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Two MPs unseated after court rules bylaw is unconstitutional

Opposition warns ruling strips Assembly of powers

Defense minister gifts rare object to Chinese museum



BEIJING: Kuwait's First Deputy Prime Minister and Defense Minister Sheikh Nasser Sabah Al-Ahmad Al-Sabah gives a rare antique to the Poly Art Museum yesterday. — KUNA

KUWAIT: Kuwait's First Deputy Prime Minister and Defense Minister Sheikh Nasser Sabah Al-Ahmad Al-Sabah has given China's Poly Art Museum a rare antique out of his own personal collection. The Chinese museum received the exquisite object, which is believed to date back to a turbulent era in Chinese history - circa 422 to 771 BC - in a lavish ceremony yesterday, read a statement by the Kuwaiti Embassy in Beijing. The antique, which belongs to HH the Amir's envoy, resembles a phoenix, which in Chinese mythology is a sacred bird that symbolizes resurrection, the statement revealed, emphasizing "recent progress" in Kuwait's ties with the world's most populous nation. — KUNA

ny yesterday, read a statement by the Kuwaiti Embassy in Beijing. The antique, which belongs to HH the Amir's envoy, resembles a phoenix, which in Chinese mythology is a sacred bird that symbolizes resurrection, the statement revealed, emphasizing "recent progress" in Kuwait's ties with the world's most populous nation. — KUNA

By B Izzak

KUWAIT: The constitutional court yesterday ruled that article 16 of the National Assembly's charter is unconstitutional, in a verdict that means unseating opposition MPs Waleed Al-Tabtabaei and Jamaan Al-Harbash. Opposition MPs described the ruling as "very dangerous", saying it represents an interference by the court in the Assembly's authority and called for introducing legislation to restrict the powers of the country's highest court, whose rulings cannot be challenged.

Assembly Speaker Marzouq Al-Ghanem declined to comment on the ruling before receiving it through official channels, but at least 10 opposition lawmakers decided to send a letter to the Assembly to discuss the consequences of the verdict on the future of the parliament. Article 16 was used by the Assembly in October to retain the membership of Tabtabaei and Harbash even after the court of cassation sentenced them to jail for storming the Assembly building in Nov 2011.

Tabtabaei, Harbash and about a dozen former MPs and opposition activists who were convicted have left the country to avoid serving the jail terms. After the two lawmakers received the jail sentences, a constitutional controversy erupted on whether they should lose or keep their seats. The Assembly decided that it has the right to vote on the issue based on article 16 of its internal charter. It voted in favor of keeping the seats.

In its 11-page verdict, the court insisted that



Waleed Al-Tabtabaei



Jamaan Al-Harbash

the voting process the Assembly undertook and its decision to keep the membership of the two lawmakers represents a "flagrant interference" in its authority. The court also said that members of the Assembly automatically lose their seats once they receive a final condemnation in a criminal case, and accordingly Tabtabaei and Harbash should have lost their seats immediately after they were sentenced.

Constitutional expert Mohammad Al-Fili said the verdict means that both Harbash and Tabtabaei have lost their seats and the

Assembly must officially announce procedures for holding by-elections. Harbash warned in a tweet that the consequences of the verdict will prevent the Assembly from considering the membership of its members. He said that this would mean that the membership of MPs can be easily stripped through a governmental administrative decision without allowing the Assembly to do anything.

Following the ruling, 10 opposition MPs held an urgent meeting to discuss its impact.

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News in brief

FM sees deal on neutral zone

KUWAIT: Kuwaiti Deputy Prime Minister and Foreign Minister Sheikh Sabah Al-Khaled Al-Hamad Al-Sabah said yesterday "meetings with our brothers in Saudi Arabia are continuing, and in the near future we will reach an agreement on the neutral zone". He made the remark during a joint news conference with visiting Dutch Foreign Minister Stef Blok. He affirmed that Kuwaiti-Saudi talks over the Gulf crisis are continuing, saying: "Saudi Arabia is a major sisterly country with which we are continuously in touch anytime and everywhere, regarding all issues". On a recently reported Middle East alliance, he said "Kuwait is in contact with its partners in the US to look into the details of the proposal for establishing this new alliance." — KUNA

Kuwait eyes workers from Ghana

KUWAIT: Director General of the Public Authority for Manpower Ahmad Al-Moussa met yesterday with deputy head of Ghana's diplomatic mission and discussed a possible recruitment of labor from Ghana. In a press release, Moussa said they discussed the mechanism of organizing the recruitment process for employers in the field of construction, agricultural activity and domestic employment. He expressed his happiness at this meeting, assuring the authority is fully prepared to cooperate with those involved in the recruitment of labor from Ghana. The Ghanaian official praised the excellent relationship between Kuwait and Ghana, thanking Kuwait for its services to his country. — KUNA

Storm in teacup over teabags

LONDON: Britons are up in arms over new environmentally-friendly teabags that leave a bitter taste in the mouth as they split open, spilling their contents into teacups across the land. Yorkshire Tea, the country's second biggest brand, launched the new biodegradable teabags in June. The new bags, which no longer rely on plastic to stay sealed, are splitting when dunked in hot water. "Hi @YorkshireTea this is the 10th teabag to split from this box. I don't like drinking the leaves," wrote Bill Fyfe, posting a photo of his cup with floating leaves. The famous brand, which is planning to sell only biodegradable teabags from 2019, apologized to customers and said it was doing everything to resolve the problem. Some 160 million cups of tea are consumed every day in Britain and floating tea leaves are a major no-no. — AFP

US begins to pull forces from Syria

WASHINGTON: The United States said yesterday it has begun withdrawing US forces from Syria as US officials said the United States was considering pulling out all its troops as it winds up its campaign to retake territory once held by Islamic State. "We have started returning United States troops home as we transition to the next phase of this campaign," White House spokeswoman Sarah Sanders said in a statement issued after President Donald Trump tweeted that "We have defeated ISIS in Syria, my only reason for being there."

The stunning move will have extraordinary geopolitical ramifications and

throws into question the fate of US-backed Kurdish fighters who have been tackling IS militants. Only last week Brett McGurk, the special envoy to defeat IS, said: "nobody is declaring a mission accomplished." It was not immediately clear from Sanders' statement whether all of the roughly 2,000 US troops in the country would leave and if so, by when. Sanders suggested that the United States would remain engaged to some degree. "The United States and our allies stand ready to re-engage at all levels to defend American interests whenever necessary, and we will continue to work together to deny radical Islamist terrorists territory, funding, support," she said.

A decision to pull out completely, if confirmed, would upend assumptions about a longer-term US military presence in Syria, which senior US officials have advocated to help ensure Islamic State cannot reemerge.

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Drone delivers vaccine to baby on Vanuatu isle

KUALA LUMPUR: A one-month-old baby in Vanuatu has become the first person in the world to be immunized using vaccines delivered by a commercial drone, the United Nations said, raising hopes that the method could save lives in other far-flung areas. The drone flew for 25 minutes across 40 km of mountainous terrain to get to the Cook's Bay area on the island of Erromango, which would otherwise have taken hours to reach on foot or by boat.

Vanuatu is the world's first government to contract a commercial drone company to deliver vaccines, according to the U.N. children agency, UNICEF, which called the successful trial on Tuesday a "big leap for global health". A nurse picked up the vaccines, including those that immunize against polio and tuberculosis, and administered them to 13 children and five pregnant mothers. "As the journey is often long and difficult, I can only go there once a month to vaccinate children. But now, with these drones, we can hope to reach many more children in the remotest areas of the island," the nurse, Miriam Nampil, told UNICEF.

"It is very innovative. I hope it will extend to a wider region," said Gina Dehinavanua, of humanitarian agency CARE International, yesterday. "It will help our kids and ensure those aged between zero and five have all the necessary vaccines to grow up as a child," she told the Thomson Reuters Foundation by phone from Vanuatu's capital, Port Vila.

The Pacific island nation, with about 280,000 people spread across roughly 80 islands, is one of the world's poorest countries. Only about a third of its inhabited islands have airfields and proper roads. Out of every 1,000 babies born in Vanuatu, 28 die before they reach the age of five, according to UNICEF data from 2016, while only one in five children is fully immunized.

Vaccines are difficult to transport as they need to be kept at specific temperatures. During the drone flight, they were kept in Styrofoam boxes with ice-packs and a temperature sensor. "With the world still struggling to immunize the hardest to reach children, drone technologies can be a game changer for bridging that last mile to reach every child," UNICEF executive director Henrietta Fore said in a statement. Drone deliveries will be tested in more villages across the archipelago before Vanuatu's government decides if the method will be used more widely. Although drones have been used to deliver medicines before, they have yet to be deployed on a large scale for humanitarian purposes. — Agencies



MANBIJ, Syria: In this file photo taken on March 5, 2017, a convoy of US armored vehicles drives near the village of Yalanli. — AFP

Yemeni mom to see dying son after US visa waiver

SAN FRANCISCO: A mother from Yemen was granted Tuesday her wish to see her dying toddler one last time in the United States, which agreed to issue her a waiver from its ban on citizens from several Muslim-majority countries. Two-year-old Abdullah Hassan, a US citizen like his father, suffers from a rare genetic brain condition and is on life support in a hospital in Oakland, California. But his mother, Shaima Swileh, had been unable to join him due to President Donald Trump's order barring visitors from six countries including Yemen.

After a tearful televised plea from the boy's father prompted public outrage, the US embassy in Cairo issued a visa for Swileh, who has been living temporarily in Egypt. She will arrive in San Francisco late Wednesday,

according to the Council on American-Islamic Relations, the Muslim civil rights group that assisted the family. "This is the happiest day of my life," her husband, Ali Hassan, said in a statement. "This will allow us to mourn with dignity."

Hassan said he had been ready to take his son off life support last week after doctors said the case was terminal, with his wife only receiving automated replies when inquiring with US authorities on her visa application.

The Council on American-Islamic Relations launched a campaign that it said prompted 15,000 emails to elected officials as well as thousands of tweets. Abdullah's grandfather earlier told the San Francisco Chronicle that Swileh was crying every day as she wanted to see her son "one last time." "To hold him for at least a minute. She's not going to see him forever," he said.

Representative Barbara Lee, a Democrat who represents Oakland and took up Swileh's case, had described denying the mother a visa as a level of cruelty that "takes my breath away". She voiced relief at the waiver but added: "So many families are still torn

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Local

‘It’s high time’ to stop Israel’s provocations, Kuwait tells world

Settlement policy blatant violation of int’l law, obstacle on path for peace

NEW YORK: United Nations Security Council must not remain inactive toward the systematic Israeli crimes against the unarmed Palestinians, Kuwait emphasizes. Such offenses are tantamount to crimes against humanity, according to the international humanitarian laws, said the Permanent Representative to the United Nations, Ambassador Mansour Al-Otaibi. “We ought to shoulder our responsibility as members (of the UNSC),” he added, addressing a UNSC session on the Middle East. “Isn’t it high time that we bear the responsibility as members of the Security Council and put an end to persistence on part of Israel, the de facto occupation power, with respect of its provocative and illegitimate conducts, premeditated and dangerous breaches of international and UN resolutions including its systematic violations of the Resolution 2334?” Otaibi asked the attending colleagues, envoys of nations from across the world.

Protecting Palestinians

Ambassador Otaibi urged the UN Secretary General to implement the UN General Assembly resolution on protecting Palestinian civilians, as stipulated in the UN chief’s latest report. He also called on states and institutions of the international community to participate in the protection of Palestinians, form an effective mechanism to implement the resolution and the UN report.

Otaibi has demanded implementation of the UNSG Resolution 2334, which affirms that the Israeli settlement policy constitutes blatant violation of the international law and obstacle on the path for peace. He insisted that Israel, the occupation de facto

force, must immediately halt settlement activities in the occupied Palestinian territories, including East Jerusalem. Moreover, the senior Kuwaiti diplomat asserted necessity of translating into action other relevant UN resolutions that brand the settlements as illegitimate, namely resolutions 465, 1980, 497 and 1981.

In his lengthy address, the State of Kuwait’s representative thanked Nikolay Mladenov, United Nations Special Coordinator for the Middle East Peace Process, for his efforts in seeking a common ground for a settlement to the crisis. Kuwait fully supports Mladenov’s mission for

mentation of the Resolution 2334 for this month, in follow-up to the first report that should have been delivered in June, in response to a request in this respect by 10 member states of the UNSG, “however, this regretfully did not happen.”

He called for increasing number of reports about implementation of the Resolution 2334, in 2019, indicating that Mladenov’s presentation on the West Bank affirmed anew how dangerous the situation there is due to the Israeli crimes and offenses on the Palestinians’ territories and their uncompromising rights. Latest of these crimes was the Israeli military aggression, on November 11, in Gaza and the other occupied lands, targeting civilian souls, buildings, media outlets and infrastructure.

Child’s funeral

The recent Israeli aggression claimed lives of scores of martyrs and many injured, he said, singling out the cruel crime that took the life of a four-year-old Palestinian. “Who among you has seen the funeral of the child Ahmad Abu Abed in Khan Younes? That was the 42nd such crime against the Palestinian children since March, where a total of 230 Palestinians had fallen as martyrs. Moreover, more than 24,000 others were wounded,” he said. According to Doctors without Borders’ reports, more than 1,000 of those injured were eternally maimed and that was due to live ammunition used by the occupation Israeli forces.

The Kuwaiti representative renewed the condemnation of recurring Israeli aggression on the sacred Al-Aqsa Mosque, affirming that Israeli has illicit schemes to alter



Recent aggression claimed scores of martyrs’ lives

attaining peace, amid the prolonged plight, suffered by the Palestinian people on daily basis — struggling to bear the brunt of the occupation cruelly since decades ago.

Envoy Otaibi praised Mladenov’s efforts with the stakeholders to try improve daily life of the population in Gaza. Such efforts have led to completing the joint review of the mechanism for rebuilding Gaza, he said, hoping that the re-examination recommendations would be put into action by January 1. Furthermore, Otaibi wished that the UN chief present a written report about imple-

ing courses for new staff members. She also noted that some MPs will suggest further amendments to be studied later.

Revenue increase

Responding to a question whether the ministry could increase its revenues through the services it provides in various community development centers and wedding halls, Sabeeh stressed that a related study was being currently prepared on all the services the ministry provides so that revenues could be increased and utilized in supporting women receiving social security aid. “Otherwise, enhancing revenues is not a priority at the time being,” Sabeeh said.

Sabeeh noted that by opening the new family care unit, the total number of family care units in Kuwait rises to 28. She explained



Hind Al-Sabeeh

that the new unit will serve around 2,250 citizens residing in Mangaf, Sabahiya and Fahaheel. She noted that the new community development center takes the total number to 22 centers around Kuwait, adding that these centers focus on serving women, training and teaching them several crafts such as tailoring, embroidery and perfumery, so that they can earn a living on their own.

Delayed salaries

In other news, Director of the Public Authority of Manpower Ahmad Al-Moussa said he has already summoned officials of a company hiring female security officers for schools to discuss the issue of their delayed salaries. He added that the salaries were already deposited to the officers’ bank accounts. Moussa urged all employers to respect the private sector labor law number 6/2010 as well as the manpower authority regulations in order to keep the local labor market regulated and attain justice for both employers and employees.

New cooperatives’ law submitted to Cabinet: Minister

By Meshaal Al-Enezi

KUWAIT: Minister of Social Affairs and Labor and Minister of State for Economic Development Hind Al-Sabeeh announced completing preparations of a new cooperatives’ law and submitting it to the Cabinet pending approval and referral to the parliament for discussion and voting. Speaking on the sidelines of opening a community development center and family care unit in Mangaf, Sabeeh said the new law includes amendments of some of the articles in the current one, especially concerning the problems related to board tenures of co-op societies, the electoral system followed and train-

Drone used to smuggle 5kg drugs into Kuwait

By Hanan Al-Saadoun

KUWAIT: The Drugs Control General Department arrested a citizen with four kilograms of shabu and one kilogram of hashish, along with a drone used in smuggling drugs from a neighboring country. A security source said a warrant was obtained, and an undercover agent was sent to the suspect to buy drugs. The suspect did not feel safe during the exchange and deliberately collided with a police patrol car, but he was stopped and the drugs were found with him. Police found more drugs and a large drone in his house. The suspect confessed to using the drone for smuggling drugs.

Salmiya fire

Fire broke out in a Salmiya building yesterday. Salmiya and Bidaa fire stations responded and found the fire was on the ground floor. Residents were evacuated and the fire was put out. No injuries were reported. Meanwhile, an investigation was opened to determine the cause of the fire.

Safety conditions

Kuwait Fire Service Directorate (KFSD) Deputy Director General for the Prevention Sector Maj Gen Khalid Abdullah Fahd said the directorate adopted a new unified system of safety conditions and preventive supervision to be implemented from January. The announcement was made during a seminar at the prevention sector for directors and superiors to be oriented with the new guidelines. Separately, Director General of KFSD Lt Gen Khalid Al-Mikrad headed an official delegation to the Netherlands to check the most modern fire equipment to deal with rain and floods that are made by a prominent company.



