Russia in 1917 following six centuries under Swedish rule. It is a huge, flowing structure of wood and glass sitting on a prime spot in the city centre, directly opposite the Finnish parliament. But whereas the parliament building is an austere and imposing hunk of granite, the new library was designed by Finnish firm ALA Architects as a welcoming, undulating structure, clad in 160 kilometers' worth (99 miles) of Finnish spruce, drawing people inside with a "warm hug".

Named Oodi—"ode" in Finnish—it is intended as a paean to knowledge, learning and equality in what was ranked the world's most literate country by a 2016 report based on official statistics. As the grand opening approaches, workers are frantically trying to finish the outside of the building. Installing the flowing wood paneling has proven harder than expected in Helsinki's freezing climate. The interior, however, is largely ready. While books will feature heavily — 100,000 of them—the cutting-edge facility also boasts studios for music and video production, a cinema, and workshops containing 3D printers and laser cutters, all free of charge for the public.

It will also house an EU-funded visitor center, offering information on the 28-member bloc's work and its impact on people's daily lives. "Oodi gives a new modern idea of what it means to be a library," Tommi Laitio, Helsinki's

executive director of culture and leisure, told AFP. "It is a house of literature but it's also a house of technology, it's a house of music, it's a house of cinema, it's a house of the European Union. "And I think all of these come together to this idea of hope and progress," Laitio said.

Robot librarians

One sign of such progress is the building's fleet of book-carrying robots—small grey waggons which navigate themselves in and out of lifts, avoiding people and furniture, in order to bring returned books up from the basement and drop them off at the correct bookcase. There, a human member of staff will place the books on the shelf. Oodi's planners believe the robot librarians are the first instance in the world of self-driving technology being used in this way inside a public library. The robots will become a familiar sight to the library's expected 10,000 visitors a day.

Silence is not golden

Oodi will have areas walled off for quiet studying, but for everywhere else, there will not be a "silence" rule in force, as is common in libraries. In fact, making a mess and noise are positively encouraged inside the "nerd loft"—a place to inspire people of all ages to come together and create. Users can build things in workshops equipped with cutting-edge tools, borrow musical instruments or play games consoles.

"We are prepared to constantly have discussions with the users and the staff about what behavior is welcome in the library, but it's definitely a place of noise and all sorts of improvised activities," Helsinki's head of library service-



Helsinki's new Central Library Oodi is pictured in Helsinki, Finland. — AFP photos

es, Katri Vanttinen, said. She is particularly proud of the library's decision not to separate the children's section from the adult books.

All are housed on the library's panoramic top floor: a sweeping 50-metre long space, with glass walls on all sides supporting a billowing, cloudlike roof. "We think that the noise the children bring into this floor is positive noise, we hear the future, and we enjoy that we have children's and adult literature on the same floor with no walls in between," Vanttinen said. "Acoustics have been planned really well, so even if people are shouting at one end you can hardly hear them at the other end," she added.

As vital as drinking water

Although many countries have been cutting back on library services, Laitio said there were no problems win-

ning political and public backing for the 98-million-euro (\$110-million) project, thanks to the value that many Finns place on libraries. Some 68 million books a year are borrowed by the country's 5.5 million people, named the happiest in the world by the UN earlier this year.

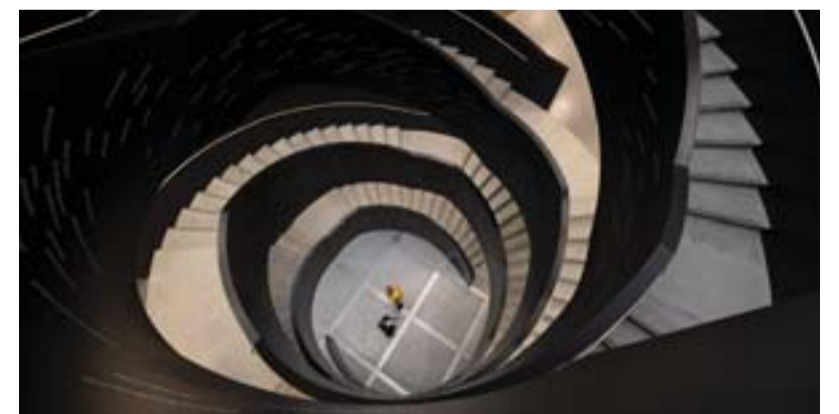
"Libraries in Helsinki are the second highest-rated public service after drinking water," Laitio said. "So libraries are really loved in Finland. And if I look at this project, a 100-million-euro investment, I hear zero to minimal protest. Actually people are really joyful and proud." — AFP



Bookshelves are seen during a preview at Helsinki's new Central Library Oodi.



A room of Helsinki's new Central Library Oodi is seen during a preview.



A staircase of Helsinki's new Central Library Oodi is seen.

British couple get happy ending to engagement ring disaster in US

For many visitors to New York, Times Square is a must-see. For one British man, it was where his romantic marriage proposal went horribly wrong—the diamond ring fell through a grate. But don't worry, thanks to the power of the internet, the story has a happy ending. John Drennan got down on bended knee to ask his girlfriend of 10 years, Daniella Anthony, to marry him in New York's Central Park. She said yes. But the

ring was the wrong size, the couple told the BBC. "I tried to tell John it was too big, but he insisted I wear it," Anthony said. As the couple walked through Times Square later on, the sparkling diamond ring fell off and plopped! — it fell through a grate.

"We were walking back to the hotel. I can still visualize the ring. Bouncing once... bouncing twice and then it was gone," Drennan said. Enter the power of the inter-

net. The couple called police, who opened the grate and hunted for hours. No luck. So Drennan and Anthony headed home and planned to buy a new ring. But in the interim, the New York Police Department had located the bauble after all, and launched a social media campaign Saturday to find the couple, with pictures of them both and the ring.

Police even had the ring cleaned. And on Sunday, the

mystery was solved. "The (now) happy couple is back in their home country, but thanks to your retweets they heard we were looking for them! We're making arrangements to get them their ring back. Congratulations!" the NYPD said on Twitter. "We don't use Twitter—we had absolutely no idea this was going on. But we are so happy," Anthony told the BBC. — AFP



(From left) Hamilton choreographer Andy Blankenbuehler, composer Lin-Manuel Miranda, music director Alex Lacamoire and director Thomas Kail arrive at the 41st Annual Kennedy Center Honors in Washington, DC.



US composer Philip Glass



US musician Wayne Shorter



US singer Cher — AFP photos

Kennedy Center gala honors best in arts and George H.W. Bush

Hollywood A-listers and Washington politicians celebrated the best in performing arts Sunday at the Kennedy Center Honors gala, which opened with a standing ovation for late president George H.W. Bush. The posh annual awards program—a rare night of red-carpet glamour in the US capital, now in its 41st year—honored an eclectic class of artists: actress and pop superstar Cher, radical composer Philip Glass, country singer Reba McEntire and jazz saxophonist Wayne Shorter. In a first, the Kennedy Center—the performing arts complex that serves as a living monument to slain president John F. Kennedy—also paid tribute to a work of art, the musical sensation “Hamilton.”

Show host Gloria Estefan, a member of last year's class of honorees, opened the festivities with a somber tribute to Bush, who died over the weekend at age 94. “I think it's appropriate to recognize the passing of a wonderful man who dedicated his life to service and who graciously attended this event many times during his administration, laughing, applauding, singing along and even shedding a tear from right up there in the presidential box,” said the pop diva.

The president traditionally sits next to the honorees, but last month, Melania Trump's spokeswoman said the first lady and husband President Donald Trump—who is despised by many top cultural and entertainment figures—would once again skip the star-studded show. Last year, they opted out after several honorees said they would boycott the event in protest at Trump's policies.

Pop queen and fashion icon Cher, a vociferous critic of the Republican president, welcomed Trump's second consecutive no-show. Asked what she would have said to the president, the 72-year-old, sporting an off-the-shoulder black lace gown and multi-belt waist cincher, laughed and said simply: “Go away.”



US singer Cyndi Lauper



US singer Kelly Clarkson



Hamilton choreographer Andy Blankenbuehler



US singer Reba McEntire



Cuban singer Gloria Estefan

'Pivotal moment' in art

For Kennedy Center president Deborah Rutter, the decision to honor “Hamilton”—the story of Alexander Hamilton and America's other founding fathers, set to show tunes and rap anthems—was a no-brainer. “It really felt like we shouldn't wait to acknowledge that this work has transformed how we think about art,” Rutter said of the Pulitzer Prize-winning box-office smash that opened in New York in 2015. “We should really note that this is a pivotal moment in the world of our performing arts.”

Lin-Manuel Miranda, the composer and lyricist behind the groundbreaking musical, performed several numbers himself along with members of the show's original cast. Speaking on the red carpet prior to the ceremony, the 38-year-old praised the Kennedy Center for the “celebration of our collaboration.” “It's an acknowledgment that musicals don't happen alone,” said Miranda, who received the honor alongside the show's director Thomas Kail, choreographer Andy Blankenbuehler and music director Alex Lacamoire.

Pop divas and jazz greats

The awards gala—to be broadcast on December 26 on CBS—also featured performances from “American Idol” winner Kelly Clarkson, jazz prodigy Esperanza Spalding and mercurial pop pioneer Cyndi Lauper. Comedian Whoopi Goldberg showed up to honor Cher, and Paul Simon delivered a tribute to Glass. Shorter, who was in Miles Davis' quintet more than 50 years ago, was honored for his compositions and leading role in the creation of the jazz fusion genre as co-founder of the band Weather Report.

During his lengthy career, Shorter collaborated with music industry greats across genres, from Joni Mitchell to Carlos Santana and Steely Dan. “My gratitude can be

described like this: I'm very happy that many of you have reached across the aisle for something called ‘jazz,’” the 85-year-old said at a pre-gala State Department dinner Saturday.

'The Face of America'

McEntire—one of country music's household names—beamed as she strode the red carpet in a royal blue dress that made her signature red hair pop. “I'm thrilled to death,” said McEntire, who at 63 joined fellow country greats Loretta Lynn and Dolly Parton as a Kennedy Center honoree. Cher—who began as one half of the folk duo Sonny & Cher and blossomed into one of entertainment's most enduring shape-shifters—said she was still in shock over the award. “Meryl told me once, ‘You do things for the art, and if the award comes it's a bonus,’” the Oscar, Emmy and Grammy winner said, referring to acting legend Meryl Streep.

“I never thought I was the right person to win this award—because I'm a little bit out there,” Glass, who at 81 is one of the greatest living composers known for his prolific output and wide-ranging approach to classical music, said he was simply “excited to be on stage with these other people.” “The production of art in this country is astonishing,” said Glass, whose Symphony No. 12 based on David Bowie's album “Lodger” will see its premiere in January at the Los Angeles Philharmonic. “The arts are the face of America,” he continued. “It's how Americans know who we are and it's how people in other parts of the world know who we are.” — AFP

S Africa minister defends police over Beyonce gig chaos

South Africa's police minister defended officers yesterday after revelers at a weekend concert dedicated to Nelson Mandela in Johannesburg headlined by Beyonce endured chaos and robberies following the event. Concert-goers had to wait several hours for transport to leave the nearly 95,000-capacity FNB stadium in Soweto Sunday and there were reports of several muggings and assaults.