KUWAIT: This picture released by the Interior Ministry shows drugs caught with a suspect who was arrested yesterday, along with a drone that he used to smuggle the drugs into Kuwait.



Damage left by a fire reported in a Salmiya building yesterday.

31 meds added to drugs’ list

By A Saleh

KUWAIT: Health Minister Sheikh Dr Basel Al-Sabah yesterday approved three ministerial resolutions on adding 31 medicines to the list of drugs and psychoactive drugs. The Ministry of Health (MoH) explained that the decisions were made responding to recommendations made by the joint committee formed to implement laws 74/1983 and 48/1987 headed by MoH assistant undersecretary for medicine and food control Dr Abdullah Al-Bader.

In another health concern, Sabah Medical Zone Director Dr Abdul Aziz Al-Farhoud expressed the zone’s pride



Sheikh Dr Basel Al-Sabah

after a number of the zone’s hospitals, including Al-Sabah Hospital, were awarded national accreditation for quality health services. Speaking at a special ceremony held on the occasion at Sabah Hospital,

he thanked all the hospital staff for their sincere efforts. Sabah Hospital Manager Dr Abdul Rahman Al-Enezi announced preparations to move to the new hospital building soon. He added that winning the national accreditation award was only the beginning of a long path of hard work, cooperation and dedication to provide top quality health services.

Real estate scam victims swindled out of KD 1 billion

KUWAIT: As the parliamentary foreign affairs committee met victims of a real estate scam and heard their complaints, committee rapporteur MP Abdullah Fahhad said the number of victims is in the thousands, who were swindled out of KD 1 billion. Fahhad said he asked the foreign ministry to help citizens who were defrauded abroad. He said the state did not pay attention to this prob-

lem until it became known in the media and the appearance of victims in the thousands. — Al-Jarida

Scam

An employee in the oil sector lost KD 4,000 from his bank account within minutes after receiving a call from a swindler who told him he had won KD 20,000. This event comes on the heels of many other similar cases despite warnings not to give PIN codes to anyone, and no one is supposed to ask for such information. A police source said a citizen in his 50s told Ardhya police station he received a call from an English-speaking person who told him he had won KD 20,000 and asked for his account number. He then asked for the PIN. The citizen then received a message telling him the money was withdrawn. Investigations are underway. — Al-Anbaa

Ministry honors 200 outstanding Kuwaiti youth

KUWAIT: Kuwait’s Ministry of State for Youth Affairs on Tuesday honored about 200 young men and women of Kuwaitis who have made achievements at local and international forums. During the ceremony,

dubbed ‘Munjiz 4’ and held at the ministry’s headquarter, the ministry’s Acting Undersecretary Shafiq Omar praised the Kuwaiti youth achievements and hailed their great potential and remarkable representation of their country at regional and international events. He pointed out that various institutions of the State, civil society and the private sector seek to support the talented Kuwaiti youth. Meanwhile, cardiologist Ahmad Al-Salman, one of the honored youth, underlined the importance of perseverance in achieving success. Salman expressed his happiness with this honor, noting that it would motivate him for further progress. —KUNA

Local

European officials acknowledge Amir's mediation, efforts towards regional stability

Amir meets Dutch FM, European Parliament's delegation



KUWAIT: His Highness the Amir Sheikh Sabah Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah meets with His Highness the Crown Prince Sheikh Nawaf Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah. — Amiri Diwan photos



His Highness the Amir Sheikh Sabah Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah meets with National Assembly Speaker Marzouq Al-Ghanem.



His Highness the Amir Sheikh Sabah Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah meets with His Highness the Prime Minister Sheikh Jaber Al-Mubarak Al-Hamad Al-Sabah.



His Highness the Amir Sheikh Sabah Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah meets with Dutch Foreign Minister Stef Blok.



His Highness the Amir Sheikh Sabah Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah meets with the head of the European Parliament's delegation for relations with the Arab Peninsula, Michele Alliot-Marie.

KUWAIT: His Highness the Amir Sheikh Sabah Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah received yesterday at Bayan Palace His Highness the Crown Prince Sheikh Nawaf Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah, along with National Assembly Speaker Marzouq Al-Ghanem. His Highness the Amir also met His Highness the Prime Minister Sheikh Jaber Al-Mubarak Al-Hamad Al-Sabah, Deputy Prime Minister and Foreign Minister Sheikh Sabah Al-Khaled Al-Hamad Al-Sabah along with Dutch Foreign Minister Stef Blok. The meetings were attended by Minister of Amiri Diwan Affairs Sheikh Ali Jarrah Al-Sabah.

Minister Blok said that the Netherlands highly appreciates Kuwait's efforts to keep stability in the region intact. He said he was deeply honored to have met His Highness the Amir, describing his country's ties with Kuwait as enduring and amicable. He emphasized bilateral investment ties, saying the two countries enjoy a robust trade relationship. The Dutch foreign minister commended Kuwait for the Gulf state's contri-

butions towards peace in the Middle East, naming Iraq and Yemen as examples. He went on to say that Amsterdam and Kuwait see eye to eye on world issues, hoping for more 'progress' in relations.

Kuwait mediation

Meanwhile, His Highness the Amir met the head of the European Parliament's delegation for relations with the Arab Peninsula, Michele Alliot-Marie, and a delegation accompanying her. Alliot-Marie said that the EU completely backs Kuwait's mediation in settling Gulf differences. Saying that she was honored to have met with His Highness the Amir, she added that the European Union and Parliament attach great importance to His Highness the Amir's efforts in the region, and fully support mediation efforts exerted by the State of Kuwait to resolve the existing dispute between the GCC countries. She noted that the presidents of the European Council and Parliament had invited His Highness the Amir to visit the European

Parliament and EU to talk about all dimensions of the issue.

The EU's MP went on to say that she and her accompanying delegation had listened to His Highness the Amir's views on the Gulf differences and the current regional situation. She added that they had also

to listen to His Highness the Amir in order to have a clear understanding of the region's geopolitical situation. His Highness the Prime Minister also met separately with Dutch Foreign Minister Stef Blok and head of the European Parliament's delegation for relations with the Arab Peninsula Michele Alliot-Marie.

Crown Prince's receptions

Also yesterday, His Highness the Crown Prince Received Ghanem and His Highness Sheikh Jaber Al-Mubarak. He also received Minister of Commerce and Industry Khaled Al-Roudhan, along with the Chairman of the Board of Commissioners and CEO of Kuwait's Capital Market Authority Dr Ahmad Al-Melhem. His Highness the Crown Prince also met the Director General of Kuwait Direct Investment Promotion Authority Sheikh Dr Mishal Al-Jaber Al-Ahmad Al-Sabah, who also heads a committee tasked with improving the business environment in Kuwait. Against the backdrop of S&P Dow Jones'

classification of Kuwait's stock exchange as an 'emerging' market, His Highness the Crown Prince was given the Capital market regulator's annual report for the fiscal year 2017-2018, in addition to a World Bank report over creating an alluring business environment in Kuwait. His Highness the Crown Prince commended these measures that aim to transform the country into a financial and economic hub, which is part of a broad Kuwaiti vision for development.

Janadriyah Festival

In other news, His Highness the Crown Prince is set to leave today, with an accompanying delegation, to the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia. Sheikh Nawaf's visit comes at the invitation of Saudi Arabia's King Salman bin Abdulaziz Al Saud to His Highness the Amir Sheikh Sabah Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah to attend the inauguration of the 33rd Janadriyah Festival 2018. The two-week annually held cultural heritage festival convenes this year under the title 'Fulfillment and Loyalty.' — KUNA



Crown Prince to attend Janadriya Festival

addressed the ongoing war in Yemen and the Kuwaiti role in putting an end to this conflict, in addition to the relationship between Gulf countries and Iran. She concluded by saying that it was very significant

GCC's monetary data must be unified: CBK governor

KUWAIT: Monetary, financial and statistical data and concepts in the Gulf region must be unified according to internationally-recognized standards, said Central Bank of Kuwait (CBK) Governor Dr Mohammad Al-Hashel yesterday. His remark was part of a speech at the opening of the High-Level Information Meeting on Joint GCC-Stat/GMCo. The meeting discusses, among other key issues, the Report on Assessment of Statistical Readiness for Monetary Union in the GCC region.

The meeting, held for the first time, comes as implementation of the GCC central banks and monetary institutions' 71st committee recommendations to support a GCC economic union, said Hashel, also Chairman of the Board of the Gulf Monetary Council. He further stressed that data must be inclusive and accurate when being timely received by decision-makers due to the "rapidly changing modern era we live in." The meeting addresses best means to implement such findings and recommendations of the consolidated report in terms of deadline, strategies, legal and structural frameworks, he pointed out. A roundtable is scheduled later in the day to null or recommendations.

Meanwhile, Sabir Al-Harbi, director general of the GCC-

STAT center, said that the center was established to improve statistical work and coordinate efforts among GCC members. Yesterday's meeting came after a detailed study by GCC-STAT on readiness for the monetary union and in preparation of the '2025 GCC economic union.'

Economic integration

In other news, Kuwait reiterated its eagerness to prop up economic and social cooperation and integration among Arab countries. Nabil Al-Abduljaleel, the assistant under-secretary of the Kuwaiti Ministry of Finance, made the remark while partaking in an extraordinary meeting of the Arab Economic and Social Council at the level of senior officials, ahead of an Arab economic and social summit due in Beirut in January 2019. He stressed that it is imperative to put in place the resolutions and recommendation of the first economic summit held in Kuwait in January 2009, which featured a bunch of economic and social projects.

The conferees looked into a set of issues and subjects pertinent to ways of promoting and developing inter-Arab economic relations, along with a follow-up report on the implementation of resolutions adopted during previous gatherings, he noted. They further considered Sudanese President Omar Al-Bashir's initiative bearing on Arab food security, integration and trade exchange in agricultural crops, plants and livestock, the Kuwaiti official said. He hoped that the planned Arab economic and social summit in Beirut would produce concrete recommendations and resolutions that could lead to pushing forward Arab economic and social solidarity. — KUNA

Sheikh Nasser discusses Kuwait's Vision at Beijing forum



BEIJING: First Deputy Premier and Defense Minister Sheikh Nasser Sabah Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah speaks during the Beijing dialogue forum. — KUNA

BEIJING: His Highness the Amir Sheikh Sabah Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah's envoy, First Deputy Premier and Defense Minister Sheikh Nasser Sabah Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah, participated Tuesday in Beijing dialogue forum highlighting the 'New Kuwait Vision 2035'. The forum was organized by Kuwait's Embassy in China in collaboration with China's center for dialogue and strategic thinking, an affiliate to China's Presidency and State Council, the embassy said in a press statement.

During the forum, Sheikh Nasser said that he hopes the number of Kuwaiti students studying in China would climb soon. He also noted that Kuwait seeks to attract more Chinese students and researchers to visit Kuwait to enhance intellectual, scientific, and cultural exchange between the two countries, and based on coordination between the two sides on New Kuwait

Vision 2035, the Chinese 'Belt and Road' initiative, the statement added. He also shed lights on a number of key issues including future projects as part of the investment, economic, and technology cooperation between the two countries.

An agreement was also signed between Kuwait Embassy and China's dialogue center to improve intellectual and academic exchange. Participants in the forum expressed interests in opening cooperation channels between the two sides. The 'New Kuwait Vision 2035' and the Chinese 'Belt and Road' initiative are compatible with each other, Kuwait Ambassador to China Sameh Hayat said. He added that the two countries' leaders are ready to speed up their cooperation through implementing agreements and memorandums of understanding signed during the state visit to China by His Highness the Amir last July. — KUNA



KUWAIT: Participants attend the High-Level Information Meeting on Joint GCC-Stat/GMCo, held in Kuwait yesterday. — KUNA

Local

Photo of the Day



KUWAIT: A surreal sunrise at Ushayriy coast. — Photo by Waleed Al-Othman (KUNA)

Overfishing, environment suspected of causing catch declines in Kuwait: Expert

KU hosts seminar on fisheries, fish catches decline

By Nawara Fattahova

KUWAIT: The Department of Marine Science at Kuwait University (KU) hosted a seminar titled 'The boom and bust of Kuwait fisheries - why fish catches are declining' on Tuesday at its premises. It was presented by Abdulrahman Ben-Hasan, PhD candidate at the University of British Columbia. He spoke about Kuwait's fisheries, defining it as the interaction between fishing gear and fish. "This includes trap fishing and shrimping. Fisheries in Kuwait have three forms - bottom trawling fishing that is the most valuable and targets shrimp and fish. Gillnet fishing targets pelagic species including zubaiddi, suboor, nuwaibi, and maid. Gargoor trap fishing targets demersal species including hamoor, hamra, shaem and shiery," Ben-Hasan said.

Catches of most commercial species have declined sharply since 1995, with the decline of suboor the most dramatic. "Prices increased tremendously - by over 366 percent - of suboor from 1995, while catches dropped by 90 percent. For nuwaibi, the price hiked by 229 percent and the catch dropped by 72 percent, zubaiddi's price hiked by 136 percent and its catch dropped by 87 percent, and so on," he explained. "There are no signs of recovery and the average price keeps increasing, with more than 100 percent relative to 2001 prices, which shows economically successful fisheries. But when we look at the huge declines in catches, we see it is more distinctive than successful fishery," he added.

Overfishing

The first suspect behind catch declines is overfishing. "Overfishing is harvesting fish stock at a rate higher than natural reproduction. In extreme overfishing, the population will continue to decline and could become extinct. In Kuwait, we suffer from Malthusian overfishing, which is too many fishermen chasing too few fish," said Ben-Hasan.

In Kuwait, fishing typically operates under an open-access regime with certain input controls. "We have no license limitation programs in our fisheries and no output controls, which mean there is no quota that is applied in

developed countries. Regulations are weakly enforced, and fisheries are subsidized both directly and indirectly. Subsidies make fishing cheaper," he noted.

"Over the last 10 years, shrimp averaged around 40 percent of the total catch. In 2012, Kuwait's shrimp stock experienced overfishing. Hamoor is another example of overfishing - we estimate its declining trend due to very high and unsustainable fishing pressure. The normal pressure should be taking around 10 percent of the population, but actually we are taking around 30 percent of the population each year," he further said.

The second suspect is the environment. "There are too many cases where reductions in fishing have completely failed to result in the desired recovery. On the west coast of Canada, complete closures of major fisheries for 20 years have been implemented since the mid-1990s with no signs of recovery, as the fish didn't come back," said Ben-Hasan.

Marine environmental issues

"We have coastal development and landfills, discharge of untreated sewage, release of significant amount of brine associated with desalination plants and reduction of the freshwater flow of Shatt Al-Arab due to dams. This is mainly due to two reasons - river-sea interaction and fish abundance. The higher freshwater flow causes higher catches. The problem is in damming the Tigris and Euphrates rivers," he added.

Today, the Shatt Al-Arab's flow is very weak. "Drought and dams allow saltwater to invade, threatening people and the ancient marshes of Mesopotamia. The flow rate of Shatt Al-Arab has been drastically reduced, which caused significant increase in salinity levels in the northern Gulf. The Shatt Al-Arab is ecologically important - it is a nursery habitat for many commercial species, transports essential nutrients and lowers excessive salinity, while the magnitude and seasonality of the Shatt Al-Arab trigger important biological events. Three decades of monitoring indicated that salinity has increased and has currently leveled off around 42 psu," he explained.

It's not known what's causing the catch declines. "By



KUWAIT: Abdulrahman Ben-Hasan, PhD candidate at the University of British Columbia, speaks during a seminar at Kuwait University. — Photo by Yasser Al-Zayyat

re-evaluating the hamoor overfishing case, maybe it's the environment. It's important to know the answer, as it will help managers implement effective regulations. Human interactions with nature should be experimental and adaptive, because human understanding of nature is imperfect. I'm proposing here to use this concept of adaptive management to tease apart the confounding effects of overfishing and environment," Ben-Hasan pointed out.

Continued fishing is the default policy option. "Reduced fishing can be viewed as an experimental policy option with some promise for improving future yields. If 'reduced fishing' increases the biomass of fish stock, then fishing is

the main cause of the declining catches, if not, then it is the environment," he said.

He concluded by saying that although Kuwait fish catches continue to decline with no signs of recovery, management measures are absent. "In 2016, the Gulf was intruding up to 100 km inland, implying that the Shatt Al-Arab flow is very weak, which is extremely worrying. To get the management part right, we need to know what is causing the decline in fish catches; one way to do this is by using adaptive management," concluded Ben-Hasan.

Annual sea heritage festival underway

KUWAIT: More than 100 contestants participated in the inauguration of the 2018 annual sea heritage festival yesterday. Sheikh Salem Al-Nawaf Al-Ahmad Al-Sabah, the head of the festival organizing committee, said in a statement at the fishermen's diwaniah, where the festival kicked off, that the new edition of the yearly event has drawn a large number of enthusiasts to partake in diverse contests and activities, namely fishing. The committee has increased the awards to lure as many par-



Sheikh Salem Al-Nawaf Al-Ahmad Al-Sabah

ticipants as possible, he has indicated, assuring the contesting fishermen that paramedics on accompanying boats will be ready to help if they are needed. Coast guards are also helping in organizing of the event, he says, reassuring the participants that the guards are ready to ensure their safety. He lauded the event patronization by His Highness the Amir and His

Highness the Crown Prince, namely their keenness on reliving the ancestors' heritage and learning from their endurance and cooperation in hardships. — KUNA



KUWAIT: Boats seen during the inauguration of the 2018 annual sea heritage festival yesterday. — KUNA

Celebrating Christmas in Kuwait: Yay or Nay?



KUWAIT: Mohammad Al-Sadani, Arabic language instructor and TV broadcaster (left), and Dr Sheikhha Al-Jassem, Assistant Professor of Philosophy at Kuwait University, attend the debate. — Photo by Joseph Shagra

By Faten Omar

KUWAIT: Kuwait, a conservative Muslim country, allows Christians to practice their faith and there are several churches in the country. On a social level, however, some view celebrating non-Muslim holidays as an invasive foreign practice. Although no statistics are available, there is anecdotal evidence to suggest that more and more Muslims in Kuwait are celebrating the social and cultural aspects of Christmas. This has led to pushback from some who view this celebration as wrong.

Niqashna, a local community platform, organized a debate Tuesday evening around this theme: “Merry Christmas: Are foreign holidays endangering our identity?” Dozens of attendees came to hear the two speakers - one for, one against - offer their views on the impact the celebration of Christmas in Kuwait is having on society.

Speaking against, Mohammad Al-Sadani, an Arabic language instructor and TV broadcaster, argued that the celebration of Christmas, even as only a cultural practice without any religious meaning, is harmful to the Kuwait identity.

“The identity is all about our culture, religion, language, clothes... We should believe in the importance of our identity as Muslims and Kuwaitis,” Sadani said, noting that most foreign holidays do not relate to Kuwait’s traditions. “We do not have to celebrate the pure religious concept of the celebration about the birth of Jesus and Christianity.”

“What is the role of the government in protecting our identity?” Sadani wondered. He also complained that the government has allowed the installation of Christmas trees in some areas including Ahmadi, arguing that this goes against Kuwait’s Muslim identity.

Speaking for, Dr Sheikhha Al-Jassem, Assistant Professor of Philosophy at Kuwait University, said that Kuwait’s identity is more inclusive and does not forbid the celebration of Christmas holidays. “Our identity is dynamic, always changing,” she said. “Our Kuwaiti identity changed by time, where we are not all originally from Kuwait, but we came from different backgrounds and religions. Therefore, we have to accept the differences among us.”

“The danbora dance is originally from Africa. Our biriyani dish is from India,” she added. “The Kuwaiti culture is a mix from everywhere when international trade was one of Kuwait’s main sources of income before oil. All of these are Kuwait’s identity. We cannot choose who is wrong or right. We cannot change the fact of the changing elements of our identity. The identity remains the same even when we celebrate other holidays. That does not change anything. Christmas is about celebrating the winter. The tree is a symbol of life remaining green in spite of the cold world outside.”

The audience seemed divided, with many supporting the right to celebrate Christmas as a cultural tradition and practice, but others also clapped when Sadani noted that the pervasive growth of English had begun to erode the role of Arabic in the society.

Christmas as a holiday has long been a controversial topic in Kuwait. In previous years, members of parliament have complained about the sale of Christmas trees in shops and Christmas decorations in local malls. At the same time, there are more than three million expatriates in Kuwait and a large segment of these are Christians or from Christian backgrounds, while shops, restaurants and malls often decorate their premises in acknowledgement of the holiday.

KIB celebrates Bahrain, Qatar National Days

KUWAIT: On the occasion of Bahrain’s National Day which falls on December 16, and Qatar’s National Day which falls on December 18 of every year, KIB organized a visit to Kuwait International Airport in cooperation with the Directorate General of Civil Aviation. During the visit, the bank distributed a number of gifts, as well as Kuwaiti, Bahraini, and Qatari flags amongst the crowd, bringing happiness and joy to the hearts of airport visitors; particularly passengers of Bahraini and Qatari flights, who expressed their sincere appreciation of this heartfelt gesture.

On this occasion, KIB congratulated Bahrain leadership, led by King Hamad bin Isa Al Khalifa and the Amir of Qatar Sheikh Tamim bin Hamad Al Thani. Additionally, the bank also congratulated the people of Bahrain and Qatar, wishing them continued prosperity. KIB noted that this celebration of Bahrain and Qatar National Days came as part of its commitment to participating in international events. In particular, the bank is dedicated to celebrating events that are related to the region and the GCC, in line with the age-old ties between the two nations; thereby strengthening lines of communication between the people of Kuwait and Bahrain, as well as Kuwait and Qatar.

It is worth noting that this initiative falls under the umbrella of KIB’s leading social responsibility program. Accordingly, the bank always strives to participate in various initiatives and events that make a positive impact on the local community.





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Yemen’s warring sides trade blame for truce breach

Facebook removes Myanmar military-linked pages, accounts



YANGON: Myanmar youths browse their Facebook page at an internet shop in Yangon. Facebook has removed hundreds of additional pages and accounts in Myanmar with hidden links to the military, the platform said yesterday, as the company scrambles to respond to criticism over failures to control hate speech and misinformation. — AFP (See Page 9)

‘Thousands’ of diplomatic cables hacked

EU launches investigation; hackers linked to China

BRUSSELS: The EU announced an urgent investigation yesterday after hackers with possible links to China accessed thousands of sensitive diplomatic cables. In the latest embarrassing data breach to hit a major international organization, the New York Times reported that hackers using similar techniques to the Chinese military gained entry to EU communications.

The cables from European Union diplomatic missions around the world reveal anxiety about how to handle US President Donald Trump as well as concerns about the behavior of China, Russia and Iran. The leak, discovered by cybersecurity firm Area 1, recalls the publication by Wikileaks of a vast haul of US State Department cables

in 2010, though in the EU case the trove is much smaller and consists of less secret communications, the NYT reported. EU officials said they have begun a probe into the leak, which comes with Europe on high alert for malign online activity in the run-up to key parliamentary elections in May next year.

“The Council Secretariat is aware of allegations regarding a potential leak of sensitive information and is actively investigating the issue,” the EU Council, which represents member states, said. “The Council Secretariat does not comment on allegations nor on matters relating to operational security. The Council Secretariat takes the security of its facilities, including its IT systems,

extremely seriously.” In one cable, the EU’s diplomatic mission in Moscow describes the controversial summit in Helsinki in July between Trump and Russian President Vladimir Putin as “successful (at least for Putin)”. Another gives a detailed account of a meeting with Chinese President Xi Jinping in which he rails against Trump’s trade tactics, saying the US was “behaving as if it was fighting in a no-rules freestyle boxing match” and vowing not to give in to “bullying”. There are extensive reports on the situation in Ukraine, where a conflict rumbles on between government forces and pro-Russian separatists, including a warning dating from February that Moscow may already have deployed nuclear war-

heads in Crimea, which it annexed in 2014. The NYT said that, according to Area 1, the techniques used by the hackers over the course of three years were similar to those used by an elite Chinese military unit. The hackers apparently gained access to the diplomatic communications network after a simple “phishing” campaign targeting EU officials in Cyprus with mails designed to trick them into downloading hacking tools.

Many of the cables are run-of-the-mill weekly reports from missions around the world, detailing conversations with leaders and officials, the NYT said. More sensitive, classified communications are handled on a different, more secure system. — AFP

Britain in Brexit limbo with 100 days to go

LONDON: British MPs head off for Christmas with just 100 days to go until Brexit, leaving a country in limbo with no divorce deal in place and total confusion over what happens next. Prime Minister Theresa May, who is holding her last question session of the year in parliament yesterday, has delayed a crucial vote on her Brexit deal to next month. Jeremy Corbyn, head of the opposition Labor Party, has accused May of trying to “run down the clock” so MPs will have to choose between her deal and crashing out of the EU. While the politicking continues in Westminster, many Britons are putting their lives on hold and delaying major financial decisions until the future becomes clearer. Retailers are complaining of a slump in sales in a normally busy period as Britons contemplate a post-Brexit future in which government forecasts say they will end up poorer.

‘Overall mood of pessimism’

More than two years after a deeply divisive referendum and after months of negotiations with Brussels, the indecision of the country’s leadership is also frustrating for many. “There’s an overall mood of pessimism in the country at the moment,” said Tom Clarkson, research director at BritainThinks, which conducts surveys on public feeling. “Brexit is the worst kind of politics. It’s very Punch and Judy. It’s the kind of Westminster politics people hate.” In ordinary conversations this Christmas, the word Brexit is being replaced by the euphemistic “The B-word” to avoid groans of despair or a revival of



LONDON: A video grab from footage broadcast shows Britain’s Prime Minister Theresa May as she tells makes a joke about the opposition Labor party leader Jeremy Corbyn’s failure to demand a no-confidence vote against her government. — AFP

long-running family feuds. Experts agree that May is likely to lose the vote on her deal, but are divided over what might happen next as there is no majority in parliament for any alternative option.

Without a deal before March 29, Britain will still leave the European Union in a chaotic end to its 46-year membership that could trigger a financial crisis. A cabinet meeting on Tuesday stepped up planning for a no-deal scenario, after which Defense Secretary Gavin Williamson informed parliament that 3,500 troops would be on standby to help with “any contingencies”. Despite the apparent economic risks, some hardline Brexit supporters back a so-called “managed no-deal Brexit”—leaving without an overall agreement with the EU but with individual ad-hoc deals to minimize disruption.

Bishops pray for unity

Many MPs are instead calling for a second referendum to end the impasse and give Britons the chance

to think again. May has ruled this out as deeply undemocratic since 52 percent voted to leave the EU in the 2016 referendum. Another possibility that has been raised by cabinet ministers in recent days would be for parliament to hold a series of non-binding votes on different Brexit options, giving MPs greater influence on Brexit strategy.

With no clear plan, a sense of desperation is setting in. British rock star Damon Albarn recently joined with other prominent public figures to call for a citizens’ assembly to decide what to do next if the British parliament cannot. As Christmas nears, even the Church of England has remarked on the “turbulent events” surrounding Brexit. “The bishops of the Church of England pray for national unity—and courage, integrity and clarity for our politicians,” they said in a statement. “There is now an urgent need for the United Kingdom to recover a shared vision and identity to help us find a way through the immediate challenges.” — AFP

Govt shutdown threat remains as Democrats reject Trump request

WASHINGTON: Prospects of a partial US government shutdown surged Tuesday after Democrats rejected what they said was President Donald Trump’s request for a “slush fund” to build a wall on the US border with Mexico. Trump has stood firm for days declaring he needed \$5 billion to build the controversial wall, defiantly proclaiming he would be “proud” to stop some government operations cold after a midnight Friday deadline if he did not get his wish.

He appeared to ease that stance early Tuesday when the White House said it did not want a shutdown and was looking for “other ways” to obtain funding, including getting Congress to reprogram \$1 billion in unspent funds so Trump could use them on his immigration policies.

“The president asked every one of his cabinet secretaries to look for funding that can be used to protect our borders,” White House spokeswoman Sarah Sanders said.

Minority Leader Nancy Pelosi—the likely next speaker of the House when Democrats take control of the chamber January 3 – and top Senate Democrat Chuck Schumer shot down the proposal, saying the \$1.6 billion in border security funding in proposed legislation is sufficient. “Leader Schumer and I have said that we cannot accept the offer they made of a billion-dollar slush fund for the president to implement his very wrong immigration policies, so that won’t happen,” Pelosi told reporters. The deadlock leaves thousands of federal workers in limbo, wondering whether they will be sent home without pay one week before

Christmas. A short-term budget extension, one that keeps spending at existing levels but does not resolve the wall issue, rapidly emerged as the likeliest way out of the impasse. If Republican and Democratic lawmakers in Congress fail to reach agreement on a spending package by midnight Friday, parts of the government will slide into a shutdown, paralyzing some federal operations. The exact impact is difficult to foretell. About 75 percent of the government is already funded through September 2019. But a quarter of government operations still require spending agreements and could face disruptions, including the departments of justice and homeland security.

‘Not a good option’

Republicans presently control Congress, including 51 seats in the 100-member Senate. But a deal can only advance with 60 votes, meaning Democratic support is vital. Pelosi said the path forward remained unclear, and that a stopgap “continuing resolution,” or CR, might be required. Senate Majority Leader Mitch McConnell insisted he remained confident there would be no work stoppage. “I think a government shutdown is not a good option,” McConnell said. “We’re in discussion with the White House about the way forward.”

But he acknowledged that a brief CR might be the likeliest next move. “If we end up going with a relatively short-term CR, we will end up, in effect, punting this year’s business into next year,” McConnell said. Meanwhile, Sanders expressed optimism that the White House could find legal ways to obtain extra funding. “There are certainly a number of different funding sources that we’ve identified that we can use, that we can couple with money that would be given through congressional appropriations that would help us get to that \$5 billion that the president needs in order to protect our border,” she said on Fox News. — AFP



WASHINGTON: The US Capitol is seen in Washington, DC as the Deadline for lawmakers to agree on a new spending deal to avert shutdown on Dec 22 approaches. — AFP

International

High stakes for friends and foes as DRC heads to polls

Impact of upcoming elections reverberate far and wide

NAIROBI: From the countries who share the Democratic Republic of Congo's vast border - some of which stirred its devastating conflicts - to international powers invested in peace efforts, the impact of upcoming elections looks set to reverberate far and wide. Here are some of the implications of the DR Congo's crucial December 23 vote to replace President Joseph Kabila, for nations in the intertwined region and the international community working in the resource-rich country.

Ashes from a regional fire

It has been over a decade since Kinshasa's neighbors fought Africa's "Great War" on its soil, but from across its borders they still jealously guard their interests in the troubled nation. The current regime in the DRC is the direct result of its neighbors' interventions in two conflicts between 1996 and 2003 that drew in troops from up to seven African countries and left millions dead. The regional fire was lit by the 1994 Rwandan genocide, as some two million mostly Hutu refugees including those who led the massacres, flooded into eastern Congo. Rebels used their camps as a new base from which to stage attacks in Rwanda, prompting Kigali to invade

the DRC. Rwanda also, with the help of Uganda, backed a Congolese rebellion which led to the overthrow of strongman Mobutu Sese Seko and saw Laurent-Desire Kabila become president in 1997. Barely a year later a second conflict began.

Kabila turned his back on his Rwandan and Ugandan allies who then invaded the country again and fought Congolese troops backed by troops from Angola, Namibia, Zimbabwe and Chad. Burundi also carried out limited operations, while Libya and Sudan offered support to Kinshasa. Kabila was assassinated in 2001 and his son Joseph Kabila became president. In the years since, the DRC has maintained complex ties with its neighbors, marked by mistrust and the plundering of its considerable natural resources. "The development of mineral riches, controlled by powerful Congolese, Rwandan and Ugandan interests, is growing and thriving" in the restive east of the country, said Andre Guichaoua, a professor at the Paris-Sorbonne university.

'Co-managed destabilization'

While the resource extraction continues, those involved have increasingly begun to work

side by side. "Over the course of time, in the eastern Congo, the different networks plundering resources who were rivals, realized that they could all get along without fighting to the death," said Thierry Vircoulon, a researcher at the French Institute of International Relations (IFRI). He said the disappearance of clearly "Rwanda-backed" rebel groups believed to have been deployed to protect these mineral interests - such as CNDP in the 2000s or M23 in the early 2010s - is evidence of this cohabitation. Guichaoua described the situation in the east as a "co-managed destabilization".

In its June 2018 report, the UN Security Council's group of experts on the DRC said that "a large part of the gold sold by Uganda and Rwanda was illegally extracted from neighboring countries, including the DRC". In Angola, the government of President Joao Lourenco has pushed for the holding of elections, and for Kabila not to be a candidate. Luanda is keen protect its offshore oil interests - which Kinshasa argues are in its waters - and resume control of diamond mining in the north. Some 400,000 Congolese miners were recently expelled or fled Angola after a massive operation against diamond smuggling. — AFP



KINSHASA: Women walk past a campaign poster of the President of the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Joseph Kabila's chosen successor Emmanuel Ramazani Shadary in Kinshasa. — AFP

Malaysia targets middlemen to end debt bondage of migrant workers

KUALA LUMPUR: Under pressure to crack down on labor abuses, Malaysia is moving to eliminate middlemen who charge millions of foreign workers exorbitant recruitment fees, leaving them saddled with debt and vulnerable to exploitation. From factories to construction sites and plantations, the Southeast Asian nation relies heavily on foreign workers for jobs usually shunned by locals.