Beyonce led an all-star line-up including Ed Sheeran, Jay-Z and Usher for the climax of a year of events celebrating the centennial of Mandela's birth in 1918, and to raise money for charity. “There is no need to blame South African police that there was no Uber, there was no transport and all that—that should be asked from the organizers,” said police minister Bheki Cele who called on victims of crime to come forward.

One man has been arrested in connection with incidents following the event, added Cele who spoke to journalists at an event in the southern city of Port

Elizabeth. Concert-goer and witness Catherine Constantinides, director of the Miss Earth SA program, said “it was more than mugging and taking phones”. “You prayed with your life not to be stabbed, punched or brutally attacked, all of which I witnessed,” she wrote on her verified Twitter account.

Fellow concert-goer Ano Shonhiwa, 23, told AFP “there was so much chaos when the concert ended and people wanted to leave”. “I heard that several people were mugged while they were waiting for transport or to call a cab,” he said. Global Citizen, which organized the event, said in a statement that “after such an inspiring evening, we are saddened to hear the challenges people had while leaving the venue”. “We have been working to support people getting home safely,” it said. — AFP

Iraq's Mohamed Al-Daradji battles inner demons through film

The Iraq War may have ended in 2011, but for filmmaker Mohamed Al-Daradji, the conflict that tore his country apart remains very much part of his everyday life. “You could say that my movies are a way of coping with the (aftermath) of the war,” the 40-year-old told AFP in Los Angeles this week as he discussed his latest drama, “The Journey.” “To me, the people of Iraq have not grieved, they have not come to terms with what happened... and I felt that maybe this is how my film can help and allow people to see themselves on the big screen.”

The film transports viewers to 2006 — five minutes before Iraqi dictator Saddam Hussein died by hanging at dawn, Daradji says—and introduces a female suicide bomber planning an attack during the reopening of the Baghdad train station. Within the confines of the station, where the drama unfolds, Daradji relays Iraq's pain and suffering through various narratives—from the distraught child bride in a wedding dress, to street children surviving by selling flowers and polishing shoes and a musician returning to normal life after 22 years in a POW camp.

Added to the mix are the American soldiers patrolling the station and barking orders, their humanity poking through as one sings a lullaby to his child back home on the phone. The first film to be released commercially in Iraq in 27 years, “The Journey” has been selected as Iraq's official contender for the upcoming Oscars in the

foreign-language category. It will be Daradji's third time representing his country at the Oscars, following “Ahlam” in 2007 and “Son of Babylon” in 2010. Like Daradji's four other features, “The Journey” examines the war's consequences, this time through the eyes of the female protagonist as she comes to terms with the horrible act she is about to commit.

'A form of therapy'

Daradji said he was inspired to make the lead character a woman after reading an article about



Iraqi filmmaker Mohamed Al-Daradji whose film ‘The Journey’, is Iraq's entry for the Oscar's Foreign Film entries, poses for a photo in West Hollywood, California. — AFP

a 17-year-old Iraqi girl arrested with a bomb strapped to her waist. “I began to make some research and found out there were more than 200 female suicide bombers in Iraq,” he said. His storyline developed further after he eventually was allowed to meet with a female prisoner captured by the Iraqi army.

“I looked at her and she was a human being, she was beautiful and so smart,” he said. “And the question that I raise through ‘The Journey’ is whether there is redemption (for suicide bombers), whether they can get back the humanity that they lost.” He said his next movie, “Bird of Paradise,” will also feature a woman as the central character, as well as children. “When I think back to my childhood, there was no one who could listen to me and maybe that's why I use children in my films and women also,” he said. “To give them a voice.”

As with all his features so far, Daradji said his latest project will again touch on Iraq's turbulent history. “In a funny way, I think all Iraqis suffer from PTSD (post-traumatic stress disorder)... and through my films I am shouting, I am letting out my anger, my frustration,” Daradji said. “I made ‘The Journey’ for selfish reasons,” he added. “In a way, it helped me come to terms with myself. “You can call it a form of therapy.” — AFP

Lifestyle | Features



French film director Agnes Varda reacts as she receives a Honorary Award during the 17th Marrakech International Film Festival.



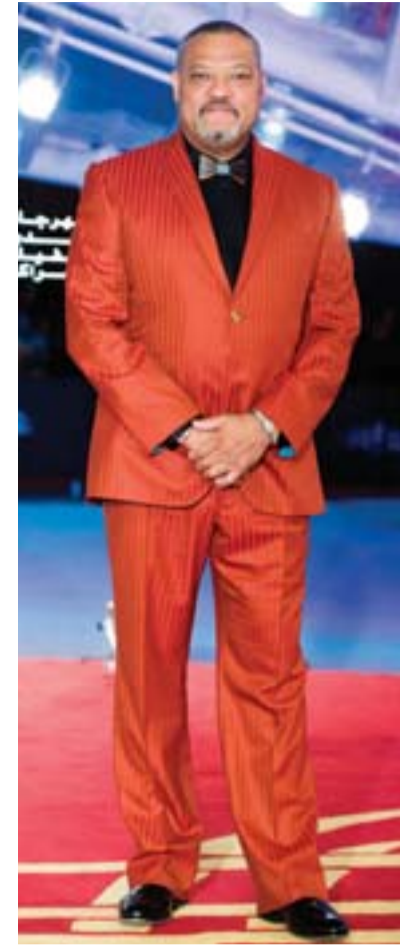
French film director Agnes Varda reacts as she receives a Honorary Award. — AFP photos



French actress Assa Sylla and French stylist Christophe Guillaume arrive at the 17th Marrakech International Film Festival.



Italian actress Valeria Golino



US actor Laurence Fishburne

Varda receives Honorary Award at Morocco festival

French film director Agnes Varda reacts as she receives a Honorary Award during the 17th Marrakech International Film Festival on Sunday. US director Martin Scorsese and actor Robert de Niro also on Sunday discussed the changing nature of cinema in the age of streaming services on the sidelines of the Marrakech Film Festival.

"The cinema of the past is gone, things are changing," Scorsese said during a meeting with the public at

the Palais des Congres. "I don't know what the future will be," De Niro said during a news conference that "Movies have to be shown on a big screen." Their remarks come with the ninth collaboration between Scorsese and double Oscar winner De Niro - gangster movie "The Irishman" - expected to be released next year by streaming giant Netflix. — AFP

DONATELLA THREW GIANNI QUITE A BIRTHDAY PARTY FOR VERSACE'S PRE-FALL 2019 SHOW IN NEW YORK

By Alyssa Vingan Klein

On Sunday night, while most New Yorkers were tucked away inside their apartments to keep warm and out of the rain, Donatella Versace threw her late brother, Gianni Versace - who would have turned 72 over the weekend - an extravagant birthday bash at the American Stock Exchange Building in the form of Versace's Pre-Fall 2019 show. While this Financial District location may not have been the most hip, it was fitting: Versace was acquired by Michael Kors for a staggering \$2.12 billion back in September, ultimately forming the new luxury fashion group Capri Holdings Ltd.

The Italian house's first-ever pre-collection runway show - which fell between Alexander Wang's and Chanel's on the new December fashion calendar - attracted an impressive list of attendees despite the gloomy weather, a fact that's not too surprising considering just how many celebrities, models and industry bigwigs love and respect

Donatella. Among the front-row guests sat Kim Kardashian and Kanye West, Lupita Nyong'o, Diane Kruger, Tracee Ellis Ross, Young Thug, 2 Chainz, Blake Lively and Paris Jackson, all dressed head-to-toe in outfits (many of which were custom) by the brand.

Upon entering the venue, the audience was seated around a mirrored black runway, at the center of which stood a gilded torch - a replica of the Statue of Liberty's - which, according to the designer's Instagram, symbolized "enlightenment, empowerment and freedom." When it came to how this collection related to the world-renowned New York state of mind, however, the theme was less obvious and more par for the Versace course - albeit with some strategic switch-ups.

The opening looks, as well as several dispersed throughout the lineup, had a decidedly "power woman" feel, like a burgundy patent leather overcoat, a classic trench, buttery leather knee-high boots and tailored all-black suiting, complete with Versace signature touches like

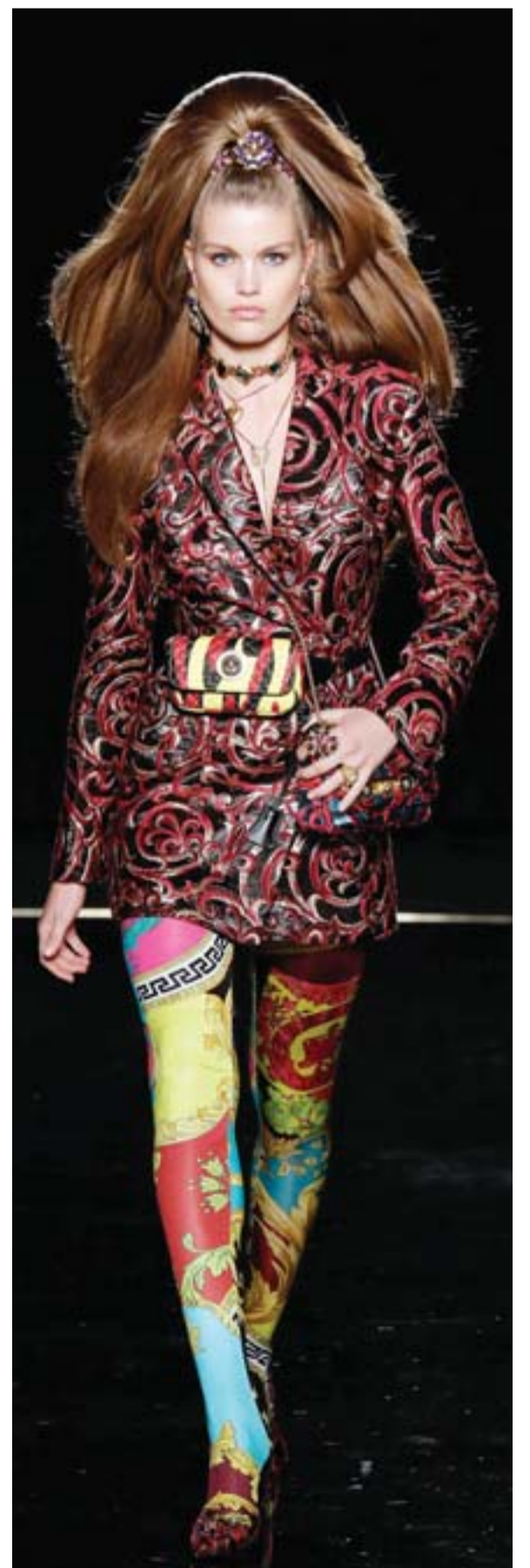
safety pins and gold buttons. This New York lady-on-the-go story was developed even further when models rolled logo-emblazoned luggage down the runway, or carried giant duffel or tote bags under their arms - all highly practical for days and nights spent running around town.

This season, Versace took the "concrete jungle" motif very seriously, with every conceivable animal print represented throughout the collection: Zebra stripes appeared on leggings, turtle-necks, mini-skirts, party dresses and more, while a giraffe-like spotting covered coats, ankle boots and a shiny blazer.

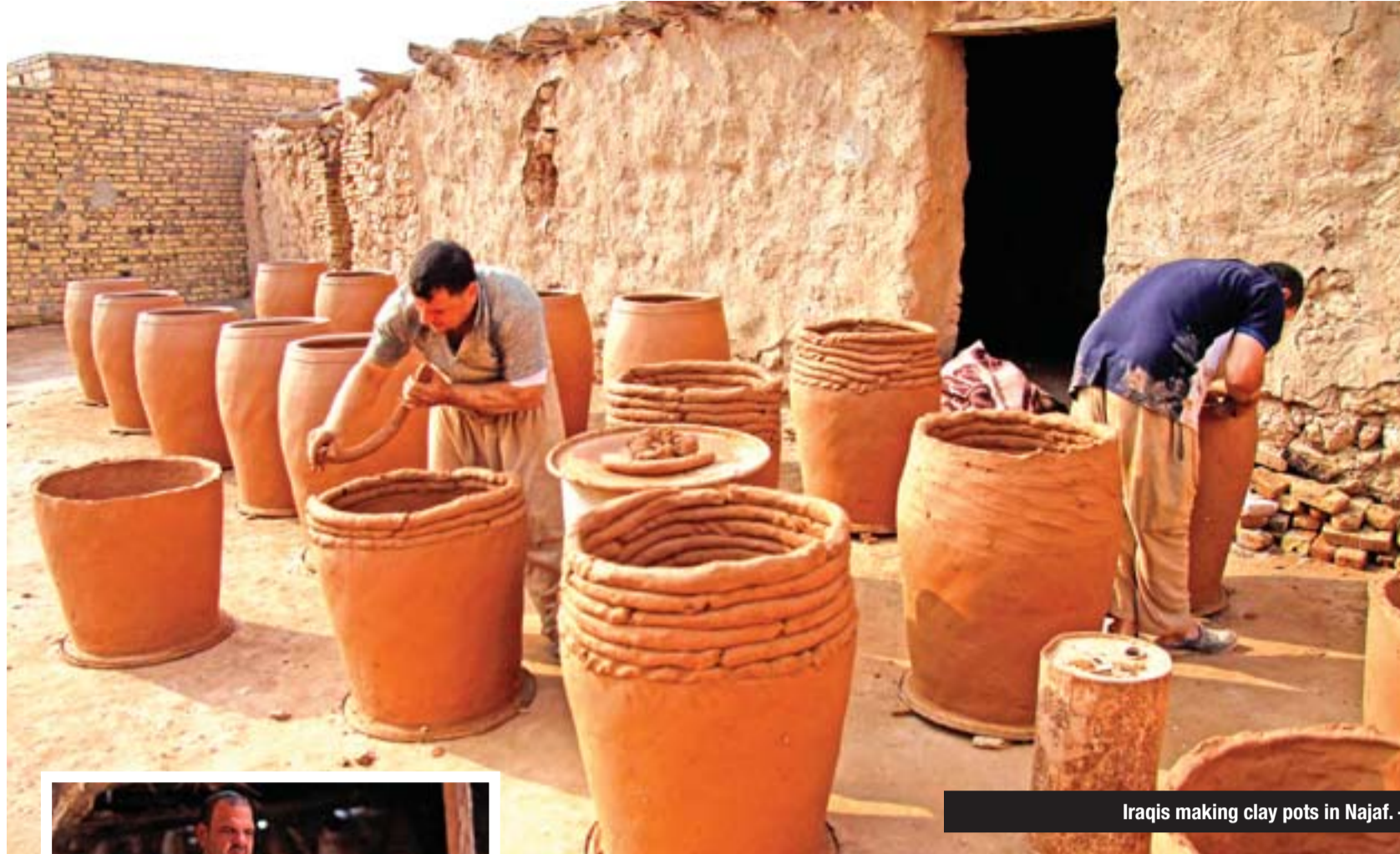
There was also a clear uptown-versus-downtown dichotomy at play. While some models were styled with silk headscarves and large sunglasses, or comically large teased hair adorned with jewels, others looked more suited for a walk down Saint Marks (Marjan Jonkman in a slime green and hot pink sweater) or a stroll in SoHo, thanks to youthful puffer jackets and bright faux-fur coats, fuzzy sweaters, logo beanies, men's chest bags, sneakers, lots of

leather and basic white tees emblazoned with the brand's name. One T-shirt in particular, an "I Love NY" tee mashed up with a gilded Versace Medusa logo (worn by Mica Arganaraz), will likely prove to be as popular in the neighborhood as anything peddled by Supreme.

As she has done for the last several seasons, Donatella dipped into the nostalgia well, especially when it came to a duo of statement dresses: the black safety pin dress from Spring 1994 made famous by Elizabeth Hurley, along with the barely-there gown worn by Jennifer Lopez to the Grammys in 2000, this time done up in hearts. (Fun fact: The latter was modeled on the runway this season by Amber Valletta, who also modeled the Spring 2000 original.) In addition to these iconic throwbacks, the show featured countless multicolored prints that were unmistakably Versace, no matter if you're in New York, Milan or anywhere else in the world. — www.fashionista.com



Models walk the runway at the Versace Pre-Fall 2019 Collection at The American Stock Exchange on December 02, 2018 in New York City. — AFP photos



Iraqis making clay pots in Najaf. — AFP photos

IRAQ'S ANCIENT POTTERY STRUGGLES TO OUTLIVE MODERN PLASTIC

Adel Al-Kawwaz expertly spins the potter's wheel, shaping the wet clay into a smooth jug. His family is famous for this millennia-old Iraqi craft, but Kawwaz is struggling to keep it alive. For thousands of years, clay utensils for storing food and cooking were found in virtually every home in Sumer, the earliest known civilization in modern-day southern Iraq. Kawwaz's own family drew their name from the jug, or "kawz" in Arabic, which they have produced for more than 200 years from clay found at a lake by Najaf, a holy Shiite Muslim city. "Making clay vases is a craft that my family had become famous for," says 45-year-old Kawwaz wistfully.

Pottery has deep roots in Iraq, where ancient civilizations turned to clay to build their homes, shape their cooking utensils, and even make their ovens. Cuneiform, one of the earliest forms of writing invented by the Sumerians, was also carved into clay tablets. But now, with a flood of more modern products, demand for the handmade clay items has dried up, says Kawwaz.

Once ubiquitous, now forgotten

His family's jugs were shaped from Najaf mud, dried in the shade, then baked at high temperatures for no less than 15 hours. In Iraq, one of the hottest countries on earth, they were indispensable. "These vases were used to keep water cool or preserve food. They were placed in the shade or hung in another high location," he says. Some Iraqis even used them to store jewelry. "Those that practiced pottery would make a lot of money because they were common items in ancient Iraqi households," says Kawwaz.

They were surprisingly handy during the era of Saddam Hussein, when many families struggled financially, as well as in the 1990s, when international sanctions hit Iraq. With household appliances extremely rare or unaffordable for most of the population, Iraqis once again relied on clay. "The income of most families did not allow them to buy a refrigerator or freezer to keep their water cold, so most used clay cauldrons," he says. Back then, his family sold their large jugs in bulk—sometimes thousands per week across every Iraqi province. But times have changed. "We

sell very few now—the numbers in an entire year don't hit 100 or 200 jugs," says Kawwaz.

Farmers who once used the large containers are opting for cheaper goods, made either elsewhere in Iraq or imported. "They buy plastic bags imported from China, so now we rarely sell clay pots," says Kawwaz in his studio, itself made of mud and covered in palm leaves. He makes the vases by special request only, but admits it's hardly worth it. Small jugs cost just 2,500 dinars or around \$2, while the larger cauldrons that hold several dozen liters (gallons) are sold at 15,000 dinars.

the edge of the Najaf Sea, Kaabi begins mixing together ingredients to make his own oven. "To the clay, you have to add reeds, red sand, and synthetic wool fibres. You let the mixture rest for two days so the clay becomes compact," he explains to AFP. Despite the drop in sales, this potter is upbeat. "Even if we sell less, even if the craftsmen are fewer and fewer, we're fighting to keep the artisanal heritage of our fathers and grandfathers alive," he says. "And of course, there are still Iraqis who only eat good bread," he says with a wink. — AFP

Battle of the bread

Despite the prevalence of electric and gas cookers, Um Haydar prefers her trusty clay oven. On her rooftop terrace in Old Najaf, she uses it to bake her own traditional bread every morning. "The taste of bread made in a traditional oven is so different from bread baked in an electric or gas oven," says Um Haydar, as the searing oven near her radiates an enticing smell. Well into her sixties, the Iraqi woman is dressed in a traditional black robe that covers her from head to toe.

Like her mother and grandmother before her, she has stuck to tradition when it comes to the clay oven, with one exception—she didn't build it herself. But some Iraqis, like Haydar al-Kaabi, insist on the full Sumerian experience. On



Defying violence, hikers head for the hills in central Nigeria

The old car number plates still carry the inscription beloved of the people of Plateau State in central Nigeria: "Land of peace and tourism". Years of spiraling violence have rocked the region of outstanding natural beauty. But tired of the unrest, young hikers have now decided to revive the slogan. Every weekend, Andrew Niagwan and his friends defy the insecurity to chart new trails and kick-start tourism in the breathtaking lush countryside around the state capital Jos. "We now have over 60 hiking locations and we are still discovering some more," Niagwan says as he hikes nearing the top of the Shere Hills, a mountain range that not so long ago attracted tourists from across Nigeria.

region for decades.

So popular are the excursions that there is a burst of new clubs to keep up with demand. Now newcomers like "The Hike Team", "Jos Hike It", and "The Wayfarers of Jos" are also organizing weekly walks in the hills. "During the crisis with the curfew we have to stay indoors and the internet has been the best companion," says 26-year-old hiker Metou Kwalo. "We are tired of the violence. We can't be always living in fear."

Fit for a queen

The fresher micro-climate in Plateau State is an exception in the often suffocating heat of Nigeria. The otherworldly beauty of the dome-shaped outcrops of rock and established hotels have long made Plateau a favorite holiday resort for rich Nigerians and expatriates. But in the early 2000s, the tourism market cooled off after bloody outbreaks of violence between Christian and Muslim communities rocked Jos and the surrounding area, killing more than 10,000 people, according to Human Rights Watch.

The Jos area lies at the crossroads of the predominantly Muslim north and largely Christian south and was on the fringes of the Sokoto Caliphate before the British colonized Nigeria. But the indigenous communities, helped by the mountainous terrain that prevented conquerors from riding through on horseback, resisted the wave of Islamisation from the north. Instead, Plateau became home to many Christian missionaries arriving from the beginning of the 19th century.

Recent history has again shown that longstanding ethno-religious grievances can resurface at any moment. In June, after three years of relative peace, more than 200 villagers lost their lives in massacres blamed on ethnic Fulani herders near Jos, triggering further unrest. The waves of violence have sunk the local economy, most expatriates have packed up and many businesses have closed, exploding the unemployment rate.

The Hill Station Hotel, once the finest hotel in Jos, is now entombed in dust, while cracks spread across its walls. "Gone are the days when the Queen of England stayed there," says Mankat Dewa, a local entrepreneur,

recalling the visit of Elizabeth II in 1956, when the hotel still hosted lavish banquets in its lush gardens. "Jos should be the first touristic site in Nigeria, but the sector has declined because of bad governance and successive crises."

'Secret locations'

Aware of the region's potential, Plateau Governor Simon Lalong said at the beginning of November he wanted to "resuscitate" tourism at a conference on the subject in Jos. "We are going to focus and put more attention on tourism as a source of revenue for not only Plateau State but also for Nigeria," he said. "Instead of Nigerians running to Kenya or (the) UK because of their weather, we would do the needful by developing the content and

upgrading facilities that are in place."