Many arrive having borrowed huge sums to pay recruitment agents, meaning they have to work for years earning virtually nothing - a form of modern-day slavery known as debt bondage. In a bid to address this, recently Malaysia struck a deal with Nepal to directly recruit workers there, without going through agents. The agreement came after Nepal temporarily suspended sending workers due to concerns about their treatment. "This is aimed at curbing human trafficking and exploitation of workers," Malaysian human resources minister M. Kulasegaran told the Thomson Reuters Foundation.

"They must not be in a bondage situation in this country and caught in a vicious cycle of earning to pay back money." Under the agreement, which came into effect on Oct. 29, Nepali workers will be hired on a government-to-government basis. Malaysian employers will have to bear all the recruitment costs, including airfare, and visa and medical check-up fees. Kulasegaran said Malaysia is negotiating similar agreements with Bangladesh, Indonesia and Vietnam. Bangladesh, Indonesia and Nepal are the top providers of Malaysia's nearly 2 million registered migrant workers, government figures show. There are millions more without work permits.

Overworked

The world's largest glove maker, the Malaysian firm Top Glove, said this month it would cut ties with unethical recruitment agents, after some of its migrant workers were found to have clocked excessive overtime to clear debts. Campaigners for years have asked Malaysia to eliminate the middlemen who charge migrants up to 20,000 Malaysian ringgit (\$4,790), a debt they often toil for years to pay off. Debt bondage is one of the most prevalent forms of modern slavery, which affects more than 40 million people worldwide, according to the United Nations' International Labor Organization.

The US State Department's 2018 Trafficking in Persons report put Malaysia in its Tier 2 Watch List - the second-lowest ranking - for not meeting the minimum standards in efforts to eliminate human trafficking, including debt bondage. Since a reformist government swept into power in May - ousting a long-ruling, corruption-mired coalition - it has suspended a key recruitment firm accused of exploiting workers, and initiated a review on migrant worker policies. High recruitment fees mean that migrants often become trapped, working excessive hours in the hope of repaying their debt more quickly.

Indra, who left Nepal for Malaysia in 2011 to work on a plantation, said he had to fork out \$1,100 to pay an agent. He managed to repay the debt within six months by borrowing money from relatives. But he said others are not so lucky, and are instead forced to turn to moneylenders who charge interest of at least 3 percent monthly. Migrant workers must work extra hours to service the debt as the interest builds up, but they struggle to pay it off entirely, he said. "Many workers have to asked for overtime work, because they have no other options to survive if they don't do that," said Indra, who now works at a laundry firm in downtown Kuala Lumpur and declined to give his full name for fear of reprisals.

Kulasegaran, the government minister, has urged major firms operating in Malaysia to take the lead in ensuring there are no labor abuses among migrant workers. While Top Glove has pledged to cut ties with unscrupulous agents, the issue remains sensitive for many companies, including the electronics brands Samsung and Panasonic, which both declined to comment. A spokeswoman for the palm oil giant Wilmar, a Singapore-listed firm with nearly 9,500 migrant labourers on its plantations in Malaysia, said the company has been paying recruitment costs for foreign workers since 2012. — Reuters

Yemen's warring sides trade blame for truce breach

ADEN: Yemen's warring parties blamed each other for violations of a UN-mediated ceasefire in Hodeidah meant to avert an all-out battle for a port city vital for emergency aid supplies and pave the way to peace negotiations. Residents reported shelling late on Tuesday, the first day of the truce, for nearly one hour on the eastern and southern outskirts of the Houthi-held Red Sea city, a lifeline for millions at risk of famine. Calm prevailed yesterday. But a source in the Saudi-led coalition arrayed against the Iran-aligned Houthis said that if international monitors were not deployed in Hodeidah soon, the deal reached under of UN-brokered confidence-building process could falter.

The United Nations was due to convene the Houthis and the Saudi-backed Yemeni government by video link yesterday to discuss a troop withdrawal from Hodeidah city and three ports under the truce deal agreed at talks in Sweden last week, the first in more than two years. Houthi-run al-Masirah TV accused coalition forces of shelling several sites in Hodeidah, including areas east of the airport. The United Arab Emirates news agency WAM quoted a Yemeni source as saying the Houthis fired mortar bombs and rockets at the May 22 Hospital in the eastern suburbs.

"We will continue to give them (Houthis) the benefit of the doubt and show restraint, but early indicators are not promising," said the coalition source, who declined to be named. "If the UN... takes too long to get into (the) theatre, they will lose the opportunity altogether and the Stockholm agreement will (be) a dead duck." Three residents in the capital Sanaa, from where the Houthis ousted the internationally recognized government in 2014, told Reuters that the coalition carried out several air strikes on al-Dulaimi Air Base near Sanaa airport yesterday. The ceasefire deal, which covers only Hodeidah, will see international monitors deployed in the city and port with all armed forces pulling out within 21 days of the truce.

Prisoner swap

Hodeidah, the main port used to feed Yemen's 30 mil-

Nomads, farmers in fight for Nigeria heartland

MAKURDI: A Reuters analysis of land use data shows how a massive expansion of farming in Nigeria's Middle Belt has cut access to grazing land for nomadic herders and fuelled persistent violence. If the coming dry season in Nigeria follows the pattern of previous years, violence will soon erupt between herders in search of water for their cattle and farmers determined to protect their land. In the past, authorities have blamed the violence on religion or ethnic divisions. But a close examination of the changes in land use in central Nigeria shows just how much it comes down to a simple clash over resources.

The stakes are high. Amnesty International said the violence has killed more than 3,600 people since 2016, most of them this year. Clashes between herding and farming communities in 2018 have killed more people than the conflict involving the Islamist insurgent group Boko Haram, according to the Armed Conflict Location and Event Data Project. Reuters journalists have tracked long-term land trends in Nigeria by analysing United States Geological Survey data. The analysis of data released publicly only in 2016 shows open grazing land available in Nigeria's Middle Belt declined by 38 percent between 1975 and 2013 while the area dedicated to farming nearly trebled.

That means less land for nomads to feed their cattle, supporting the view of local people that the conflict is based on the availability of land rather than ethnic or religious differences. The shift towards farming not only reflects Nigeria's rapid population growth, but also successive governments' efforts to diversify the economy away from its heavy reliance on oil. Violence involving Fulani herders and farmers from other ethnic groups has been widespread since 2011 but most frequent in Nigeria's Middle Belt, a region where the mostly Christian south converges with the Islamic north.

Grazing land

In 1975, grazing land was plentiful. It made up 52 percent of all land in Nigeria, while farmland made up 23 percent. In the Middle Belt, grazing land was even more plentiful - 61 percent was grazing land, while farmland accounted for 14 percent. In 2013, Grazing land decreased



SANAA: Armed Yemeni men hold their weapons as they gather in the capital Sanaa to show their support to the Shiite Houthi movement against the Saudi-led intervention yesterday. — AFP

lion people, has been the focus of fighting this year, raising fears abroad that a full-scale assault could cut off supplies to 15.9 million people suffering from severe hunger. Western nations have pressed the coalition led by Saudi Arabia and the UAE to end the nearly four-year war, which has killed tens of thousands of people and is widely seen as a proxy conflict between regional big powers Saudi Arabia and Iran. The alliance, which receives arms and intelligence from the West, entered the war in 2015 to restore the government of Abd-Rabbu Mansour Hadi, now based in the southern port of Aden. The Houthis control most urban centres.

The truce, the first significant breakthrough in peace-making efforts, is meant to pave the way for a wider ceasefire in the impoverished country and a framework for political negotiations. The two sides had also agreed a prisoner swap. A Red Cross official said in Geneva yesterday

day they had exchanged lists of a total of 16,000 people believed to be detained. The UN video conference will be the first meeting of the Redeployment Coordination Committee overseeing the ceasefire and withdrawal. It includes three representatives from both sides.

It will be chaired by retired Dutch Major General Patrick Cammaert, expected leave New York later this week to Yemen. The Security Council is considering a resolution to ask the UN chief to submit proposals by the end of the month on how to monitor the truce and forces redeployment. Yemen descended into war after pro-democracy unrest forced late former president Ali Abdullah Saleh to step down. Hadi was elected to a two-year term to head a transitional government but the Houthis drove him into Saudi exile. The Houthis deny getting any help from Iran and say they are waging a revolution against corruption. — Reuters

Venezuelan inmates see rugby as a road to redemption

CARACAS: In a lush valley west of Caracas, two teams of burly rugby players bolt onto a field like colts, cheers rising from a small crowd of onlookers. The only jarring note in this bucolic scene - surrounded by mountains, high trees and sugar plantations - are the 100 National Guard soldiers deployed around the perimeter. Cradling their rifles, they eye the players coolly. And for good reason. The tattooed men in colorful rugby jerseys with crests describing their teams as Jaguars, Hawks and Lions are violent gang members from some of Venezuela's toughest jails.

Playing rugby, a game that requires teamwork and controlled aggression, means a day out in fresh air, free from handcuffs and grimy incarceration. It is also a game that requires discipline, and for these men, represents a step on the road to redemption. The seven-a-side tournament is the brainchild of businessman Alberto Vollmer, head of the family-owned Hacienda Santa Teresa. The sugar plantation and distillery, which produces some of the world's finest rum, also works to rehabilitate some of Venezuela's toughest convicted gang members. Vollmer calls it Project Alcatraz.

The knot of relatives on the side of the pitch cheer on the players by name and try to get their attention by holding up signs. Some weep to see their fathers, brothers, or husbands running out on the pitch, momentarily free. Redemption is Vollmer's theme as his hacienda hosts 13 prison teams from around Venezuela at this tournament. "What we have learned in Project Alcatraz is that it doesn't matter where you come from or that you had dark moments... because we have discovered that each individual has infinite potential," he says.

Some of the relatives are overcome by emotion, weeping when they see their men outside the confines of prison walls. One of the excited onlookers is Yusbelis Torres, who waved a banner to encourage her two brothers who have spent the last five years behind bars for robbery. — AFP

Trump panel recommends guns in schools to keep US students safe

Safety panel recommends arming staff

WASHINGTON: A safety panel set up by US President Donald Trump in the wake of numerous school shootings has recommended that schools consider arming staff, using veterans as guards and reversing Obama-era guidelines. The Federal Commission on School Safety panel, led by Education Secretary Betsy DeVos, was set up after the February massacre in Parkland, Florida, when a former student shot dead 17 people, sparking mass gun control protests. The commission rejected calls to increase the minimum age required for gun purchases, arguing in its 180-page report that most school shooters obtain their weapons from family members or friends. Instead, it suggested arming staff - even

teachers in some circumstances - "for the sake of effectively and immediately responding to violence."

School districts where police responses could be slower, such as rural districts, may benefit in particular, the commission said. It also recommended education authorities hiring military veterans and former police officers who "can also serve as highly effective educators." The report pushes for a review of disciplinary guidelines introduced in 2014 under former president Barack Obama, which suggested alternatives to suspension and expulsion to tackle discrimination against black and Latino students. The commission's report said the measure has had "a strong negative impact on

school discipline and safety." The American Civil Liberties Union condemned that proposition. "The Trump administration is exploiting tragedies to justify rolling back school children's civil rights protections, despite the lack of any evidence linking school discipline reform to school shootings," it said in a statement. Democratic Representative Nancy Pelosi, who will be US House speaker when her party take over the chamber in January, criticized the report saying Trump and DeVos "have reached a new low."

"Their 'report' on school safety puts special interests and the NRA ahead of protecting America's school children. Students & parents have had #Enough," Pelosi

wrote on Twitter. She drew a backlash from Ryan Petty, a gun enthusiast and school safety advocate whose 14 year old daughter was killed in the Parkland massacre. "Hi @NancyPelosi, it's easy to be a critic. Harder to create. Would you sit down with Parkland families to discuss the report?," Petty wrote on Twitter. "We worked hard to ensure this report addresses top school safety priorities. It's painful for us when you dismiss it without basis in fact," he added.

Over 219,000 US students have been involved in a school shooting since the April 1999 Columbine High School massacre, according to figures collated by the Washington Post. — AFP

News in brief

IS kills 700 prisoners

BEIRUT: The Syrian Observatory for Human Rights said yesterday that Islamic State militants had executed nearly 700 prisoners in nearly two months in eastern Syria. The UK-based war monitoring group said the prisoners were among 1,350 civilians and fighters that Islamic State had been holding in territory near the Iraqi border. The jihadists control a shrinking strip of land east of the Syria's Euphrates River around the town of Hajin, which US-backed forces entered this month. The Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF), led by the Kurdish YPG militia, has battled Islamic State there for several months with the help of U.S. air power and special forces. SDF commander-in-chief Mazloum Kobani told Reuters last week that at least 5,000 IS fighters remain holed up in the enclave, including many foreigners who appear ready to fight to the death. — Reuters

Ex-defense chief killed

LAGOS: Gunmen have shot dead a former defense chief on a main road outside Nigeria's capital Abuja, the air force said, in an attack that underscores worsening security in the vast west African nation. "It is with a heavy heart that I regretfully announce the unfortunate demise of former Chief of Defense Staff, Air Chief Marshal Alex Sabundu Badeh", air force spokesman Ibikunle Daramola said in a statement late Tuesday. Badeh, 61, died Tuesday "from gunshot wounds sustained when his vehicle was attacked while returning from his farm along Abuja-Keffi road". The air force did not say if any arrests had been or suggest motives behind the killing. Badeh who served as Nigeria's defence chief under former president Goodluck Jonathan, retired in 2015. He has been on trial since his retirement over allegations of corruption while in office. — AFP

Sri Lankan MPs defect

COLOMBO: Three lawmakers from Sri Lankan President Maithripala Sirisena's party defected to the government of Prime Minister Ranil Wickremesinghe on Tuesday after a dispute between the two leaders. The island nation was plunged into crisis in October after Sirisena replaced Wickremesinghe with ex-president Mahinda Rajapaksa, without the backing of parliament, leading to protests and downgrades of Sri Lanka's debt. Rajapaksa, best known for crushing a long-running insurgency in the north of the country and drawing Sri Lanka closer to China, failed to win a parliamentary majority and resigned on Saturday as a government shutdown loomed. Wickremesinghe was then sworn in as prime minister for the fifth time in a remarkable comeback. "We joined the government... as the party and the country have been dragged into a difficult position," Vijith Wijayamuni Soysa, one of the three lawmakers told parliament. — Reuters

6 baby seals decapitated

WELLINGTON: Six baby seals have been found decapitated in New Zealand in what wildlife rangers yesterday branded a "cruel and senseless" act against a protected species. The bodies of the New Zealand fur seal pups were found by a tourism operator on Monday at Scenery Nook near the South Island city of Christchurch, the Department of Conservation said. The department's local operations manager Andy Thompson said the animals, which are protected under New Zealand law, were estimated to be 11 months old. "Due to the disturbing, brutal and violent nature of this crime... it has been reported to the police," he said. Thompson said the seals' heads were nowhere to be found and it appeared they had been killed elsewhere then dumped in the beauty spot from a boat. "We believe it's incredibly unlikely sharks would have bitten the heads off six seals but left the bodies untouched," he said. — AFP

Underground bishop quits

BEIJING: A second bishop from China's underground Catholic church is stepping aside and is being replaced by a government-backed clergyman, state-run media reported, amid a thaw in relations between Beijing and the Holy See. There are an estimated 10 million Catholics in China, divided between a government-run association whose clergy are chosen by the Communist Party, and the unofficial church loyal to the Vatican. An agreement struck in September on the appointment of bishops has paved the way for a rapprochement between China and the Vatican, who cut off diplomatic ties in 1951. Zhuang Jianjian, bishop of the Shantou diocese in southern China will retire and be replaced by Huang Bingzhang, deputy chairman of the Chinese Patriotic Catholic Association, the Global Times reported. The Vatican-issued mandate was given to Huang last week by a delegation from the Holy See that met several Chinese bishops, the state-linked paper reported. — AFP

UK steps up no-deal Brexit plans; 3,500 troops on standby

LONDON: The British government said it was allocating two billion pounds (\$2.5 billion) to fund Brexit and putting 3,500 troops on stand-by after ministers agreed to make no-deal planning "an operational priority". The news came amid continued opposition to Prime Minister Theresa's May draft divorce deal, just 14 weeks before the country leaves the EU. Following a meeting of her cabinet-the last before parliament breaks for Christmas and New Year-Defense Secretary Gavin Williamson said around 3,500 troops would be on stand-by to help deal with the "any contingencies" from a no-deal outcome. But Brexit Secretary Steve Barclay said ministers still hoped to secure backing for May's agreement in a House of Commons vote delayed until next month.