Many in Jos, especially young people, seem to agree and are being joined by European and US expatriates for scenic hikes, barbecues and waterfall dips on excursions that sometimes attract hundreds of people. "Of course, we need to adapt the situation. We avoid areas where attacks took place in the last months," says Niagwan. "When we plan to go camping for the weekend, we keep the exact location secret until the very last minute." Niagwan's strategy appears to be working: "So far, we've never had an issue." — AFP



In this file photo the Amurum Forest Reserve, where undulating rock formations surround a savannah dominated by lush and tall grass in Jos, Plateau State is pictured.

Holding a can of white spray paint, Niagwan draws arrows on stones to mark the fresh trail. Up ahead, a guide hacks through the dense vegetation, his machete flying in great arcs to reveal the path. "For years, people used to avoid the area, but thanks to us the hiking fever is back," Niagwan, a tall psychology graduate in his thirties, says proudly. The nature enthusiast created the Jos Plateau Hikers Club in 2013 with his 82-year-old French friend Yves Gattepaille, who has been walking in the



In this file photo the Amurum Forest Reserve, where undulating rock formations surround a savannah dominated by lush and tall grass in Jos, Plateau State is pictured. — AFP photos



The Popocatepetl Volcano spews ash and smoke as seen from Mexico City on Sunday. The Popocatepetl volcano, located about 55 km from Mexico City, has recorded numerous low-intensity exhalations in the past few days. — AFP

Two killed in India violence linked to dead cows: Police

NEW DELHI: A violent mob rampaged through villages in northern India yesterday after the discovery of suspected cow carcasses, setting vehicles ablaze and murdering two people including a senior police officer. Police fired shots in the air as hundreds of villagers, incensed over the death of the sacred animals, pelted stones at officers sent to quell the violence just 130 km from New Delhi.

Anand Kumar, an additional director general of Uttar Pradesh state police, said word spread quickly in Bulandshahr district when carcasses believed to be cows were found dumped near a village. Cows are considered sacred by many Hindus and some accused of slaughtering the beasts have been lynched by vigilante mobs in the past.

"These were suspected cow carcasses and the villagers were angry about it," Kumar told reporters. "There were around 400 people from three neighboring villages. They indulged in heavy stone pelting and arson. Police baton-charged and tried to bring the situation under control. Police resorted to firing in the air to control the crowd."

Subodh Kumar Singh, a police inspector, and a local villager were killed in the violence. It is not yet clear how they died. Police have launched an investigation

and said post-mortem examinations would be conducted. Footage shared online showed vehicles on fire and huge crowds of men hurling objects at police. Kumar said more than a dozen cars were set alight.

It is illegal to slaughter cows or even possess beef in many Indian states. Some carry life sentences for transgressions. Uttar Pradesh, the scene of yesterday's violence, prohibits cow slaughter. Its chief minister Yogi Adityanath, a firebrand Hindu priest turned politician, has pushed for slaughterhouses to be closed and cow shelters to be constructed.

Cow slaughter is a powder-keg issue in India and one that rights group say has been stoked by Hindu hardliners to provoke violence against Muslims and other minorities. In two prominent cases last year, a dairy farmer was murdered on a highway for transporting cows and a Muslim teenager accused of carrying beef was stabbed to death on a crowded train. Critics say vigilantes have been emboldened by the 2014 election of Prime Minister Narendra Modi's Hindu nationalist Bharatiya Janata Party. Modi, who will seek a second term in office in elections by May, last year condemned murder in the name of protecting cows after a string of vigilante killings sparked protests. — AFP



CHINGRAVATI, India: An overturned and smoldering vehicle is seen following mob violence in this village in Bulandshahr in India's northern Uttar Pradesh state yesterday — AFP

Qatar to quit OPEC to focus on gas...

Continued from Page 1

It also only holds around two percent of the world's global oil reserves, according to the CIA World Factbook. Kaabi said that he would still attend OPEC's Vienna meeting later this week, his "first and last" as energy minister. That meeting is expected to set a policy for 2019 and despite Qatar's announcement, oil prices soared yesterday after Russia and Saudi Arabia renewed a pact to cap output on the sidelines of a G20 summit. While there was no announcement on how much would be cut and for how long, the pact was cheered by oil traders, with Brent jumping \$2.60 to \$62.06 and West Texas Intermediate up \$2.42 to \$53.35.

Although Qatar's sudden move came out of the blue, analysts say it will have limited impact on the global market. Fiona Cincotta, a senior market analyst at UK-based City Index, said Qatar had "surprised the market" but added it was another sign that "some major production decisions will be taken outside of OPEC" following the G20 summit that closed Saturday in Buenos Aires.

Some analysts saw Qatar's withdrawal as a "political decision to oppose Saudi Arabia", which alongside the United States and Russia is the biggest producer in OPEC. "So is it really worth it to someone like Qatar to go to Vienna to meet with someone who will lead the meeting and who is your enemy?" asked Thierry Bros, a researcher with the Oxford Institute for Energy Studies. "In the end, perhaps you can do without it."

"It could signal a historic turning point of the organization towards Russia, Saudi Arabia and the United States," said Algeria's former energy minister and OPEC chairman, Chakib Khelil, commenting on Qatar's move. He said Doha's exit would have a "psychological impact" because of the row with Riyadh and could prove "an example to be followed by other members in the wake of unilateral decisions of Saudi Arabia in the recent past".

The exit is the latest example of Qatar charting a course away from its Gulf neighbors since the rift began last year. It comes before an annual summit of Gulf Arab states expected to grapple with the roughly 18-month standoff. Once close partners with Saudi Arabia and the UAE on trade and security, Qatar has struck scores of new trade deals with countries further afield while investing heavily to scale up local food production and ramp up military power.

"There is a sentiment in Qatar that Saudi Arabia's dominance in the region and the region's many institutions has been counterproductive to Qatar," said Andreas Krieg, a political risk analyst at King's College London. "It is about Qatar breaking free as an independent market and state from external interference." Asked if Qatar's withdrawal would complicate OPEC's decision on output this week, a non-Gulf OPEC source said: "Not really, even if it's a regrettable and sad decision from one of our member countries."

Amrita Sen, chief oil analyst for Energy Aspects consultants, argued the move would have limited impact. "Quitting OPEC is largely symbolic for Qatar," he told Bloomberg. "Its oil production has been steady with limited prospects for increases." OPEC is dominated by oil-rich Saudi, which along with the UAE and other allies has had no ties with Qatar since June 2017. Relations between Riyadh and Doha are at an all-time low as a result of the crisis, which has seen Saudi-led countries accuse Qatar of supporting terrorism and being too close to Iran. Qatar refutes the allegations and claims rivals want to overthrow its government.

But researcher Bros argued that Qatar's departure would weaken OPEC at a moment when Riyadh is battling an international outcry over the murder of journalist Jamal Khashoggi. "This shows that it will become more complicated to run things (at OPEC). Those that remain are not great friends, such as Iran and Saudi Arabia," said Bros. Kaabi meanwhile announced that Qatar would "make a big splash in the oil and gas business soon", adding Doha would also build the Middle East's biggest ethane cracker, an industrial facility which converts gas to by-products such as adhesives and ethylene for plastics. — Agencies

Trump seeks Khan's help...

Continued from Page 1

Information Minister Fawad Chaudhry told Reuters. Trump told Khan the Pakistan relationship was very important to the United States and to finding a solution to the Afghanistan conflict, Chaudhry added. The US embassy in Islamabad had no immediate comment on the letter. In a televised interview to selected journalists in the evening, Khan said his government would "try our best to make the Afghan Taliban sit together with the Americans so that negotiations can be carried forward," without giving further details.

Trump has been open about his desire to bring home about 14,000 US troops who remain in Afghanistan as part of Resolute Support and a separate counter-terrorism mission aimed against militant groups such as Al-Qaeda and Islamic State. "President Trump has also acknowledged that the war had cost both USA and Pakistan. He has emphasized that Pakistan and USA should explore opportunities to work together and renew partnership," the foreign ministry said in a statement. The ministry added that Pakistan is committed to playing "a facilitation role in good faith". "Peace and stability in Afghanistan remain a shared responsibility."

Zain 5G network ready to go live...

Continued from Page 1

The practical applications offered by 5G technologies will expand the scope of services provided by Zain Kuwait especially to the government and enterprise (B2B) sector, who will benefit enormously from high speeds, stimulating both the economic growth of the country as well as creating boundless new business

Trump has appointed Afghan-born US diplomat Zalmay Khalilzad as a special envoy for Afghanistan, tasking him with pushing through peace talks. Khalilzad last month set a deadline of April 2019 for the war to end. But Afghan Taliban militants last month rejected the proposed deadline and said a three-day meeting in Qatar between their leaders and Khalilzad, to pave the way for peace talks, ended with no agreement. Khalilzad on Sunday began an eight-country tour, which includes Pakistan, Russia and Qatar, to promote peace and convince the Taliban to join negotiations.

Officially allies in fighting terrorism, Pakistan and the United States have a complicated relationship, bound by Washington's dependence on Pakistan to supply its troops in Afghanistan but plagued by accusations Islamabad is playing a double game. Last month, Trump said in an interview Pakistan doesn't "do a damn thing" for the United States despite billions of dollars in US aid, adding that Pakistani officials knew of former Al-Qaeda leader Osama bin Laden's location before his killing by US troops in a 2011 raid inside Pakistan. Khan hit back by saying the United States should not blame Pakistan for its failings in Afghanistan.

Pakistani officials, who deny offering safe havens to the Afghan Taliban, say their influence on the group has waned over the years. Last week, Afghan President Ashraf Ghani said he had formed a 12-strong team to negotiate peace with the Taliban, but warned that implementation of any deal would take at least five years. — Agencies

opportunities, especially in the delivery of unique products and services, smart cities, and Internet sectors.

This announcement follows the MoU signed during a two-day strategy summit held in Shanghai in October 2018 between Zain and Huawei whereby the two companies discussed and assessed the expected business cases for 5G in the region, including its impact on IoT, mobility, connectivity, healthcare, government; and other essential sectors. Zain is on track to have its operations in Kuwait be the first to launch 5G commercially, maintaining its technology leadership in the quality and range of services offered to the country's community, whether it be government, enterprises or individuals.

Sports

Jordan lifts Mavs over Clippers, Butler, 76ers hold off Grizzlies

DeRozan's 36 points lead Spurs past Blazers

LOS ANGELES: DeAndre Jordan torched his former team for 16 points and a season-high 23 rebounds Sunday, and Dennis Smith Jr., who had a front tooth knocked out in the third quarter, came up with a game-saving block to allow host Dallas Mavericks to earn their seventh consecutive home victory, 114-110 over the Los Angeles Clippers. Jordan was pivotal in the victory, scoring on a late tip-in and then tipping and stealing a Lou Williams pass attempt with 19 seconds to go and Dallas trying to hold onto a 111-110 lead. After the Mavericks went ahead 112-110, the Clippers called timeout and went inside to Tobias Harris. However, Smith blocked the shot and then made two free throws at the other end to seal the victory. Smith amassed nine points, five assists, two steals and two blocks. Dallas got huge contributions from Harrison Barnes, who finished with a game-high 30 points and nine rebounds, and reserve J.J. Barea finished with a season-high 24 points, four assists and five rebounds. Montrezl Harrell led Los Angeles with 23 points while Williams and Danilo Gallinari had 21 apiece.

LAKERS 120, SUNS 96

Kyle Kuzma had 23 points and eight rebounds to lead Los Angeles past the visiting Suns. The Lakers ran their winning streak to three and climbed a season-high five games above .500. LeBron James had 22 points, six rebounds and eight assists and Brandon Ingram had 15 points for the Lakers. Richaun Holmes scored a season-high 15 points off the bench, and Deandre Ayton finished with 10 points and 10 rebounds for the Suns, who have lost five in a row.

76ERS 103, GRIZZLIES 95

Jimmy Butler hit two free throws with 1:31 remaining and a jumper 41 seconds later to stave off a Memphis rally, helping host Philadelphia hang on for a win. Ben Simmons and Joel Embiid recorded double-doubles for the 76ers, who completed a 3-0 homestand with their fourth straight win. Butler finished with 21 points and JJ

Redick a team-high 24 for the 76ers. Mike Conley had a team-high 21 points and five assists for the Grizzlies, who have lost four of their last five games.

PELICANS 119, HORNETS 109

Anthony Davis had 36 points, 19 rebounds and eight assists, and visiting New Orleans handled Charlotte. Jrue Holiday added 19 points, and Nikola Mirotic scored 16 for the Pelicans. New Orleans won for just the second time in seven games while the Hornets lost for the fourth time in six games. Frank Kaminsky had 19 points to lead a strong effort from the Hornets' bench, which had a combined 67 points.

SPURS 131, TRAIL BLAZERS 118

DeMar DeRozan scored a season-high 36 points including 15 straight in the third quarter and LaMarcus Aldridge added 29 points on 11-of-15 shooting from the floor as host San Antonio Spurs defeated Portland. The Spurs snapped a two-game losing streak while the Blazers lost for the fifth time in six games. Rudy Gay added 18 points for San Antonio, with Patty Mills scoring 15. Damian Lillard led all scorers with 37 points and added 10 assists for Portland, while CJ McCollum added 24 points.

HEAT 102, JAZZ 100

Dwyane Wade made two free throws with 3.2 seconds left, and Miami defeated visiting Utah when Jazz star Donovan Mitchell saw his 3-point attempt from the left elbow bounce in and out. On the winning play, Wade drove to his right in a tie game and drew a foul on Jazz 7-foot-1 center Rudy Gobert, who went for the block. Mitchell scored 18 points, but he finished the game shooting just 8 of 24 from the floor. He also missed six of his seven 3-point tries. Miami's Hassan Whiteside had a monster game: 23 points, 20 rebounds and three blocks. It was his 11th career 20-20 game and his third this season. — Reuters



DALLAS: Harrison Barnes #40 of the Dallas Mavericks shoots the ball against the LA Clippers on Sunday at the American Airlines Center in Dallas, Texas. — AFP



KUWAIT: From left to right Al-Ghurba, Al-Osaimi, Karam, Butaiban and Al-Ibrahim.



Part of the general assembly

KSSC holds extraordinary general assembly

By Abdeltif Sharaa

KUWAIT: Kuwait Shooting Sport Club (KSSC) held an extraordinary general assembly Sunday at Sheikh Sabah Al-Ahmad Olympic shooting complex, to discuss and approve the new statute which was unanimously approved.

The meeting was attended by Deputy Chairman Mohammad Karam, Secretary General Obaid Al-

Osaimi, Treasurer Essa Butaiban, Assistant Secretary Eng Mohammad Al-Ghurba and Assistant Treasurer Adnan Al-Ibrahim.

Mohammad Karam welcomed those present and lauded their support of the board of directors. He also thanked HH the Amir Sheikh Sabah Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah, HH the Crown Prince Sheikh Nawaf Al-Ahmad, and Prime Minister HH Sheikh Jaber Al-Mubarak Al-Hamad Al-Sabah for their support of the

sport of shooting. Honorary president gave special thanks for Sheikh Salman Sabah Al-Salem Al-Humoud Al-Sabah.

Meanwhile, Secretary General Obaid Al-Osaimi thanked the general assembly members for being present to approve the new statute, and discuss the names of members of the election committee of KSSC, which will oversee all election procedures, and the statute was approved unanimously.

Coe in spotlight as IAAF mulls Russian reintegration

MONACO: Sebastian Coe will find himself firmly in the spotlight once again today as track and field's governing body mull over reintegrating doping-tainted Russia into world athletics. The Russian athletics federation (RUSAF) was initially banned by the Coe-headed IAAF in November 2015 over allegations of widespread government-backed doping fraud, with that suspension upheld eight times since.

The landscape has changed somewhat, however, with the World Anti-Doping Agency's September lifting of the three-year ban on Russia's anti-doping agency (RUSADA) for non-compliance.

WADA drew heavy international criticism when it voted to declare RUSADA "compliant", before being granted access to Moscow raw data. It responded by promising it will impose new sanctions if Russia did not cooperate by December 31 and a team visited the Russian capital last week.

The WADA decision has left the IAAF facing a tough decision and even led RUSAF to appeal against its IAAF suspension at the Court of Arbitration of Sport. Coe insisted, after WADA's decision to lift the ban, that Russia needed to meet two pre-conditions to be allowed to return to international athletics competition. Firstly, Russian authorities must acknowledge the findings of the McLaren and Schmid Commissions that sports ministry officials were implicated in the scheme to cover up the doping of Russian athletes as described in their reports.

And secondly Russian authorities must provide access to the data from testing of samples at the Moscow laboratory from 2011-2015, so that the Athletics Integrity Unit can determine whether the suspicious findings reported in the Moscow lab's database should be pursued.

"We need to see things out to the end," Frenchman Bernard Amsalem, a member of the IAAF Council, told AFP. "We imposed conditions and if those conditions aren't fulfilled, then we must extend the suspension of Russia."

In Tuesday's meeting in Monaco, Norwegian Rune Andersen, who heads up the IAAF's Russian taskforce team, will present his recommendations to the Council, after which Coe will call on the 26-strong body to vote on Russia's possible reintegration. "What would we do if WADA isn't able to get access to the laboratory data between now and December 31?" asked Amsalem in reference to WADA's demands that access to the Moscow lab be a condition of the continued reinstatement of RUSADA. "I know Council members, like me, who will not yield." While RUSAF has been banned, the IAAF has in fact given some leeway, allowing Russian athletes who could prove they were clean and training in proper environments to compete under a neutral flag.

"We've already reintegrated numerous athletes, we've left the door open for a little while," Amsalem said. The last full Russian athletics delegation competed at the 2015 Beijing world championships. Since then, one Russian competed in the Rio Olympics in 2016, 19 at the London world championships a year later and 72 at the European champs in Berlin in August. — AFP

Rahm wins Hero World Challenge

NASSAU: Jon Rahm says a putting tip last August from tournament host Tiger Woods helped the Spaniard to storm his way to a four-shot success at the Hero World Challenge on Sunday.

Rahm, 24, was never challenged over the final round, shooting a bogey-free 65 for a 20-under par total on the Albany course.

The win is Rahm's third success this season and a seventh victory in his short two-year pro career and in the process sees Rahm move to a career high No. 6 on the world rankings.

Rahm had shared the lead on both day two and day three and capped his closing round with three birdies in four holes from the sixth. Last September, Rahm was drawn in the Ryder Cup Sunday singles against boyhood idol Woods and delivered Europe their much-needed first point with two and one triumph.

Now Rahm has his name on Woods' Hero World Challenge trophy. "That Sunday with Tiger is one of the most emotional, most important moments in my golf career," said Rahm. "I started crying when I was shaking his hand because that meant so much to me to play against Tiger Woods."

"A couple of months later to win his event-his Foundation's event along with Hero, this is really special." And it was the putting tip on the practice green at East Lake that has now seen Rahm become the first Spanish winner of the Hero World Challenge.

"When we were at East Lake Tiger was putting next to me, I just can't putt on Bermuda as I had grown up in Spain on poa annua," said Rahm.

"Tiger kind of laughed and said 'it's all about feel out there'. In presenting me the trophy he said, 'Hey, that's a pretty good performance from someone who can't putt on Bermuda greens.'"

American Tony Finau holed a dramatic 10-footer for birdie at the last in a score of 69 for second place at 16-under and in the process denying Justin Rose from returning to World No. 1.

Rose, who eagled 15 in a last round 65, had been sharing second place in 15-under par and the assurance of again becoming World No. 1 only for Finau to pull the rug out from under the Englishman.

"It's not a huge goal for me to be No. 1, but when you have these opportunities you want to take them," said Rose. And Woods rounded-off his full-season return to competition with a tired-looking 73 to finish 17th in the 18-player field. "The entire year has been amazing and I've just been so blessed to have the opportunity," said Woods.

"To come from where I came from last year at this point to have the ability to actually play and compete again in the game and do it consistently is quite amazing."

Woods was then headed to his private jet to Los Angeles to board a Qantas flight to Melbourne and arriving today for a three-day Presidents Cup inspection and promotion of the event being staged later next year on the famed Royal Melbourne course. Woods, as the USA Team captain, is due to host a press conference on course Wednesday in Melbourne. —AFP



Nissan Al Babtain invites marathoners and visitors to participate and win a seat at UEFA CL final

KUWAIT: As an exclusive partner of the annual NBK walkathon, one of the largest ever marathons in Kuwait, Abdulmohsen Abdulaziz Al Babtain Company (AABC), the sole authorized dealer of Nissan vehicles in the State of Kuwait, encourages its fans to be part of the nationwide movement that seeks to create positive change. Being held on December 8th at Green Island, the annual walkathon titled "We're Stronger ... With Every Step" will bring together diversified segments and age groups to ensure everyone receives an equal opportunity to perform to the best of their athletic abilities.

Nissan Al Babtain's support of the annual event stems from its belief that sports and fitness play an important role in transforming the lives of everyone in the community for the better. As the

yearly race encourages both genders of different genres ranging from the youth, adults and older demographics to partake in a unified cause, Nissan Al Babtain remains committed to its corporate social responsibility to partner with positive role models and game changers in the Kuwaiti society.

Winners from each category are guaranteed valuable cash prizes they can take home. As an automotive partner, Nissan Al Babtain encourages the participants and visitors to participate at Nissan activation area for a chance to win double match ticket to the much anticipated UEFA Champions League Final Madrid 2019.

Nissan Al Babtain invites all to test their will and join the popular 11KM race to raise awareness on the need for a healthier lifestyle.

Sports

Anaheim Ducks rally from 4 down, edge Capitals 6-5

Jets escape 3-goal hole, top Rangers in shootout

WASHINGTON: Pontus Aberg scored the tiebreaker with 5:05 remaining and finished with two goals and one assist as the Anaheim Ducks rallied from a four-goal, second-period deficit and stunned the host Washington Capitals 6-5 on Sunday. Aberg scored his second goal of the game after a pass from Ryan Getzlaf (one goal, two assists). With Washington goalie Braden Holtby pulled away from the net, Aberg scored easily from the left side and completed the Ducks' comeback from a 5-1 deficit. The Ducks scored twice in the second period and added three more in the third to end Washington's seven-game winning streak. For the Ducks, Ryan Miller earned the win in relief of John Gibson, who gave up three goals in the first 13:19. Miller stopped 19 of the 21 shots he faced.