He added that any responsible government would intensify preparations for the "default option" of leaving the European Union without a deal on March 29 next year. "We agreed that preparing for no deal will be an operational priority within government," Barclay said. "But our overall priority remains to secure a deal." He said departments would step up their advice to businesses on how best to prepare for the scenario, which many fear could be catastrophic for the British economy. Businesses will be provided with a 100-plus page online preparation pack and emails will be sent to 80,000 of those most likely to be impacted over the next few days, according to Downing Street.

Divisions

Finance minister Philip Hammond insisted in a statement Tuesday that "the PM's deal is the only way to deliver on the referendum while protecting jobs, businesses and prosperity". The same government statement said that Hammond was making arrangements to ensure that government departments "can fund measures to address civil contingencies in a no deal scenario".

The Home Office, which will get the biggest share of the Brexit funding, will use it, among other things, "to increase Border Force capability with hundreds of new officers," it said. May's cabinet is divided between minis-

In Baltimore, Christmas comes early for those with unwanted guns

BALTIMORE: Christmas is coming early this year for Stanley, who came to turn over his old revolvers and several rifle magazines to police in the violence-plagued US city of Baltimore in exchange for cash. "I'm hoping to get \$700, to buy my three kids Christmas gifts," says Stanley, who surrendered four magazines for AR-15s-the lightweight semi-automatic frequently used in mass shootings-and four handguns. The buy-back scheme was announced in a bid to rid the streets of illegal weapons in a city that has seen 298 people killed through Sunday this year, or nearly one per day, according to the Baltimore Sun daily.

It is no surprise, therefore, that the number of deaths in violent crime in the city is expected comfortably to exceed 300 for the fourth calendar year in a row. On Monday, the collection was organized in a sports center in Upton, a poor area where decrepit buildings stand alongside public housing and where at least eight people were shot dead this year. Police have promised anonymity to those who hand in their weapons, who must be residents of Baltimore. Large magazines will net \$25, handguns and rifles \$100, semi-automatic rifles \$200 and automatic rifles \$500. The transactions are completed quickly, and in cash.

'They won't steal this one'

Stanley was pleased with the price for magazines: "They're offering \$25 for each magazine. I bought them like \$5 apiece." Robert, an elderly man, showed up with the only weapon he had: a small-caliber .22 rifle wrapped in a garbage bag. "My house got broken into before and they stole a gun,



LONDON: Britain's Prime Minister Theresa May attends the weekly Prime Minister's Questions (PMQs) in the House of Commons in London yesterday. — AFP

ters who want the government to embrace a no-deal outcome and those who favor parliament having a final say in a series of votes on potential scenarios for Brexit. One option is the prime minister's own Brexit deal, but that is hanging by a thread after she was forced to pull a vote on it last week in the face of huge opposition from within her own Conservative Party.

Earlier Tuesday, Downing Street reportedly blocked opposition leader Jeremy Corbyn's request Monday for a non-binding no-confidence motion in May. That had followed her telling MPs they will not get to vote on her deal this week, but would have to wait until the week beginning January 14. The delay prompted accusations that the prime minister is stalling to increase pressure on MPs to back her plan-and fresh calls for Labor to initiate a binding no-confidence vote against the whole government. However, such a move faces likely defeat after Conservative Brexit hardliners and the Democratic Unionist Party, which props up her government, both said they would back May.

'Running down the clock'

May insisted Monday that she was continuing to seek "assurances" from the EU over elements of her plan, although EU officials said no meetings were planned. The postponed vote has left members of her own party and Labor opposition politicians infuriated. "The prime minister has cynically run down the clock, trying to manoeuvre parliament into a choice between two unacceptable outcomes"-her deal or no deal, Corbyn said.

May is also facing calls for a second referendum to resolve the impasse, with dozens of MPs from all sides now supporting another plebiscite and reports that May's officials are also considering the possibility. But the prime minister argued that this would betray the 2016 Brexit referendum result and undermine public confidence in politics. "Let us not break faith with the British people by trying to stage another referendum," she told parliament on Monday. "Another vote... would do irreparable damage to the integrity of our politics," May said, adding that it would also "likely leave us no further forward". — AFP

Migration row forces Belgian PM to resign

BRUSSELS: Nationalist anger over migration brought down the Belgian government yesterday, forcing Prime Minister Charles Michel to offer the king his resignation. With only five months to go until planned legislative elections in May, in was not immediately clear whether King Philippe would accept Michel's sudden departure. The palace said a decision is pending but a senior source told AFP the "most likely" outcome would be the crown asking Michel's government to handle the day-to-day business of government until the scheduled vote.

Having lost the backing of the Flemish nationalist N-VA on December 9, Michel had attempted to lead a minority government. But on Tuesday, during a parliamentary debate, the liberal premier admitted defeat rather than face and probably lose a no confidence vote called by the left-wing and green opposition parties. Michel, who took office in 2014, lost the backing of the New Flemish Alliance (N-VA) over his support for the UN migration pact, a cause celebre for European anti-immigration parties. The resignation comes two days after demonstrations against the pact in central Brussels descended into scuffles, with police forced to use tear gas and water cannon to restore order.

After a debate in parliament where opposition parties refused to agree to vote on planned reforms on a case-by-case basis until the May 26 election, Michel announced he would quit. "I have taken the decision to submit my resignation and it is my intention to go to see the king immediately," Michel said, jumping before lawmakers could push him with a motion of no confidence. Afterwards, King Philippe received Michel but will hold further consultations before deciding whether to accept his resignation, the palace said in a statement.

Agriculture Minister Denis Ducarne of Michel's liberal MR party, criticized the left wing and green parties for risking "paralysis and crisis for our country" instead of cooperating. Their support was needed because the N-VA, led by powerful Antwerp mayor Bart De Wever, had made political demands which Michel judged "unacceptable"-notably on constitutional changes. The liberal premier has steadfastly defended the Marrakesh migration pact, saying it presented an "opportunity for better European and international cooperation." The non-binding UN accord, which would promote a common global approach to migrant flows, was initially supported by all four parties in Belgium's coalition. — AFP



BALTIMORE: A man picks up 4 shotguns off the street as he arrives at the Shake and Bake Community Center in Baltimore, MD for the 2018 Baltimore Police Gun Buyback Program. — AFP

so this time they won't steal this one," he said. As the number of people turning in weapons grew, a man in his 30s took a bag of rifles out of the trunk of his car. The guns seemed to be in good condition. The man, who did not want to be identified, said he no longer used his weapons, which were stored in his basement. He chose to turn them in because he did not "want to sell them to someone I don't know. I don't want to be responsible. I hope to get \$1,000. It's going to pay for my car."

The right to bear arms is guaranteed by the 2nd Amendment to the US Constitution, and there are weapons in one third of American homes. According to health authorities, nearly 40,000 people died in the United States as a result of firearms in 2017 - a figure that includes suicides. The last gun buy-back effort, in 2012, collected about 250 weapons, according to Baltimore police. "At the end of the day, guns kill people and we want to get them off the street," acting Baltimore police commissioner Gary Tuggle said last week.

Divided opinions

In Upton, opinions are divided.

International

Myanmar military-linked pages and accounts removed from Facebook

Facebook scrambles to respond to criticism amid hate speech

YANGON: Facebook has removed hundreds of pages and accounts in Myanmar with hidden links to the military, the platform said yesterday, as the company scrambles to respond to criticism over failures to control hate speech and misinformation. The social media giant - Myanmar's most popular and influential site - has been lambasted for years for its ineffective response to malicious posts, particularly against the country's Rohingya Muslims. The problem reached new levels of urgency last year as Myanmar's military drove more than 720,000 Rohingya into Bangladesh, while dehumanising material about the stateless group spread on the site.

Facebook said yesterday some 425 pages, 17 groups, 135 accounts and 15 Instagram accounts had been removed, which were posing as independent news, entertainment, beauty and lifestyle pages but in reality had links to the military or to pages previously removed. This is Facebook's third sweeping takedown of pages and accounts for what it calls "coordinated inauthentic behavior" in Myanmar following deletions in October and August. Hardline nationalist monks and even the army's top generals, accused by UN investigators of genocide, are among the users Facebook blacklisted this year.

Facebook said in a newsroom post that it does not want people or

organizations "creating networks of accounts to mislead others about who they are, or what they're doing," adding that one page had 2.5 million followers. Some of the deleted pages were called "Down for Anything", "Let's Laugh Casually", and "We Love Myanmar". Facebook has been trying to repair its battered reputation, improving the speed with which hate speech is taken down and vowing to beef up its Myanmar-language reviewers on staff to 100 by the end of 2018. But critics say this is not enough to oversee some 20 million Facebook accounts in the country, many in a patchwork of regional languages.

An independent report commissioned by Facebook concluded last month that the state was ultimately responsible for rights abuses, but the company should have done more to prevent the platform from being used to foment division and incite offline violence. It also warned that Myanmar's 2020 election will likely be a flashpoint for abuse and misinformation. Most people in Myanmar only came online in the last few years, when smartphone usage soared as the country opened up to the outside world after decades of isolated military rule. Civilian leader Aung San Suu Kyi's government - which is in an uneasy power-sharing agreement with the military - has come under fire for not doing more to stand up for the Rohingya. — AFP



15 Instagram accounts also removed



YANGON: A Myanmar man logs into his Facebook account at a teashop in Yangon. Facebook has removed hundreds of additional pages and accounts in Myanmar with hidden links to the military, the platform said yesterday, as the company scrambles to respond to criticism over failures to control hate speech and misinformation. — AFP

New Zealand warns Google over naming a murder suspect

WELLINGTON: New Zealand warned Google to "take responsibility" for its news content yesterday, after the internet giant broke a court order suppressing the name of a man charged with murdering a British backpacker. An Auckland court granted the man interim name suppression this month but Google revealed his identity in an email to subscribers of its "what's trending in New Zealand?" service. Justice Minister Andrew Little said the breach was unacceptable and he had made his views known to Google executives at a meeting in parliament on Tuesday night.

While Google has argued the breach was inadvertent and it was unaware of the court order when the automatically generated email went out, Little said that was not good enough. "I put the ball back in their court," he told commercial radio yesterday. "If they choose to set up their algorithms and distribute news, they've got to take responsibility for that." The case concerns the murder of British tourist Grace Millane, 22, whose body was found earlier this month just outside Auckland, resulting in a 26-year-old man being arrested and charged. The case generated intense interest in New Zealand and Britain, where some media outlets have also named the accused, arguing the court order does not apply to them.

Little said he met two local Google executives, and a senior legal counsel from the company's California headquarters joined them by video. He said they appeared genuinely concerned about the breach and assured him they were working to ensure

it did not happen again, with another meeting scheduled for early 2019 to assess their progress. Little conceded that controlling information on the internet and social media was challenging but said court orders were made for a reason and must be respected. "We can't just stand back and say this is all too hard," he said.

"The price of that (would be) we have to capitulate and concede what are very important rights that anyone going through the courts has." He said the case highlighted the potential need for an international agreement if Google "won't do anything (or) can't do anything" to resolve the issue. "They can expect us to talk to partner countries around the world who have a similar interest... about reaching an agreement to enforce each others' orders in each others' countries," he said. "That may well happen inevitably anyway because it's not just Google, there are others as well and we have to protect the integrity of our court system." — AFP

A third Canadian detained in China

BEIJING: A third Canadian citizen has been detained in China, a Canadian newspaper reported yesterday, amid a diplomatic spat between Beijing and Ottawa over the arrest of a Chinese telecom executive. Canada's foreign ministry said it was "aware of a Canadian citizen" having been detained, according to the National Post, which cited a ministry spokesperson.

The spokesperson did not provide further details and did not suggest that the detention was linked to the arrest of Huawei chief financial officer Meng Wanzhou, the report said. Chinese foreign ministry spokeswoman Hua Chunying told a regular press briefing that she had "not heard" about the reported detention. The recent detentions of two Canadians has raised suspicions that Beijing is holding them in retaliation for Meng's December 1 arrest, though no link has officially been made between the cases.

Meng was released on bail last week in Vancouver pending a US extradition hearing on US fraud charges related to sanctions-breaking business dealings with Iran. China has accused the other detainees-former Canadian diplomat Michael Kovrig and China-based business consultant Michael Spavor-of activities "that endanger China's national security". They were both detained on December 10. Kovrig is a Hong Kong-based senior adviser at the International Crisis Group think tank, while Spavor facilitates trips to North Korea and helped former NBA star Dennis Rodman travel to the neighbouring country.

Beijing has threatened Canada with "grave consequences" if Meng is not freed and Chinese state-run media has lashed out at the arrest, saying it was politically motivated. Ottawa has repeatedly said the arrest was not political but rather a judicial process in keeping with an extradition treaty with Washington. But despite escalating tensions between the two countries, the Canadian embassy in China does not seem to be holding back. On Tuesday it posted a commemoration of the 10th anniversary of Charter 08, a widely circulated online petition that called for political reform in China, on Chinese social media.

Nobel Peace Prize Laureate and dissident Liu Xiaobo, who died last year from liver cancer while in police custody, was arrested after co-authoring the petition, which urged protection of basic human rights and the reform of China's one-party system. More than 1,300 people "shared views before (the) comment section was shut down", wrote the Canadian embassy on its Twitter account yesterday, which included a link to the Nobel Prize's Liu page. "Violation of article 35 (freedom of speech) of China's own Constitution?" — AFP

China warns against 'weaponizing' space

BEIJING: China said yesterday it opposed the "weaponization" of space as it criticized US President Donald Trump's orders to create a new command centre for controlling military space operations. "China has consistently proposed the peaceful usage of space, and opposes the weaponization of space and a space arms race," said Chinese foreign ministry spokeswoman Hua Chunying at a press briefing. "We oppose even further turning space into the new battleground," she added.

On Tuesday, Trump ordered the creation of "Space Command", a new

organizational structure within the Pentagon that will have overall control of military space operations. SpaceCom, as it will inevitably come to be known, will be on equal footing with other US military commands, such as Central Command in the Middle East or Indo-Pacific Command in Asia, and will require a new headquarters as well as a commander and deputy commander who will need Senate approval. It is not the first military space entity proposed by the US president this year. In June, Trump said he wanted to create "Space Force", an entirely new branch of the military, alongside the Navy, Marine Corps, Army, Air Force and Coast Guard.

He insists such a move is necessary to tackle vulnerabilities in space and assert US dominance in orbit. But its creation is not a done deal, as it needs to be approved by Congress, and the concept has met with some skepticism from lawmakers and defense officials wary of the cost and added bureaucracy. China has also bolstered its



CALIFORNIA: People are seen at a Space X parking lot as work continues behind them on the entrance to a tunnel across the road from Space X headquarters in Hawthorne, California. — AFP

space capabilities in recent years. Earlier this month, the country launched a rover heading to the far side of the moon, a global first that

could boost Beijing's ambitions to become a space superpower. In 2013, China landed its first probe on the moon, Yutu or "Jade Rabbit". — AFP

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US homeless find refuge in safe parking

After he lost his job three years ago and could not pay his rent, 54-year-old Jamie La Croix was lucky to get a car - it saved him from sleeping in the bushes. Yet that brought its own problems: municipalities throughout southern California where he lives have passed local laws against sleeping in a vehicle. He would "try to find a parking lot - anywhere I can where there won't be any law enforcement involvement," La Croix, a part-time construction worker, told the Thomson Reuters Foundation. His situation, he added, was "very common".

Homelessness spiked in the United States following the 2008 economic recession, according to official statistics, although the numbers have since improved. Cities nationwide responded in different ways, including passing laws that criminalize many of the situations that homeless people find themselves in. Local laws banning people from sleeping in a vehicle saw the greatest increase - the number of cities with such laws doubled to 81 between 2011 and 2014, according to the National Law Center on Homelessness and Poverty, a non-profit.

Across most of the San Diego region it is now illegal to live in one's vehicle, and so, for the past year, La Croix was sleeping in his car at highway rest areas. But that was difficult, he said, because the rules stipulate you cannot stay for more than eight hours at a time. And, he added, at times the rest areas could be dangerous. In November, he heard of a program offering a safe, legal place for those who needed to sleep in their vehicle. He has spent the past month there.

The project, run by a non-profit called Dreams for Change, provides clothing and food, and has a service to find housing and full-time work. At this lot he has had "zero problems". In fact, he said, two police officers recently asked him how they could get in touch with the organizers so they could tell others in need about the program. "Now, instead of giving people a ticket, they'll direct them to the safe parking lot," La Croix said.

'Across professions'

There are no figures on the number of "safe parking" programs across the country, but experts and organizers said there had been an uptick in interest in recent years. Most such initiatives, they said, were on the West Coast. San Diego has three such programs; two are run by the city. "Most people forget about this group of homeless individuals - they think about the street homeless with addiction problems," said Teresa Smith, chief executive of Dreams for Change, which since 2010 has run the lot where La Croix lives.

"After the recession we started seeing people coming in (to homeless shelters) that never really did before," she said, noting that those who are helped include families and people from "across the professions". Over the past eight years, said Smith, the three local programs have helped more than 5,000 people, including many families. In order to foster a sense of stability, people can stay as long as they need. Most average six to eight months.

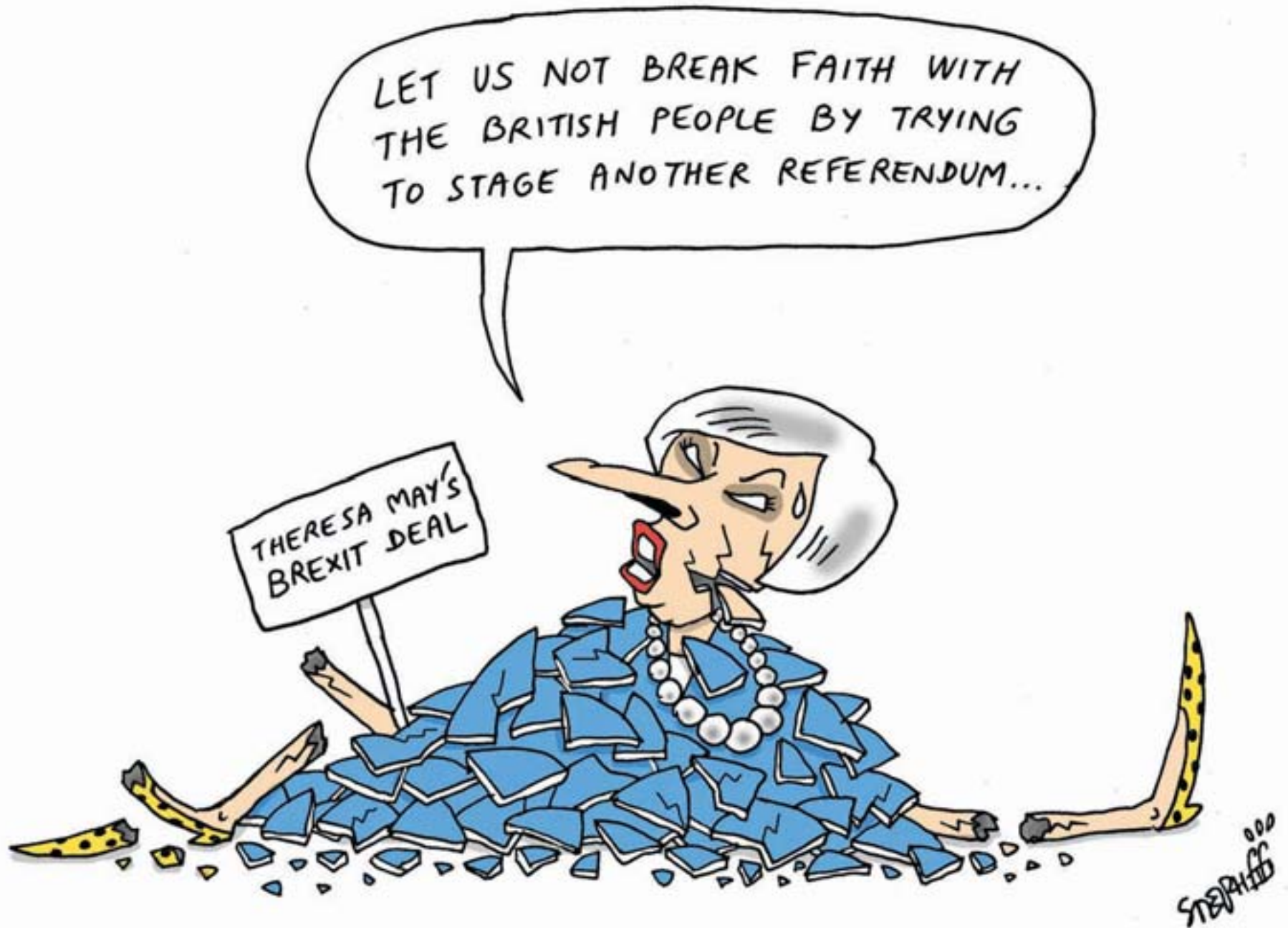
Advocates said it was not only the public that overlooked car-bound homelessness. For decades, the government has focused spending on subsets of the homeless population - military veterans or those dealing with chronic homelessness, said Megan Hustings, director of the National Coalition for the Homeless. That meant money for other groups had dried up, she said. "And (now) you have to fit into a very specific profile to get homelessness assistance. That's problematic and has led at least in some degree to the increase in the number of people living in vehicles," she said.

Hidden in plain sight

Churches and other religious institutions also provide safe parking, making use of what are often large lots. "We're offering an option," said Karina O'Malley, the safe-parking coordinator at Lake Washington United Methodist Church, outside Seattle. "We have an empty parking lot, and if folks find it useful, we want to make it available." O'Malley, who has also been involved for a decade running a homeless shelter, said safe parking was an important add-on even when shelter options were available. Pets, for instance, are often a "huge barrier" to getting into a shelter.

Under a round-the-clock program that started in 2012, people can sleep in their car at the church lot, then go down the road to the shelter to shower, use computers and more, she said. "But they'll still want to come back to the parking lot and have a private place where they can lock the doors, have their pets, keep their stuff," O'Malley said. Each night, about 50 people sleep in the church parking lot under the program that, she said, costs very little.

About six other churches operate in a loose network of safe parking lots in the Seattle area, said O'Malley, who fields calls from across the country from others interested in setting up similar programs. In March, a judge ruled against the city of Seattle after a homeless man's truck was towed because it had not been moved within 72 hours, violating a local ordinance. The judge said the impoundment was illegal because the man had been using the vehicle as a home. Even outside of formal "safe" programs, parking lots have become focal points for outreach efforts targeting the homeless. — Reuters



Trump mired in legal morass

Donald Trump rails on an almost daily basis against the federal probe into whether his campaign colluded with Russia to get him elected to the White House. But the investigation by former FBI director Robert Mueller into the 2016 election is just one of many ongoing inquiries into Trump, his businesses and his associates. Trump's ex-national security advisor, retired lieutenant general Michael Flynn, appeared in court on Tuesday for sentencing after pleading guilty to lying to the FBI.

And New York's attorney general announced that Trump's personal charity, the Trump Foundation, had agreed to shut down amid a lawsuit accusing it of engaging in illegal activity. Exactly how many investigations target Trump is subject to interpretation because many of the probes overlap with others or have spun off in different directions. But the scrutiny is extensive. And that's before a Democratic-controlled House of Representatives convenes in January with wide-ranging powers to dig into Trump's affairs. Whether Trump could personally face charges while in the White House is a matter of debate - legal experts are divided on whether a sitting president can be indicted. The following are the main investigations facing Trump as he approaches two years in office:

Russia investigation

The core focus of the Special Counsel's probe is whether there were "any links and/or coordination between the Russian government and individuals" associated with the Trump campaign. While Mueller has yet to file any charges alleging outright collusion between the campaign and

Moscow, the probe has led to a host of indictments and guilty pleas. One focus of the probe is a June 9, 2016 meeting at the Trump Tower in New York in which a Russian lawyer was to offer dirt on Democratic nominee Hillary Clinton. The meeting was attended by Trump's campaign chairman, Paul Manafort, his son Donald Jr., and son-in-law Jared Kushner.

Mueller is also looking into whether WikiLeaks' Julian Assange coordinated his leaks of stolen Democratic Party emails with Trump campaign advisor Roger Stone. Twenty-five Russians and three Russian companies have been indicted for interfering in the 2016 election. Manafort was convicted of tax evasion and other charges related to his consulting work for pro-Moscow politicians in Ukraine between 2004 and 2014. Flynn and George Papadopoulos, an advisor to the campaign, pleaded guilty to lying to FBI agents about their contacts with Russians and have been cooperating with Mueller. Papadopoulos was given 14 days in prison, while Flynn's sentencing was delayed until March.

Michael Cohen, Trump's personal lawyer, was ordered to spend three years in prison after pleading guilty to tax evasion, providing false statements to a bank, campaign finance violations and lying to Congress. Cohen admitted lying to Congress about talks to build a Trump Tower in Moscow, acknowledging the negotiations continued well into the 2016 election campaign.

Campaign finance violations

Trump is facing potential legal jeopardy over hush money payments made to two

women who were threatening to go public during the election campaign with claims they had affairs with the Republican candidate. Cohen said \$130,000 was paid to porn actress Stormy Daniels and \$150,000 to former Playboy model Karen McDougal. Prosecutors have described the payments as illegal campaign contributions intended to influence the election and Cohen said they were made "in coordination and at the direction" of Trump. The president has said he did not instruct Cohen to break the law and has sought to pin the blame for the payments solely on his long-time "fixer."

Obstruction of justice

One avenue of the Mueller probe is whether Trump obstructed justice by abruptly firing then FBI director James Comey and asking him to shut down an investigation into General Flynn. Trump dismissed Comey in May 2017 while he was investigating Russian meddling in the 2016 election, a probe that was eventually taken up by Mueller.

Inauguration spending

According to The Wall Street Journal, federal prosecutors in New York are investigating whether Trump's inauguration committee misspent some of the record \$107 million it received in donations. The newspaper said prosecutors were looking into whether some donors gave money in exchange for access to Trump administration officials.

Profiting off his businesses

One of the cases facing the president is linked to his Trump International Hotel in Washington and an obscure provision in the

Trump Foundation

Trump agreed to shut down his personal charity, the Trump Foundation, after it was targeted in a lawsuit by the New York attorney general. State attorney general Barbara Underwood filed a lawsuit against the foundation in June, accusing it of "persistently illegal conduct" to advance Trump's business and political interests. The suit named Trump, sons Don Jr and Eric and daughter Ivanka, who were on the foundation board. The suit, which will move forward despite the agreement dissolving the charity, seeks \$2.8 million in restitution and to bar Trump, Don Jr, Eric and Ivanka from serving on the boards of other New York non-profits.

Taxes

In the wake of a New York Times expose about alleged tax evasion by the Trump family, New York state tax authorities said they were looking into the matter. According to the Times, the Trump family managed in the 1990s to avoid paying taxes on hundreds of millions of dollars through "outright fraud" in some cases. — AFP

Mexican forensic scientists' crime fighting weapon

Jorge's putrefied corpse would have been buried in an unmarked grave but for a rehydration technique pioneered in Mexico that allowed him to be identified by his tattoos and given the send-off his family wanted. In the northern city of Ciudad Juarez - once considered the most violent in the world - close to the United States border, unidentifiable bodies are an all too common sight due to the interminable war between drug cartels that have left 14,000 dead over the last decade. But the town's forensic scientists, such as Alejandro Hernandez-Cardenas Rodriguez, have garnered a worldwide reputation for their work in rehydrating the tissue of mummified corpses.

"If you give a mummified or putrefied corpse to family members, and they can't look at it, or if they do they can't recognize it, they will always remain unsure, even if we tell them that thanks to genetics there's a 99.99 percent certainty that it's him," said Hernandez-Cardenas, an expert of international renown who has held conferences and workshops abroad to teach his techniques. "If we give them a body in the best conditions, rehydrated, they will have the certainty they are receiving the body of their loved one."

To rehydrate a body, Hernandez-Cardenas plunges it for several days into a tub filled with 300 liters of water mixed with a solution he created. It takes three to five days to rehydrate a putrefied corpse and a week for a one that has been mummified - or dried up. Hernandez-Cardenas began tests in 2004 to perfect a technique first invented at the turn of the 20th century in the US. Originally it was used to allow fingerprints to be taken from certain corpses but Hernandez-Cardenas then began experimenting on "several hundred" hands, ears or entire bodies.

His technique, patented in 2017, improves the appearance of skin, bringing tattoos, scars or distinctive marks back to life. But it also allows for internal organs to be better viewed, thus helping in the identification of the cause of death. When it came to the body of Jorge, discovered a



month after his death, the technique made visible his name written over a red heart on the left side of his blackened body. Other tattoos including an Aztec sun on a forearm and a message reading "My son Jesus", also allowed his family to identify him.

Rehydration is merely the latest in a series of measures used by forensic scientists in the fight against violent crime in Mexico, most of which goes unpunished. Identifying victims is just the first in the succession of obstacles in convicting criminals and experts can be faced with bodies that have been decapitated, burnt, amputated or sprayed with up to 200 bullets. Forensic scientists from Chihuahua state, where Ciudad Juarez is situated, often share their experiences with counterparts throughout the country who either lack training or are hamstrung by "fear", according to Rafael Garcia, 35, a crime scene investigator in Ciudad Juarez since 2009.

Ambush danger

Although Garcia has never considered leaving his role, his family has asked him to find less dangerous work. "My

parents tell me: Think hard, look at the violence there is," he said, having just spent three hours working on a body found in the back of a car. In 2010, he was the victim of a gun attack while working at the site of an ambush on a police convoy. Since 2012, forensic scientists have carried guns while they also undergo training in firearms, security and ambushes.

This year alone, there have been 1,118 murders in Ciudad Juarez, which last year came 20th in a list of the world's most dangerous cities compiled by Mexico's Citizens' Council for Public Security, with 56 murders per 100,000 inhabitants. It's a city also sadly known for a spate of violent murders of women and girls since 1993. Garcia has been called out to up to eight crime scenes in a single day. "It's tiring, not just physically but also mentally. You have to control your feelings and the pain of those close to you," he said. According to Ivan Mendoza, 26, who quit the engineering sector three years ago to work with corpses: "Sometimes you get home to be told you smell bad. But we're used to it and we put our feelings to one side." — AFP

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Zain Kuwait enters pioneering agreement with Zain Drone

One of the first operators in MENA to deploy drone technology for tower infrastructure

- Automation will drive efficiencies with up to 50% in cost savings for Zain Kuwait by optimizing cell tower operations and improving infrastructure monitoring, diagnostics, and maintenance
- Drone-as-a-Service agreement is the first commercial deal for the recently launched Zain Drone

KUWAIT: Zain Kuwait, the leading digital service provider in Kuwait announces entering an agreement with Zain Drone to undertake inspections of its tower infrastructure. The agreement sees Zain Kuwait as one of the first operators in the MENA region to deploy drone technology to inspect and maintain its cell tower infrastructure, demonstrating the operator's drive to become a more agile and cost-efficient operator. The agreement also represents the first commercial deal for Zain Drone.

The pioneering Zain Drone-as-a-Service (DaaS) offering was announced at a ceremony at GITEX in Dubai in October 2018, with the business set to unlock opportunities in various industries to fast-track growth and exploit the Internet of Things (IoT) in an efficient, safer and faster way. The offering delivers state-of-the-art bespoke drone solutions and provides advanced analytics for governments and businesses.

In a growing trend globally for the telecom sector, progressive mobile operators have identified the need to constantly monitor their towers to ensure smooth and hassle-free relay of signals between devices and infrastructure to ensure a great mobile experience for customers. Drone cell tower inspection reduces costs and the time taken to detect any flaws considerably, as well as providing companies with complete details of defects through visual imagery, making it



Zain Kuwait's Chief Technology Officer
Nawaf Al-Gharabally

easier to develop lasting solutions for the problems that are identified.

Commenting on the agreement, Zain Kuwait Chief Technology Officer, Nawaf Al-Gharabally said, "Zain Kuwait is a flagship operation within the Group, and as such it is important for us to lead the way with regards to developments related to efficiency and infrastructure maintenance. Zain Group has always benefited from its broad portfolio of operations, be it from a geographic perspective or a technological



one, and tying up with Zain Drone is another example of how strong synergies are being driven within the Group to significant positive effect."

AbdulAziz Jawad, CEO of Zain Drone said, "We are pleased to announce our first commercial agreement with Zain Kuwait, one of the most innovative and forward-looking telecom operators in the region. Our business case is based on providing tools to our partners that help them optimize their operations and maximize gains from the efficient running of infrastructure. Kuwait will be a great showcase market for the capabilities of Zain Drone-as-a-Service, and we look forward to winning further business in Kuwait and other markets across the region from Zain operations as well as from non-Zain affiliated organizations."

Jawad continued, "Automation will play a key role in the cell tower inspection industry where automated workflows have proven their potential by helping cut inspection costs by as much as 50%, given



Zain Drone CEO AbdulAziz Jawad

that Drone hardware and software technologies have developed to the level that the entire inspection process can be streamlined and automated. The valuable benefits of Drone technology in this instance includes, higher-resolution visual inspections than ground-based inspections; a significant reduction of man hours and costs; safely assess the condition and alignment of all components of cell towers with inspections done from a safe distance; an increase in efficiency due to data accuracy,

live streaming and zoom or thermal capabilities; and importantly, no network downtime time as the cell towers remain functional during inspection."