JETS 4, RANGERS 3 (SO)

Mark Scheifele scored the game-winning goal in the third round of a shootout as visiting Winnipeg rallied from a three-goal deficit in the third period to edge New York. Scheifele gave the Jets their second win in seven games when trailing through 40 minutes when he slowed down and put a wrist shot under Henrik Lundqvist's pads. Patrik Laine also scored in the second round of the shootout for Winnipeg, which outshot the Rangers by a 42-19 margin through regulation and overtime. Mika Zibanejad scored in the second round of the shootout but the Rangers lost for the fifth time in six games and also dropped to 5-0-2 when leading through two periods.

AVALANCHE 2, RED WINGS 0

Semyon Varlamov had 24 saves for his first shutout of the season, and Nathan MacKinnon and Gabriel Landeskog each had a goal and an assist as Colorado beat host Detroit. Mikko Rantanen, the leading scorer in the NHL, had assists on both goals. The Avalanche

have gone 9-0-2 since losing five in a row. Colorado's top line accounted for all the points, and the shutout is the first this season for the team. MacKinnon, who led the league in scoring in November and was named the NHL's second star for the month, kept up his strong play with his 19th goal of the season, on a second-period power play. Landeskog's empty-net goal sealed the win in the last minute.

SHARKS 3, CANADIENS 1

Joe Pavelski and Brent Burns each had a goal and an assist, and Martin Jones made 40 saves as visiting San Jose snapped a four-game losing streak with a victory over Montreal. Justin Braun also scored a goal for the Sharks, which won the final game of a five-game road trip (1-3-1). Jeff Petry scored for Montreal, which lost for the sixth time in seven games (1-4-2). Jones snapped a personal four-game losing streak and was brilliant in the third period when he recorded 21 saves. It was the first road victory for the Sharks dating back to a 4-3 overtime win at Anaheim on Oct. 28.

KINGS 2, HURRICANES 0

Alec Martinez scored the winning goal with 2:13 remaining, and Jonathan Quick delivered a sensational 34-save shutout as host Los Angeles beat Carolina and gave Quick his first win of the year and 50th career shutout. Going into the day's action, the Kings were the lowest-scoring team in the league and the Hurricanes were tied with the Arizona Coyotes for the second-least-productive offense. With overtime looming and the contest still scoreless, Martinez delivered the clutch goal-just his second of the season. Martinez drove to the net and neatly redirected Jake Muzzin's crossing pass into the cage. Kyle Clifford added an



WASHINGTON: Evgeny Kuznetsov #92 of the Washington Capitals skates with puck against the Anaheim Ducks during the second period at Capital One Arena on Sunday in Washington, DC. — AFP

empty-net goal with 53 seconds left.

FLAMES 3, BLACKHAWKS 2

Elias Lindholm and Derek Ryan each scored on the power play, and Calgary held on for a win at Chicago. Sean Monahan also scored for the Flames, who won

for the sixth time in the past eight games (6-1-1). Jonathan Toews and Dylan Strome scored in a losing effort for the Blackhawks, who have lost four straight and six of seven. Flames goaltender Mike Smith made 22 saves while the Blackhawks' Corey Crawford turned aside 38 shots. — Reuters

'King Kohli' spearheads India's charge to end drought Down Under

MUMBAI: Having proved his credentials as a batsman in Australia four years ago, Virat Kohli returns for a series Down Under that could well define his legacy as India captain.

Pundits once bracketed Kohli alongside Australia's Steve Smith, Joe Root from England and New Zealand's Kane Williamson as the batsmen who would go on to dominate world cricket but the India skipper's prolific run-scoring form and consistency has set him apart from the rest.

Kohli, who turned 30 last month, is the world's top-ranked batsman in both Tests and one-day internationals, with over 1,000 runs in both formats in the calendar year. Despite his achievements with the bat, Kohli has failed to achieve the success he craves as captain. India's home form remains strong, they last lost a test series at home in 2012, but Kohli's hopes of winning more series on foreign soil have been dashed with defeats in South Africa and England this year due to a lack of batting support.

He was the top scorer between both sides in South Africa with a hundred and a half century in a 2-1 series defeat, while in England he fared even better with two centuries and three fifties but still the tourists were beaten, 4-1.

The last time India toured Australia in 2014-15 Kohli scored four centuries in as many tests and notched 692 runs at a jaw-dropping average of 86.25. India ended up losing 2-0.

Kohli took over India's test captaincy during that series after Mahendra Singh Dhoni retired from the longest format and this time around he will be looking to achieve something no India captain has managed before - a series win in Australia.

With their opponents struggling to recover from a ball-tampering scandal that led to long bans for former captain Steve Smith, opener David Warner and batsman Cameron Bancroft, India may never have had a better chance to claim victory.

CURRENT FORM

Not since Sachin Tendulkar retired in 2013 has an Indian cricketer commanded the adulation Kohli enjoys. He became the fastest to reach 10,000 ODI runs in his 205th innings in October, eclipsing Tendulkar's record by an astounding 54 innings, and his performances have earned him rock star status in the cricket-mad country of 1.3 billion.

Kohli's single-minded drive for excellence mirrors that of Tendulkar, who accumulated over 34,000 runs and 100 centuries in a 24-year career. Like Tendulkar, Kohli has a near-flawless technique which helps him tackle pace and spin with equal ease, and India look to him every time they hit choppy waters, as they did for two decades with the retired batting great. In the run-up to the four-test series, which starts in Adelaide on Thursday, Australian pundits have been asking how the hosts can go about stopping Kohli but few have been able to provide a satisfactory answer.

Before arriving on Australian shores, Kohli hit a test hundred and three consecutive ODI centuries against the West Indies at home. He hit a sparkling 61 late last month to help his side to a series-levelling win in the three-match Twenty20 series against Australia. It will be no cakewalk for Kohli though.

Australia's bowling attack, comprising pace trio Mitchell Starc, Josh Hazlewood and Pat Cummins and spinner Nathan Lyon, is still something to be feared and the hosts believe they are good enough to beat any side in their home conditions. — Reuters

Williamson, Watling dig in after Yasir shines in final Test

ABU DHABI: New Zealand skipper Kane Williamson hit a fighting half century while BJ Watling batted with patience to delay leg-spinner Yasir Shah's bid to become the fastest to 200 wickets on the first day of the third and final Test in Abu Dhabi yesterday.

Williamson missed out on a 19th Test century but Watling was unbeaten on 42 as New Zealand closed on 229-7, a measured recovery after being reduced to 72-4 by a triple strike from Yasir in the first session. Yasir began his 33rd Test needing five wickets to become the fastest man to reach the milestone of 200 Test wickets. The record is currently 36 Tests, set 82 years ago by Australian legspinner Clarrie Grimmett.

Yasir managed 3-62 but was then thwarted by the fifth wicket stand of 104 in 249 balls between Williamson and Watling. He failed to take any more wickets in the last two sessions and still needs another two wickets to hit the 200-mark and claim the record.

Williamson struck seven boundaries but these were the bright points in a day when defence came first. The normally robust and aggressive Kiwi captain curbed his attacking instinct as he attempted to carve out a first innings that might give his side some leverage in the match. The scoring rarely got above two an over.

Watling also dug in and the pair batted right through the middle session. Williamson passed 50 in a Test for the 46th time but he was not able

to convert his innings into another hundred. Having reached 89 off 176 balls, he mistimed a clip off Hasan Ali shortly after tea and found a gleeful Asad Shafiq ouching the catch at short midwicket.

Off-spinner Bilal Asif took over from Yasir, claiming Colin de Grandhomme for 20 and Tim Southee for two to finish with 2-57. But Watling kept one end intact through his patient near-four hour batting, hitting only one boundary in his 180-ball display of self-denial.

With both teams needing a win to seal a series which is currently tied at 1-1, Yasir was the key and the leg-spinner induced a mini-collapse in the morning as the Kiwis slipped from 70-1 to 73-4 at lunch.

Yasir trapped opener Jeet Raval leg before with a faster one for 45. Raval reviewed but ball-tracking showed it would have hit leg stump. With his next ball, Yasir clean-bowled Ross Taylor as the batsman went back but completely missed the ball.

Henry Nicholls saved the hat-trick but shortly after he attempted to sweep and Yasir flicking the ball as it went through to bowl him around his legs. Yasir, whose 14 wickets helped Pakistan level the series in Dubai, has 25 wickets in the series so far.

It was teenage left-arm paceman Shaheen Shah Afridi, making his Test debut as a replacement for injured medium pacer Mohammad Abbas, who gave Pakistan their initial breakthrough and claim his first Test victim. The 18-year-old nipped one back sharply to rap opener Tom Latham on the pads. Pakistan reviewed the on-field not out decision and were rewarded when ball-tracking showed the ball would have cannoned into the stumps.

New Zealand, who won the first Test by four runs in Abu Dhabi, brought in fast bowler Tim Southee and off-spinner Will Somerville in place of Neil Wagner and Ish Sodhi. — AFP



ABU DHABI: New Zealand captain Kane Williamson (2L) plays a shot as Pakistani captain and wicketkeeper Sarfraz Ahmed (L) looks on during the first day of the third and final Test cricket match between Pakistan and New Zealand at the Sheikh Zayed International Cricket Stadium in Abu Dhabi yesterday. — AFP

SCOREBOARD

Scoreboard on day one of the third and final Test between Pakistan and New Zealand played at Sheikh Zayed Stadium yesterday:

New Zealand 1st innings		Extras: (b 8, lb 6)	
J. Raval lbw b Yasir	45	Total: (for seven wkts: 90 overs)	14
T. Latham lbw b Shaheen	4	Stil to bat: Ajaz Patel, T. Boulton	229
K. Williamson c Shafiq b Hasan	89	Fall of wickets: 1-24 (Latham), 2-70 (Raval), 3-70 (Taylor), 4-72 (Nicholls), 5-176 (Williamson), 6-203 (Grandhomme), 7-209 (Southee)	
R. Taylor b Yasir	0	Bowling: Hasan 16-5-46-1, Shaheen 17-4-43-1, Yasir 31-9-62-3, Asif 24-2-57-2, Harris 2-0-7-0.	
H. Nicholls b Yasir	1		
BJ Watling not out	42		
C. de Grandhomme c Shafiq b Asif	20		
T. Southee c Azam b Asif	2		
W. Somerville not out	12		

Chris Gayle wins Australia masseuse defamation payout

SYDNEY: West Indies cricket star Chris Gayle yesterday won a Aus\$300,000 (US\$221,000) payout from an Australian media group which claimed he exposed his genitals to a massage therapist.

The all-rounder was accused by Fairfax Media, publisher of The Sydney Morning Herald and The Age, in a series of stories in the newspapers in 2016. They alleged he exposed his penis and indecently propositioned the woman in a dressing room at the 2015 World Cup in Sydney.

Gayle strenuously denied the allegations, claiming at the time that the journalists behind the story wanted to "destroy him". His teammate Dwayne Smith, who was in the changing room at the time, also denied the incident took place. He won his defamation case in October last year, with jurors finding Fairfax was motivated by malice and had failed to establish a defence of truth.

New South Wales Supreme Court Justice Lucy McCallum said in awarding the payout that being accused of such conduct was "very damaging to Mr Gayle's reputation", according to a report in Fairfax newspapers.