Zain Drone is investing heavily to build the required capabilities in drone operations and is positioning itself to become the leading strategic partner in the fast-developing markets for unmanned data acquisition. The Zain Group enjoys solid in-house expertise in drone technology, drawing from international experts, and enjoys unparalleled knowledge of the enterprise market in Kuwait and across the region.

Zain DaaS offers multiple solutions across core industries such as Oil and Gas (Flare Inspections), Utilities (Power Line Inspections), Construction (BIM), Infrastructure (Asset Inspections), Security, Real Estate, Telecom Infrastructure, Agriculture and other industries.

Earlier this month Zain Drone announced it had entered into a Teaming Agreement with DroneShield, a worldwide leader in counter-drone solutions, which will see the companies working together on meeting Zain customers' requirements for counter-drone security solutions in the region.

With the launch of Zain Drone services, the Zain Group is fulfilling its digital transformation strategy of offering unique and business enhancing services to its customers. For more please visit: drone.zain.com

GSK and Pfizer to merge consumer healthcare units

LONDON: Pharmaceutical giants GlaxoSmithKline and Pfizer yesterday announced a merger of their consumer healthcare units that produce over-the-counter medicines.

GSK said it would have a 68-percent controlling equity interest in the GSK Consumer Healthcare joint venture that will have combined sales of about £9.8 billion (\$12.7 billion, 10.9 billion euros). The tie-up of over-the-counter (OTC) brands including GSK's Sensodyne toothpaste with Pfizer's Centrum multivitamins paves the way for British group GSK to have two UK-listed companies, one specialised in the development of drugs and the other in consumer healthcare.

US-based Pfizer's erectile-dysfunction drug Viagra does not form part of the tie-up, a GSK spokesman said.

The merger meanwhile comes as the pharmaceutical industry's biggest players seek out new blockbuster treatments following expiry of patents for some of their major drugs that has enabled rivals to offer cheaper alternatives.

GSK's share price surged 7.4 percent to £15.54 on news of the deal, topping London's benchmark FTSE 100 index, which was up 0.4 percent overall in early deals.

"This announcement seems to be the next brick in the wall of CEO Emma Walmsley's plan to cement Glaxo's position in this particular (OTC) space, having already bought out Novartis stake in a similar venture earlier this year, while also offloading its Horlicks (drink) business," noted Michael Hewson, chief market analyst at CMC Markets UK.

"The pharmaceutical sector is likely to face enormous challenges in the years ahead with respect to margin compression and the prospect of increased competition... particularly since companies like Amazon have helped push prices lower," he added in a client note.

GSK said annual cost savings should reach £500 million by 2022 and predicted that the joint venture would be the global leader in OTC prod-



LONDON: In this file photo, the headquarters of the British pharmaceutical company GlaxoSmithKline is pictured in west London. Pharmaceutical giants GlaxoSmithKline and Pfizer announced yesterday, a merger of their consumer healthcare units that produce over-the-counter medicines. — AFP

ucts with a market share of 7.3 percent.

"Within three years of the closing of the transaction, GSK intends to separate the joint venture via a demerger of its equity interest and a listing of GSK Consumer Healthcare on the UK equity market," a statement said. "Over this period, GSK will substantially complete the integration and expects to make continued progress in strengthening its Pharmaceuticals business and R&D pipeline."

Earlier this month, GSK struck deals to buy US cancer-treatment specialist Tesaro for \$5.1 billion and sell the night-time hot drink brand Horlicks to Unilever for 3.3 billion euros. In a separate statement, US giant Pfizer said the joint venture "will be a category leader in pain relief, respiratory, vitamin and mineral supplements, digestive health, skin health and therapeutic oral health and will be the largest global consumer healthcare business". GSK chief executive Walmsley said "the transaction also presents a clear pathway forward for GSK to create a new global Pharmaceuticals/Vaccines company... focused on science related to the immune system, use of genetics and advanced technologies".

She added: "Ultimately, our goal is to create

two exceptional, UK-based global companies, with appropriate capital structures, that are each well positioned to deliver improving returns to shareholders and significant benefits to patients and consumers."

It is meanwhile a final act for Pfizer CEO Ian Read, who leaves his post at the end of the year, handing the reins over to the company's chief operating officer Albert Bourla. "We are pleased to announce this new joint venture for Pfizer Consumer Healthcare, delivering on our commitment to complete the strategic review for this business in 2018," Read said.

"Pfizer and GSK have an excellent track record of creating successful collaborations, and we look forward to working together again to unlock the potential of our combined consumer healthcare businesses," he added.

Earlier this year, Swiss group Novartis sold its stake in its consumer healthcare joint venture to GSK for \$13 billion.

Meanwhile yesterday, Japanese company Taisho Pharmaceutical said it had offered \$1.6 billion for UPSA, a French OTC drugs company owned by US giant Bristol-Myers. — AFP

UK economy to slip to 7th biggest in world in 2019 - PwC

LONDON: Britain risks slipping from being the world's fifth-biggest economy to its seventh-largest next year, when it is due to leave the European Union, with France and India on course to overtake it, accountancy firm PwC said.

PwC projected economic growth in 2019 of 1.6 percent for Britain—assuming the country manages to avoid the shock of a no-deal Brexit in March—versus 1.7 percent for France and 7.6 percent for India.

"The UK and France have regularly alternated in having the larger economy, but subdued growth in the UK in 2018 and again in 2019 is likely to tip the balance in France's favor," PwC economist Mike Jakeman said. The ranking is based on the size of national economies in US dollar terms.

Britain's economy slowed and the value of the pound slumped after the 2016 Brexit referendum decision to leave the EU. "India is the fastest-growing large economy in the world, with an enormous population, favorable demographics and high catch-up potential due to low initial GDP (gross domestic product) per head," Jakeman said.

"It is all but certain to continue to rise in the global GDP league table in the coming decades." PwC expects India to rise to fifth place next year from seventh, and France to remain at sixth.

With just 100 days until Brexit, the United Kingdom is on the brink of leaving the European Union without a divorce deal, the nightmare scenario for many businesses which are now planning for an



Britain's Prime Minister Theresa May

economic shock.

Prime Minister Theresa May's failure to find a divorce deal the British parliament will approve means the world's fifth largest economy now faces three main choices: agreeing a last-minute deal, halting Brexit or leaving without a deal.

No deal means there would be no transition so the exit, set in law as 2300 GMT on March 29, would be abrupt. Bank of England Governor Mark Carney said leaving the EU with no transition could be akin to the 1970s oil shock.

May is yet to win the support of a deeply divided parliament for the deal she struck last month with EU leaders to maintain close ties with the bloc. But British politicians have been unable to agree any alternative Brexit course, deepening concerns that the United Kingdom will, as May has warned, drop out of the world's biggest trading bloc without a deal.

"Businesses have been watching in horror as politicians have focused on factional disputes rather than practical steps that business needs to move forward," the heads of Britain's five biggest business lobby groups said. — Reuters

Business

Huawei announces securing 25 5G commercial contracts

Tech giant ranks number one among all ICT equipment providers

KUWAIT: Huawei Rotating Chairman Ken Hu held a press conference with leading global media at the company's new campus in Dongguan on Tuesday. The journalists visited R&D labs showcasing materials and thermal management technologies developed for 5G equipment, as well as an independent cybersecurity lab.

Hu delivered strong messages of confidence in Huawei's business growth and prospects, citing the trust of hundreds of network operators, nearly half of the world's Fortune 500 companies, and hundreds of millions of consumers. Huawei's 2018 revenue, he said, was expected to exceed \$100 billion.

He also directly addressed recent allegations against Huawei, stating that it is best to let facts speak for themselves, while emphasizing repeatedly that the company's security record was clean. Hu noted that there have been no serious cybersecurity incidents in 30 years.

On 5G, Hu mentioned that Huawei has secured 25 commercial contracts, ranking number one among all ICT equipment providers, having already shipped more than 10,000 base stations to markets around the world. Almost all network customers have indicated they want Huawei, which is currently the market leader with the best equipment and will remain so for at least the next 12 to 18 months, for faster and more cost-effective upgrades to 5G. Some security concerns based on the technology for 5G were very legitimate, noted Hu, but able to be clarified or mitigated through collaboration

with operators and governments.

"Rare cases" have arisen where some countries are using 5G issues as an excuse for groundless speculation based on "ideological or geopolitical considerations". Security concerns disingenuously raised as excuses to block market competition would slow adoption of new technology, increase costs for network deployment, and raise prices for consumers. If Huawei were allowed to compete in the US for 5G deployment from 2017 to 2020, around US\$20 billion of capital expenditure in wireless infrastructure would be saved, according to some economists.

Hu emphasized that Security is Huawei's highest priority and it overarches everything. Hu was open to a question about building cyber security evaluation centers in places such as the US and Australia, pointing to similar centers in the UK, Canada, and Germany that are designed to directly identify, address, and mitigate concerns. Huawei has subjected itself to the strictest reviews and screening by regulators and customers, while expressing understanding of legitimate concerns that some stakeholders might have. However, no evidence indicates that Huawei equipment poses a security threat. Regarding often-quoted concerns over Chinese law, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs in China had formally clarified that no law requires companies to install mandatory backdoors. Huawei remains open to concerns about its openness, transparency, and independence as well as dialogue. Any proof or evidence



DONGGUAN: Huawei Rotating Chairman Ken Hu holds a press conference with leading global media at the company's new campus in Dongguan on Tuesday.

could be shared with telecom operators, if not to Huawei or the public at large.

"We will continue to increase our investment on security and security related technologies. In our most recent board meeting, we decided on a companywide

transformation program to improve our software engineering capabilities. The company will invest an initial special budget of \$2 billion US dollars in the next five years to comprehensively improve our software engineering capabilities so our products will be better prepared for the future world" Hu added.

In the press conference, some journalists asked about Huawei's CFO, Meng Wanzhou. Hu said he was unable to comment due to legal processes underway, but he did express that business operations were not being impacted by this event. Executive travel plans were not impacted, and Huawei remains very confident about its trade compliance system, which has been running since 2007. The company has confidence in the fairness and independence of the judicial systems in Canada and the US.

Hu described the company's recent achievements as exciting, and recalled his almost 30-year history with Huawei during which its people, culture and management had grown. "This is journey of transformation that has helped us grow up from an unknown vendor to the 5G leader". He also recognized that Huawei still faces challenges, thanking the media for interest in dialogue and appealing to employees, customers, and stakeholders.

As a closing statement, He mentioned a Chinese saying which means "the road ahead is long and hard, but we will keep moving and reach the destination, because we have already embarked on this journey".

Germany relaxes rules to attract non-EU skilled workers

BERLIN: Worker-starved Germany decided yesterday to ease immigration rules to attract foreign job-seekers and replenish its ageing workforce, despite mounting public resistance against new arrivals.

Chancellor Angela Merkel's cabinet approved a new immigration law which still has to be formally approved by parliament next year, possibly with some amendments. Economy Minister Peter Altmaier hailed as a "historic day" the cabinet's decision on Germany's first immigration law, which had been eagerly anticipated by business groups.

The new law aims to attract foreign skilled vocational workers with German language skills, including those from outside the European Union, and promises them eased visa procedures and reduced red tape. "We need manpower from third countries to safeguard our prosperity and be able to fill the job vacancies," said Interior Minister Horst Seehofer.

Job-seekers such as cooks, metal-lurgy workers or IT technicians would be allowed to come to the EU's biggest economy for six months to try and find employment, provided they can financially support themselves.

A separate provision, which sparked much controversy, will allow permanent residency for some of the rejected asylum seekers in Germany who have been granted stays of deportation because their home country is considered unsafe.

To qualify, they must have held a full-time job for 18 months, speak at

least intermediate-level German, be socially well-integrated with no criminal offences, and be able to prove their identity.

"We must not deport the wrong people," said Labour Minister Hubertus Heil, who stressed that many of the recent arrivals now "speak German, work, are industrious and are useful for Germany".

'Pragmatic solution'

Nonetheless, the provision for asylum seekers had been criticized for potentially sending the wrong signal and encouraging human traffickers to bring illegal migrants to Germany on the promise they will eventually be allowed to stay. Immigration has been a hot-button political issue since Germany has absorbed more than one million mostly Muslim refugees and migrants from 2015.

The large influx sparked a xenophobic backlash that saw the far-right, anti-immigration and anti-Islam Alternative for Germany (AfD) enter parliament a year ago as the biggest opposition party.

But Germany has also been anxious not to leave thousands of migrants idle and susceptible to taking on jobs on the black labor market while they spend years awaiting a final decision on their asylum claims. The ministers stressed that the new rules aim to find a "pragmatic solution" for rejected asylum seekers who cannot be sent back because, for instance, they face the risk of torture in their country of origin. — AFP

INFINITI QX80 built to transform driving experiences

KUWAIT: The INFINITI QX80 brought by Abdulmohsen Abdulaziz Al-Babtain Co (AABCO), the sole authorized dealer of Infiniti vehicles in the State of Kuwait, exemplifies INFINITI's presence in the luxury SUV segment. The INFINITI QX80 takes INFINITI's 'Powerful Elegance' design language in a bold new direction, creating a powerful, contemporary and commanding aesthetic.

The flagship SUV model has been created to meet the needs of today's luxury car buyers, and introduces a more modern interpretation of upscale luxury to the full-size SUV segment. It will appeal to a buyer that wants for nothing: affluent, high-achieving entrepreneurs and business leaders, often with families, who demand space and utility, hand-crafted quality and modern design, and effortless on-road performance.

The QX80 has a refined and spacious cabin that features high-quality materials, a hand-crafted finish and advanced drive-assist technologies. With a taut yet comfort-oriented suspension, and ample performance from its 5.6-liter V8 engine, the new QX80 gives drivers an assured feeling of control and confidence at the wheel.

The QX80's rear entertainment system has also been upgraded. Higher-resolution screens provide the interface for connectivity and entertainment devices. The system also now supports 31 languages, up from three in the outgoing QX80.

The QX80 is newly-available with a range of technologies to inform the driver of their surroundings, help them avoid potential hazards and ease the monotony of driving in certain conditions. These technologies include: Lane Departure Warning and Prevention, Intelligent Cruise Control, Distance Control Assist, Predictive Forward Collision Warning, Forward Emergency Braking, Blind Spot Warning and Intervention and Backup Collision Intervention.

It is worth noting that the INFINITI QX80 received the 'Best Premium SUV'

India airlines to buy 2,300 new planes over 20 years: Boeing

NEW DELHI: Boeing expects Indian airlines to spend some \$320 billion on 2,300 new aircraft over the next 20 years as passenger numbers soar, the US giant said yesterday. "The Indian economy is projected to grow by nearly 350 percent over the next two decades to become the third largest economy in the world," the firm said in a statement.

Boeing said that the main driver of growth in the airline sector will be low-cost airlines, meaning that more than 80 percent of all new aircraft deliveries in India will be single-aisle models.

India's commercial aviation industry has achieved 51 consecutive months of double-digit growth, with more than 10 million pas-



accolade at the prestigious 'Wheels 2018 Car of the Year' awards or popularly known as COTY which was held in Dubai earlier this year. Infiniti Al-Babtain encourages its

customers to explore the unique features of the QX80, by visiting the Infiniti showroom located in Al-Rai. The showroom is open daily except Fridays.

With eye on China, Germany toughens rules for foreign buyouts

BERLIN: Germany was yesterday set to toughen rules on non-EU share purchases and acquisitions of its strategic companies, amid growing disquiet about takeovers by Chinese firms.

It plans to lower the threshold where reviews apply to foreign purchase offers of 10 percent of companies, down from 25 percent now. Germany and other EU states have voiced growing concern in recent years as Chinese companies have bought up, or purchased controlling stakes in, high-tech firms, airports and harbors. Chancellor Angela Merkel's cabinet planned to approve the change to the Foreign Trade Regulation, and Economy Minister Peter Altmaier was then to give a statement at 1130 GMT.

The update would strengthen government powers to review and possibly block foreign purchases in companies that are crucial to Germany's defense or "critical infrastructure".

This would include military, IT security and power companies but also, for example, large food producers, reported the business daily Handelsblatt. "The test criterion is whether an acquisition endangers the public order or security of the Federal Republic of Germany," an economy ministry spokesman said. Alarm has grown in Germany about losing valuable knowhow since Chinese appliance giant Midea in mid-2016 took over German industrial robotics supplier Kuka.

In mid-2017 Germany tightened scrutiny of non-EU takeovers of strategic companies, doubling to four months the time for reviews, and broadening the range of sectors. China issued a word of caution about the rules, though it said they did not target a specific country.

"As protectionism and unilateralism intensifies, different parties should pay more attention to avoid sending the wrong signals to the outside world when launching any kind of policies," said Chinese foreign ministry spokeswoman Hua Chunying at a press briefing in Beijing.

"We hope Germany will create fair and open market access ... for international enterprises, including Chinese enterprises, investing in Germany," Hua said. As major players in the global economy, both Germany and China "have shared responsibility to maintain free trade and multilateralism," she added. — AFP



sengers on average travelling within India each month this year.