She added that Gayle's evidence on hurt to his feelings was "surprisingly compelling". Fairfax said it planned to lodge an immediate appeal. The publication of the stories followed an uproar after Gayle attempted to flirt with an Australian presenter on live TV, asking her out for a drink and telling her: "Don't blush, baby." After winning the court case, Gayle tried to spark a bidding war for a tell-all interview on the case, promising that "when I break this down to y'all it will be like a movie". "Biding (sic) starts at US\$300K for this interview! So much to say & I will!" he tweeted to his then 3.75 million followers. There were no takers. — AFP

England named hosts of Women's Euro 2021

LONDON: England will host the women's European Championship in 2021 with the final set for Wembley Stadium a year after the venue hosts the climax of the men's edition, European soccer's governing body UEFA announced yesterday.

The Football Association's (FA) bid to stage the tournament was unchallenged, granting the 2017 semi-finalists automatic qualification for the 16-team tournament as hosts. "England has been selected to host UEFA Women's Euro 2021, with 16 teams to compete in July of that year," UEFA said in a statement.

The FA's chief executive officer Martin Glenn said bringing the event to England was an opportunity to celebrate women's soccer and help their efforts to grow the game. "We cannot underestimate the positive impact this tournament will have on inspiring the

next generation," Glenn added.

"Young girls and boys will be lifted by the chance to see Europe's elite on their doorstep and it can only help the effort across our leagues and clubs to grow the game even further." England hosted the smaller Women's Euro 2005, which featured eight teams, at venues across the north-west of the country.

More than 29,000 spectators watched England's opening win against Finland in Manchester, a record for an opening group match. The FA said Brighton & Hove Albion's Amex Stadium and Southampton's St Mary's Stadium were among a number of venues being considered for the 2021 tournament. The draw for the qualifying group stage will be held in February next year. The Netherlands beat Denmark 4-2 to lift the 2017 title on home soil. — Reuters

Sports

Neymar injury concern after Bordeaux end PSG's flawless run

Marseille drop points after a goalless draw at Reims

PARIS: Paris Saint-Germain are again sweating on Neymar's fitness on Sunday after the superstar attacker left the field at Bordeaux clutching his groin before Andreas Cornelius' late header ended the French champions perfect start to the Ligue 1 season.

Brazilian Neymar was substituted 57 minutes into the hugely entertaining 2-2 draw the Matmut Atlantique stadium, in which he had opened the scoring and had looked in great form before having to head to the dressing room with what looks to be an injury to the same adductor muscle that nearly stopped him from scoring the decisive goal in Wednesday's huge 2-1 win over Liverpool.

"I don't know at all (what his injury is). We have to be careful, he said it was not a problem to play tonight but the pitch was hard and I hope he will be in good shape after Strasbourg," said PSG coach Thomas Tuchel, referring to his side's must-win final Champions League group game at Red Star Belgrade in nine days' time. The Ligue 1 leaders, who had won all 14 of their league matches going into Sunday's pulsating clash, had to wait until the last minute to see if Neymar and strike partner Kylian Mbappe would be ready for the win over the Reds, who now face an uphill battle for qualification to the Champions League last 16 thanks to Neymar's first-half winner last week. The pair twice put PSG in front on Sunday, but Jimmy Briand and Cornelius ensured that Bordeaux became the first French team to stop the runaway leaders this season.

However the result is unlikely to slow down PSG's march to the title, as they still stand 14 points ahead of nearest challengers Montpellier, who took advantage of Lyon drawing 2-2 at Lille to sneak into second with a 2-1 win at Thierry Henry's struggling Monaco on

Saturday. PSG's arch rivals Marseille failed to make most of their fellow Champions League chasers dropping points after a goalless draw at Reims on Sunday. Rudi Garcia's side stay fifth.

Meanwhile mid-table Toulouse drew 2-2 with fellow relegation rivals Dijon and Strasbourg routed Rennes 4-1. Neymar's opener for PSG came after a spell of concerted Bordeaux pressure and at the end of a superb exchange with countryman Dani Alves, who on his first start of the season flashed in a powerful cross that was crashed home first-time by number 10.

His 11th league goal of the season took some time to be awarded however, as the VAR dithered over whether Mbappe was offside and interfering with the play as he flashed a leg at Neymar's shot.

That goal looked to have broken Bordeaux, and Angel Di Maria, who had fluffed a golden chance laid on for him by Neymar earlier in the half, then struck the post in first-half stoppage time as the home side rocked under pressure. However the hosts fought back again after the break, and they got their first reward when Briand slotted home a fine cross from the lively Yann Karamoah.

Neymar was substituted shortly afterwards and Bordeaux smelled blood, but Mbappe turned the match in PSG's favour, latching on to Julian Draxler's through ball before crashing home what looked to be the winner and almost immediately asking to be substituted with an apparent muscle problem.

Tuchel didn't remove the 19-year-old however, and he was there to see Cornelius meet Maxime Poundje's cross with such force that PSG keeper Alphonse Areola couldn't stop his header from crossing the line and ending PSG's 100 percent start. — AFP



BORDEAUX: Paris Saint-Germain's Brazilian defender Marquinhos (L) vies with Bordeaux's Brazilian midfielder Otavio (R) during the French L1 football match Bordeaux vs Paris Saint-Germain (PSG), on Sunday in Bordeaux, southwestern France. — AFP

Roma stall Inter 2-2, AC Milan move fourth in Serie A

MILAN: Roma battled back for a 2-2 draw which denied Inter Milan second place in Serie A on Sunday in a Stadio Olimpico thriller between two sides looking to impress after losing in Europe during the week.

Keita Balde Diao gave Inter the half-time lead amid Roma fury at having a penalty appeal denied, but the side from the capital powered back with a Cendiz Under scorcher after the break.

Aleksandar Kolarov slotted in a penalty to seal a point for the Romans to cancel out Inter captain Mauro Icardi's header.

Inter-who lost to Tottenham Hotspur in the Champions League midweek-remain third, level on 29 points with second-placed Napoli who travel to Atalanta later. Champions Juventus opened up an 11-point lead on Napoli with a 3-0 win at Fiorentina Saturday with Cristiano Ronaldo scoring from the spot to bag his 10th goal in 14 games.

"It was a very entertaining match for all watching and I think a valuable point for both teams," said Inter coach Luciano Spalletti. "It shows we are on the right track." Roma-who advanced to the Champions League knockout rounds despite losing to Real Madrid-have only won one of their last six league matches and are down in seventh place. Eusebio Di Francesco's side were furious they were denied a penalty call after Danilo D'Ambrosio tripped Nicolozani before Keita broke through after 37 minutes.

D'Ambrosio then set up Senegalese winger Keita to blast in a volley from close range. "It's shameful," said AS Roma legend Francesco Totti. "I want to know, and we all do, how those in the VAR booth didn't see that foul. We all saw it on a far smaller screen."

Turkish winger Under pulled Roma level six minutes after the break rifling in from distance to stun Samir Handanovic in the Inter goal. Icardi rose to head in a corner on 66 minutes before Kolarov slotted in a penalty on 73 awarded after Marcelo Brozovic's arm touched the ball. The match ended in drama with former Roma boss Spalletti banished from the sidelines for dissent to cheers from the Stadio Olimpico crowd.

Inter are now four points ahead of city rivals AC Milan who moved fourth after Patrick Cutrone and Frank Kessie sealed a 2-1 comeback win over promot-



ROME: AS Roma Turkish forward Cengiz (L) Under fights for the ball with Inter Milan defender from Slovakia Milan Skriniar during the Italian Serie A football match at the Olympic stadium in Rome on Sunday. — AFP

ed Parma. Lazio dropped to fifth a point back after being held 1-1 at bottom club Chievo. It was a hard-fought victory for Milan who have a number of injured players out along with suspended Argentine forward Gonzalo Higuain.

"This is a precious win because we played against a team who can trouble you in every moment," said Gattuso. "This team is incredible, the boys always show grit, determination. They are giving their all, it's easy to coach a group like that."

Roberto Inglese nodded in his fourth goal this season for Parma from a corner five minutes after the break but Milan pulled one back six minutes later thanks to Cutrone volleying home.

Kessie slotted in Milan's second from the spot on 71 minutes after Alessandro Bastoni was deemed after consultation with VAR to have handled the ball. Parma drop to ninth and are now five points behind AC Milan who occupy the final Champions League berth.

In Verona, Ciro Immobile grabbed a point for Lazio against a Chievo side still looking for their first win of the season, but who held Napoli 0-0 last weekend. Chievo captain Sergio Pellissier, 39, opened for the hosts after 25 minutes, as Lazio were unable to turn their domination into goals.

Italy forward Immobile finally broke through after 66 minutes for his ninth goal of the season following a one-two with Argentine Joaquin Correa. Immobile rattled the bar ten minutes later but Simone Inzaghi's side were unable to find the three points and drop to fifth.

"It was the worst first half I'd seen in my three years in this job," said Inzaghi. "I wanted to replace all 11 players at half-time." "For the first time this season, we are not in the top four." Earlier Torino-with coach Walter Mazzarri back on the bench after a health scare-rallied past 10-man Genoa 2-1 to move sixth. Sassuolo dropped out of the European places following a goalless draw at Udinese. — AFP

Spurs fan arrested after banana skin thrown onto pitch

LONDON: A football fan has been arrested after a banana skin was thrown onto the pitch at the Emirates Stadium as Arsenal forward Pierre-Emerick Aubameyang celebrated scoring a penalty in front of Tottenham fans.

The Gunners won a memorable match 4-2 on Sunday and London's Metropolitan Police afterwards confirmed there were seven arrests made. Britain's Press Association said it understands that one of those arrests came after a banana skin was hurled from the away end as Aubameyang celebrated scoring in front of the Tottenham fans.

"Behaviour such as this is completely unacceptable and the supporter in question will be issued with a ban," a Tottenham spokesman said. There were also six arrests for public order offences-at least two of which are believed to be Arsenal supporters who lit smoke canisters during the match.

Former Arsenal and England forward Ian Wright, speaking as a pundit on BBC television, said: "I've played against Spurs and I've taken a lot of abuse from Spurs but never ever has it been racial. "Now Spurs have to deal with this because some idiot has done that."

"It's not only embarrassed Spurs but it has embarrassed the Premier League because it has gone around the world, and now Spurs have to deal with that and have that tainting all over them. It's really unfortunate to see."

Gabon forward Aubameyang opened the scoring on Sunday with his 10th-minute spot-kick and, after Tottenham had replied through Eric Dier and a Harry Kane penalty, then equalised early in the second half.

Alexandre Lacazette put the hosts 3-2 up before Lucas Torreira added Arsenal's fourth. Aubameyang had opened the scoring before an Eric Dier header and a Harry Kane spot-kick sent Spurs in ahead at half-time.

The Gabon forward went on to equalise, with Arsenal wrapping up the points through Alexandre Lacazette and Lucas Torreira strikes. The unrest was not restricted to the stands as the two sets of players had to be separated following Dier's equaliser on a feisty afternoon in north London.

The England midfielder celebrated by putting his finger to his lips, with Arsenal substitute Stephan Lichtsteiner reacting angrily to the gesture and referee Mike Dean showing Dier a yellow card. —AFP

England to face Netherlands in Nations League semi-finals

DUBLIN: England will meet the Netherlands for a place in the inaugural Nations League final with hosts Portugal facing Switzerland in the other semi-final after yesterday's draw in Dublin. Portugal and Switzerland will meet in Porto on June 5 with England and the Netherlands clashing in Guimaraes on June 6.

The third-place playoff and final will take place on June 9, with the latter game being staged in Porto. All four sides qualified for UEFA's new competition-designed to replace meaningless friendly matches with competitive internationals-by winning their three-team groups in the top tier of the Nations League.

England came from behind to late on to beat Croatia 2-1 at Wembley last month and leap from bottom of a

group also including Spain to the top. The Netherlands also needed a late show to edge out world champions France by scoring twice in the final five minutes in a 2-2 draw away to Germany.

However, Switzerland arguably produced the most stunning comeback in overturning a 2-0 deficit against Belgium to win 5-2 in their final group game. European champions Portugal were unbeaten in four games against Poland and Italy to secure their place and the honour of hosting the tournament.

There could be disappointment for some travelling fans, though, as the Dom Afonso Henriques stadium in Guimaraes holds just 30,000 with England and the Dutch both expected to bring a strong support. — AFP

Aguero gives Man City injury scare

LONDON: Pep Guardiola said he was warned by club doctors that top scorer Sergio Aguero could be ruled out until January if he aggravated a muscle injury. The Argentina international missed Saturday's 3-1 win over Bournemouth and is doubtful to face Watford and Chelsea this week. "The doctors told me (on Friday) Sergio cannot play," Guardiola said. "If he plays, maybe it's four or five weeks off. In that situation, this month, with a lot of games, he was not safe." City's all-time top scorer appears unlikely to make the trip to Vicarage Road today or Stamford Bridge on Saturday.

"Right now, I'm not quite sure," Guardiola said when asked about the availability of Aguero, who has eight Premier League goals this season. "I speak with the doctors every day, they make a report and

a briefing," he added. "They say 'ready' or 'not ready' and we decide."

Gabriel Jesus started against Bournemouth in Aguero's absence but was unable to add to his single league goal so far this season for the Premier League pacesetters. Aguero's form has limited the Brazilian's playing time recently but the 21-year-old said he was ready to contribute if needed following his own injury concerns, which saw him miss last week's Champions League win over Lyon.

"I've been training really hard, maybe that's why I felt something in my groin last week," Jesus said. "Unfortunately I was out of the Champions League match that I really wanted to play. "I always make it clear for Pep that I'm here to help the team regardless of how. Obviously that I want to play more minutes, but I respect who is playing at the moment." Guardiola praised Jesus's all-round contribution against Bournemouth and said he had no concerns over the lack of league goals. "We just relax," Guardiola said. "It's work, this work ethic he has. Always I said to him-when you work like he works on the pitch, always we will sustain him. We will always be there." — AFP



Matches on TV

(Local Timings)

ENGLISH PREMIER LEAGUE		
West Ham United v Cardiff City	beIN SPORTS	22:45
Brighton & Hove Albion v Crystal Palace FC	beIN SPORTS	22:45
Bournemouth FC v Huddersfield Town	beIN SPORTS	22:45
Watford v Manchester City	beIN SPORTS HD 2	23:00
FRENCH LEAGUE		
OGC Nice v SCO Angers	beIN SPORTS	21:00
Amiens SC v AS Monaco FC	beIN SPORTS	21:00
Montpellier HSC v LOSC Lille	beIN SPORTS	23:00

25 Jordan lifts Mavs over Clippers, Butler, 76ers hold off Grizzlies



26 Williamson, Watling dig in after Yasir shines in final Test



27 Neymar injury concern after Bordeaux end PSG's flawless run



Rams grab NFC West division crown

Chargers overtake Pittsburgh Steelers 33-30



DETROIT: Quarterback Matthew Stafford #9 of the Detroit Lions is sacked by Ndamukong Suh #93 of the Los Angeles Rams and Dante Fowler #56 during the first half at Ford Field on Sunday in Detroit, Michigan. —AFP

LOS ANGELES: Todd Gurley rushed for 132 yards and two touchdowns as Los Angeles clinched the NFC West title by pulling away from host Detroit. Jared Goff completed 17 of 33 passes for 207 yards and a touchdown for the Rams (11-1) while getting picked off once. Robert Woods caught five passes for 67 yards and a score. Matthew Stafford completed 20 of 33 passes for 245 yards with a touchdown and an interception for the Lions (4-8).

CHARGERS 33, STEELERS 30

Rookie Michael Badgley kicked a 29-yard field goal with no time left Sunday night to give the visiting Los Angeles Chargers a 33-30 win over the Pittsburgh Steelers. At the game's end, Badgley missed a 39-yard attempt and had a 34-yard try blocked, both with no time left, but the Steelers were offside both times. The Chargers (9-3) erased a 16-point halftime deficit to win for the eighth time in nine games. The Steelers (7-4-1) have lost two straight following a six-game win streak. Philip Rivers threw for 299 yards and two touchdowns for the Chargers. Ben Roethlisberger passed for 281 yards for Pittsburgh, with scoring passes to Antonio Brown (10 catches, 154 yards) and Jaylen Samuels, and James Conner ran for two touchdowns before leaving in the fourth quarter with a lower right leg injury.

CARDINALS 20, PACKERS 17

Green Bay's home loss to Arizona cost coach Mike McCarthy his job. The Packers (4-7-1) fell at Lambeau Field despite being 14-point favorites over the Cardinals (3-9). Josh Rosen led the Cardinals to the go-ahead field goal, a 44-yarder by Zane Gonzalez, with 1:41 remaining. On third-and-23 earlier in the drive, Rosen scrambled to his right and found timeless veteran Larry Fitzgerald, who made a diving, 32-yard reception. Packers quarterback Aaron Rodgers subsequently converted a fourth-and-5 with a 7-yard pass to Jimmy Graham, moved the chains with a completion to Robert Tonyan and gained 11 on a scramble. That got the Packers into field-goal range, but Mason Crosby was wide right from 49 yards out as time expired.

PATRIOTS 24, VIKINGS 10

Tom Brady threw for 311 yards and the tiebreaking touchdown as New England retained the No. 2 seed in the AFC playoff picture by subduing Minnesota in

Foxborough, Mass. Brady, who completed 24 of 32 passes, found Josh Gordon over the middle for a 24-yard scoring strike with 35 seconds left in the third quarter that made it 17-10. James Develin added his second short scoring run on the next drive for the Patriots (9-3), going 2 yards with 10:54 remaining in the game to set the final margin. Kirk Cousins completed 32 of 44 passes but for just 201 yards with a touchdown and two interceptions for Minnesota (6-5-1).

TEXANS 29, BROWNS 13

Ka'imi Fairbairn kicked five field goals, and host Houston converted all three Baker Mayfield interceptions into points in a victory over Cleveland. The Texans (9-3) extended their franchise-best winning streak to nine games by capitalizing on the Browns' error-prone rookie quarterback. By the time Mayfield engineered a 75-yard touchdown drive to open the second half, the Browns (4-7-1) trailed 23-0. Deshaun Watson completed his opening 11 pass attempts as Houston scored to conclude its first two possessions. Watson passed for 224 yards but was sacked four times. Mayfield opened the second half 10 of 10 for 219 yards and finished 29 of 43 for 397 passing yards and a touchdown pass.

GIANTS 30, BEARS 27 (OT)

Odell Beckham Jr. threw one touchdown pass and caught another score, and New York held on for an overtime win over Chicago in East Rutherford, N.J. Aldrick Rosas kicked a tiebreaking field goal from 44 yards on the Giants' first possession of overtime. New York (4-8) then relied on its defense to stop the final drive from the Bears, who forced overtime by erasing a 10-point deficit in the final 75 seconds. Adam Shaheen, Akiem Hicks and Anthony Miller scored touchdowns for Chicago (8-4), which had its winning streak snapped at five games. Tarik Cohen took the ball on a reverse and tossed a 1-yard touchdown pass to Miller to even the score on the final play of regulation.

SEAHAWKS 43, 49ERS 16

Russell Wilson threw four touchdown passes, and Bobby Wagner returned an interception 98 yards for a score as Seattle defeated visiting San Francisco. The Seahawks (7-5) won their third straight game while the 49ers (2-10) took their third consecutive loss. Wilson com-

pleted 11 of 17 passes for 185 yards. The Seahawks, who have the league's top rushing offense, added 168 yards on the ground. Chris Carson had 13 carries for 69 yards, and first-round draft pick Rashaad Penny had 65 yards and a touchdown on seven carries.

BUCCANEERS 24, PANTHERS 17

Jameis Winston threw two touchdown passes, and host Tampa Bay picked off four passes from Carolina's Cam Newton. Winston was 20 of 30 for 249 yards without an interception as the Buccaneers (5-7) avenged a November loss. The Panthers (6-6) lost their fourth game in a row and fell to 1-5 in road games. Newton finished 28 of 41 for 300 yards and two touchdowns. It was his first four-interception game since his rookie season in 2011.

CHIEFS 40, RAIDERS 33

Patrick Mahomes threw three touchdown passes in the first three quarters and a fourth with 1:54 remaining, allowing Kansas City to build a big lead and then hold off a late rally by host Oakland. The Chiefs (10-2) put up 30 or more points for the 10th time this season and 40-plus for a fifth time en route to their AFC-best 10th win. Oakland (2-10) joined San Francisco as the NFL's first 10-loss teams. Mahomes threw 3- and 6-yard touchdown passes to Travis Kelce and a 13-yarder to Demetrius Harris, the latter building a 33-16 lead with four seconds remaining in the third period. Derek Carr connected on a pair of fourth-quarter TD passes to get Oakland within 33-30 with 6:46 to play before Mahomes drove the Chiefs 75 yards in 10 plays for the clinching score, a 2-yard TD pass to Chris Conley.

RAVENS 26, FALCONS 16

Baltimore held host Atlanta to 131 net yards and improved to 3-0 with rookie Lamar Jackson at quarterback. Jackson had a 13-yard touchdown run in the first quarter and finished with 125 yards passing and 75 rushing despite missing a good part of the third quarter while being evaluated for a possible concussion. Tavon Young returned a Matt Ryan fumble on a sack 11 yards for a clinching touchdown midway in the fourth quarter, shortly after Justin Tucker had hit from 47 yards for his fourth field goal of the game. Baltimore (7-5) rushed for 207 yards while holding Atlanta to 34 on the ground. The Falcons (4-8) took their fourth straight loss. —Reuters

Modric tipped to pip French stars to Ballon d'Or and end Ronaldo, Messi era

PARIS: The winner of the 2018 Ballon d'Or will be revealed at a glittering ceremony in Paris late last night, with Croatia's Luka Modric and a host of French World Cup winners all hoping to finally end the 10-year duopoly of Cristiano Ronaldo and Lionel Messi.

Ronaldo and Messi have dominated the award for the last decade, claiming it five times each, but the expectation is that a new name will be read out as this year's winner at just after 10pm (2100 GMT) at the Grand Palais, just off the Champs-Elysees.

While Ronaldo won another Champions League with Real Madrid in a typically prolific year, and Messi continues to mesmerise for Barcelona, both are now in their 30s and neither really stamped their authority on the World Cup in Russia.

That could be crucial. As FIFA president Gianni Infantino said recently: "You could give the Ballon d'Or to half the France team for what they did at the World Cup."

Six members of the France side that triumphed in Russia are among the 30 nominees for the award, which is organised by France Football magazine and voted for by 180 journalists from around the world.

Among them are Paris Saint-Germain's dazzling teenage forward Kylian Mbappe, Atletico Madrid striker Antoine Griezmann and Madrid's Champions League-winning defender Raphael Varane. Hugo Lloris, Paul Pogba and N'Golo Kante are also in the running. The last Frenchman to win the Ballon d'Or was Zinedine Zidane in 1998, on the back of France's World Cup victory on home soil that year. —AFP