Boeing's bullish outlook comes despite

Indian airlines hitting problems in recent months on the back of high fuel prices, a weak rupee and fierce competition. —AFP

Business

WFBC awarded fastest growing financial brokerage company in Kuwait for 2018

Award confirms company’s position in Kuwait market

KUWAIT: Watani Financial Brokerage Company (WFBC) was named the fastest growing brokerage company in Kuwait for the year 2018 by International Finance, one of the leading specialized institutions in the field of investment and financial companies, which aims to encourage and honor excellence in the financial sector.

Commenting on the award, Tariq Al-Shehab, Vice Chairman of Watani Financial Brokerage Company and Director of Brokerage at NBK Capital, said: “This award confirms the position of WFBC in the Kuwaiti market as a company. A financial brokerage licensed company by the

Capital Market Authority and registered on the Kuwait Stock Exchange that provides the best service to its customers in Kuwait and in the region. We are delighted with this recognition for the quality of our services, the confidence of our customers and the trading solutions we provide.”

“He pointed out that this achievement achieved by the company has a good impact on all the distinguished employees of the company and contributes on motivating them to excel.

He also emphasized the company’s continuous pursuit of development and innovation, in line with its keenness to trust its customers and to provide

them with the most distinguished services and to focus on developing the company’s position in the Kuwaiti market as a company capable of keeping abreast of developments on the Kuwait Stock Exchange.

The International Finance Awards program selects the winners based on an annual survey delivered by analysts and investors around the world as well as the technical analysis of the performance of companies that met the requirements of the nomination by a qualified and professional research team.

The National Brokerage Company is 93.3 per-

cent owned by National Bank of Kuwait and is managed by Al-Watani Investment Company, NBK Capital. The company offers the sale and purchase of shares on the Kuwait Stock Exchange. The company’s systems enable its customers to trade directly on the Kuwaiti stock exchange or through a number of professional financial intermediaries specialized in providing brokerage services Integrated Finance for customers trading on the Kuwait Stock Exchange. It also provides trading service through the branches of the company deployed in the branches of the National Bank of Kuwait.



EU and Italy reach deal on disputed 2019 budget

BRUSSELS: The EU and Italy’s populist government yesterday called a truce in their bitter row over Rome’s disputed 2019 budget, as Brussels said revised spending plans fell within bloc rules. In a historic first, the European Commission in October rejected Italy’s original big-spending budget, which promised a universal basic income and a pension increase for low-wage earners.

“Intensive negotiations over the last two weeks have resulted in a solution for 2019,” said EU Commission Vice President Valdis Dombrovskis at a news conference in Brussels. “Let’s be clear: the solution is not ideal. But it avoids opening the excessive deficit procedure at this stage,” he added, referring to a process that can result in major fines for a member country.

In the deal, Italy has accepted to back down on both of its landmark measures, and was now committed to not adding to its colossal two-trillion euro debt load next year. To win the compromise, Brussels in return offered some flexibility in calculating the budget in light of “exceptional circumstances”, including modernizing infrastructure after a tragic bridge collapse in Genoa last August.

“Basically, this agreement is a victory for dialogue over confrontation,” said European Economic Affairs Commissioner Pierre Moscovici. The EU and Italy negotiated intensely with both sides worried that a protracted feud would alarm the markets and ignite a debt crisis in the eurozone’s third biggest economy.

The situation grew more complicated politically after France last week announced a new wave of spending for 2019 that will also break EU rules on public spending.

This came in response to recent “yellow vest” protests across France that has spooked French President Emmanuel Macron away from pro-Brussels belt-tightening ahead of European elections next year. Italy and others complain that powerful France receives special treatment on its budget plans by the EU Commission.

Without the compromise, Italy would have ultimately faced a fine of up to 0.2 percent of the nation’s GDP after a long and rancorous process with its eurozone partners.

The talks centered on the so-called structural deficit, which includes all public spending minus debt payments. Italy’s first budget was set to blow through commitments made by the previous government, with a deterioration to a 0.8 structural deficit. The deal on Wednesday said this would now be balanced.

SoftBank mobile unit in record IPO but market debut flops

TOKYO: Japanese technology giant SoftBank celebrated the world’s second-biggest IPO for its mobile unit yesterday but the newly traded shares endured a torrid time in their debut session, plunging nearly 15 percent. A spokesman for the firm confirmed it had raised around 2.65 trillion yen (\$23.5 billion) via the unit’s IPO, making it Japan’s largest and the biggest globally since Alibaba went public in 2014.

But at the opening bell, the stock was already trading at 1,463 yen, significantly under the initial offer price of 1,500 yen per share, and headed lower from there. The firm finished at 1,282 yen, down 14.5 percent from the IPO price with heavy selling into the close.

Ken Miyauchi, CEO of the SoftBank Corp mobile division, acknowledged it was “unfortunate that the share price ended down”. “But this is only the beginning. Many things will happen. We are off to a tough start of our journey... but I see this as a new start for our business,” Miyauchi told reporters.

Analysts said the IPO had not come at a particularly good time for SoftBank Corp, as global markets have been suffering in recent months and Japanese lawmakers are taking aim at what they see as mobile operators’ overly high prices.

The benchmark Nikkei 225 index slipped 0.6 percent while the broader Topix index was down 0.4 percent. Other market players said tepid demand was not helped by an embarrassing episode earlier this month when a technical glitch left tens of millions of customers of SoftBank and British mobile operator O2 unable to access data.

Add to that global security concerns over China’s Huawei and “the number of those who wanted to buy the shares was rather small”, said Masayuki Toshiba, senior market analyst at Rakuten Securities.

“Concerns that SoftBank’s investment costs could rise because it would not be able to use Huawei parts is a reason not to buy the shares,” said one analyst in Tokyo, who declined to be identified.

SoftBank took more than one-third of its mobile unit public and was able to sell the full offering of 1.76 billion shares at the IPO price of 1,500 yen, beating the



previous national records set by NTT in 1987 and its subsidiary NTT Docomo in 1998.

‘Growth strategy’

The blockbuster IPO is seen as part of boss Masayoshi Son’s strategy of transforming SoftBank from a Japan-based telecom company to a global hi-tech investment firm. Son has already said the IPO would go towards swelling the coffers of his SoftBank Vision Fund, which is worth an estimated \$100 billion and has taken stakes in some of the hottest tech firms, including Uber, Slack, WeWork and Nvidia.

Analysts at ratings agency Standard & Poor’s have said the listing “would further underline SoftBank’s transition to an investment holding company”. Another agency, Moody’s, said the IPO would “enhance transparency” in the parent company’s investment portfolio because the mobile unit’s “share price and daily market value will be available to the public”. The SoftBank parent company itself has said the listing would give the mobile unit “greater managerial autonomy to develop its own growth strategy”.

It has also said the listing would help clarify the roles of the parent company and its mobile unit.

The mobile unit said in a statement alongside the market debut that it expects net profit of 420 billion yen on sales of 3.7 trillion yen for the full year to March 2019. In the year that ended March, it logged net profit of 400.75 billion yen on sales of 3.58 trillion yen, it said. — AFP

Trade slowdown coming at worst time for world economy, markets

LONDON: The warning signs are multiplying and becoming clearer: global trade growth is slowing, which will pose an increasing threat to the world economy and financial markets next year. Cross-border commerce is in its poorest health since the Great Financial Crisis 10 years ago, or even in decades, depending on which measure you look at, and the incoming data point to further deterioration next year.

In the last week alone a batch of figures from economic and exporting powerhouses in Asia, including China, showed that global trade is losing steam. And it couldn’t be coming at a worse time for investors.

Wall Street and stock markets around the world are falling. Major names in tech (Apple) and banking (Goldman Sachs), sectors that are pivotal to the global flow of goods and services and which had led the market boom of recent years, are among the biggest losers on the way down. Auto sector stocks, among the most exposed to cross-border and cross-continent commerce and supply chains, have been particularly volatile and vulnerable this year to the (mostly negative) newsflow on tariffs and trade.

According to Citi, the volume of global exports anticipated in the next six months is contracting, and at the fastest pace since 2008-09. Alarming, this leading indicator is extremely well correlated with global trade growth.

Economists at Oxford Economics lowered their forecast for world trade growth in 2019 earlier this year by more than 1.5 percentage points to 4 pct. The

festering US-China trade war could result in cumulative global GDP losses of 0.7 pct next year and 1.0 pct by 2020, they add. In an updated paper published in “Our World In Data” in October, Esteban Ortiz-Ospina, Diana Belkian and Max Roser noted that the value of exports as a share of global GDP fell three years in a row from 2011-14. The level of contraction is small, by roughly 1 percentage point to 24.12 percent, but the direction of travel is cause for concern.

“There is a correlation between economic growth and trade: countries with higher rates of GDP growth also tend to have higher rates of growth in trade as a share of output,” they concluded. “The empirical literature suggests that increased trade causes higher economic growth.”

Whether that growth is shared even remotely evenly or fairly is another question. But the ripples from slowing trade growth or even contraction would be widely felt. World Bank figures show that trade as a share of global GDP has fallen for four years in a row. There have been steeper declines, such as 2008-2009, but this is currently the longest downturn since at least 1960.

‘Tariff man’

This week, South Korea’s government cut its 2019 growth outlook to 2.6-2.7 percent, which will be the lowest since 2012, and data showed Indonesian exports for November falling off a cliff. China’s exports in November rose 5.4 percent year on year, roughly half of economists’ consensus forecast and a third of the previous month’s 15.6 percent.

There’s no shortage of flashpoints in the global trade war, the most significant being the US-China front. Washington and Beijing have agreed a 90-day truce, but if a deal can’t be reached, then existing 10 percent tariffs on US imports from China would go up to 25 percent. —Reuters

Asian business confidence wallows near 3-year low

SINGAPORE: A very cautious optimism remains among Asian companies in the fourth quarter as they wait to see whether there will be any breakthrough in a trade dispute between the United States and China, a Thomson Reuters/INSEAD survey showed.

Representing the six-month outlook of 84 firms, the Thomson Reuters/INSEAD Asian Business Sentiment Index edged up to 63 in the October-December quarter, slightly above a near three-year low of 58 seen in the previous period. Anything above 50 indicates a positive outlook. But the latest result still marks one of the lowest readings since a rout in Chinese stocks in mid-2015 rattled world markets.

“This confirms the reading of the previous quarter: there is more uncertainty, there are increasing concerns about growth,” said Antonio Fatnas, a Singapore-based economics professor at global business school INSEAD. “This doesn’t mean there is going to be a crisis over the next quarters, but if there is one, this is an indication that it wouldn’t be a large surprise to some.”

Once again, a global trade war was cited as the chief business risk by respondents. A slowdown in the world’s second-biggest economy China and higher interest rates were also cited as risk factors. The survey was conducted in 11 Asia-Pacific countries, across a range of sectors from Nov. 30 to Dec. 14.

US President Donald Trump and Chinese leader Xi Jinping earlier this month agreed to a truce that delayed a planned Jan 1 increase of US tariffs to 25 percent from 10 percent on \$200 billion of Chinese goods while they negotiate a trade deal.

But that deal remains far from certain. Trump has long railed against China’s trade surplus with the United States, and Washington accuses Beijing of not playing fairly on trade. China calls the United States protectionist and has resisted what it views as attempts to intimidate it.

Under pressure

The dispute between the world’s two biggest economies, threatens businesses throughout the region due to global value chains. Firms in the tech and telecoms sector - where valuations have already been hit by concerns over slowing global demand - were one of the most pessimistic in the survey with their lowest-ever reading of 44.

“Everyone is under pressure from valuations anyway in this sector,” said Suresh Sidhu, chief executive officer of Malaysian telecoms firm edotco Group Sdn Bhd.

“The fact that the trade war and currencies, particularly if you are Asian, start to mess with your revenue and earnings models has added another whammy.”

Firms in Taiwan, an important node in the global electronics industry, had the most negative outlook by country in the survey at 17. On a country basis, that marked the steepest fall in the quarter, from 58 in Q3. Companies in other mature economies such as Korea and Japan were among the most pessimistic, while firms in the Philippines, Thailand, Malaysia - the rapidly developing Southeast Asia region - were the most optimistic.

However, even for emerging Asia, there are concerns over the scramble to keep up with rising US interest rates as regional central banks move to defend their currencies against a strengthening US dollar. Rising rates was a concern flagged by Thai-based hotel operator Minor International PCL, which recently acquired a Spanish hotel group in a multi-billion dollar deal.

“This is the biggest acquisition we have done in our history so any movement in interest rates definitely impacts our cost of funding,” said the firm’s investor relations director Supitcha Foonant.—Reuters

US offers \$4.5bn investment in Central America, southern Mexico

WASHINGTON: The United States, hoping to stem migration, said Tuesday it was ready to support \$4.5 billion in investment in Central America and southern Mexico.

The United States promised to back new Mexican President Andres Manuel Lopez Obrador’s push for development in Central America, the primary source of migrants whose unauthorized entry into the United States has become a central focus for President Donald Trump.

The Overseas Private Investment Corporation (OPIC), which offers government-backed favorable financing to US businesses, is prepared to support \$2.5 billion in new investment in El Salvador, Guatemala and Honduras “if commercially viable projects are identified,” the State Department said.

OPIC is also looking to mobilize \$2 billion more for southern Mexico, the country’s poorest region, a statement said. The State Department said that OPIC already has \$2.8 billion worth of projects in the pipeline in Mexico as well as \$1 billion since last year in El Salvador, Guatemala and Honduras-the so-called “Northern Triangle.”

In a parallel announcement in Mexico, Foreign Secretary Marcelo Ebrard told reporters that his government was “committed to promote strong regional growth, better-paying jobs and more opportunities for all our citizens.”



Democrats skeptical

The US funding offer, made in a low-key written statement, comes in stark contrast to Trump’s years of rallies demanding that Mexico pay for a vast wall on the border. Trump, railing against unauthorized immigration ahead of last month’s election, threatened via Twitter in October to cut off aid to Central America unless they stopped migrants. Two months later, the US government is teetering on the brink of a shutdown with Trump demanding that Congress provide \$5 billion for the wall.

Representative Eliot Engel, a Democrat who next month takes over the House Foreign Affairs Committee, said he was “skeptical” about the “rhetorical commitment” to Central America in light of the Trump administration’s policies, including separating children from parents at the border.

He said that Congress would look carefully at the next budget to “separate fact from fiction” and ensure that the United States is in fact supporting Central America.

In new government funding, the State Department said it would request an additional \$180 million for the Northern Triangle in its request to Congress for the 2019 fiscal year. While backing Trump’s wall, Secretary of State Mike Pompeo has acknowledged that development is a longer-term solution to migration from the Northern Triangle countries, which are among the world’s most violent.

State Department spokesman Robert Palladino said the United States expected Central American countries to “hold up their end of the bargain” and work to improve the situation at home. — AFP

Business

Boursa Kuwait signs agreement with Ooredoo to manage its DR datacenter

Datacenter to allow company to safeguard its mission-critical data and services



KUWAIT: Khaled Abdulrazzaq Al-Khaled and Sheikh Mohammed bin Abdullah Al-Thani during the signing ceremony at the Boursa Kuwait headquarters.



KUWAIT: As part of its ongoing commitment to provide a secure, robust and cost-effective market place infrastructure, which ensures the continuity of the operations key services in the case of disasters, Boursa Kuwait has signed an agreement with Ooredoo Kuwait, to host the stock exchange's disaster recovery (DR) datacenter.

The signing ceremony was held at the Boursa Kuwait headquarters, in the presence of Khaled Abdulrazzaq Al-Khaled, Chief Executive Officer, Boursa Kuwait and Sheikh Mohammed bin Abdullah Al-Thani, Chief Executive Officer at Ooredoo Kuwait, and other senior representatives from both companies.

Boursa Kuwait's Datacenter provides a highly available hosting space that enables Boursa to

remotely run and manage enterprise applications from a controlled and secure environment. This will help Boursa in safeguarding mission critical data with the highest level of security and operational reliability by offering services in-line with the highest industry standards.

The scope of services for the new system also includes secured colocation area, high-speed connectivity between main and DR site, high available Internet connectivity, and high available market participant connections. Boursa Kuwait will also have multi-redundant links that will ensure an uninterrupted connectivity between main and DR site in case of a main circuit's failure.

Al-Khaled said: "In line with our vision of creat-

ing and sustaining a robust and resilient stock market where companies and investors can thrive, we have been investing our time and efforts to adopt the best practices across all aspects of our operations. The new DR datacenter will further strengthen our IT DR Infrastructure and improve business continuity within the organization at a lower cost with higher service standards. We are optimistic that our partnership with Ooredoo will bring further value to all our participants."

Sheikh Al-Thani expressed his gratitude and appreciation to the trust and confidence Boursa Kuwait had given Ooredoo in Kuwait to fulfill this mutual agreement. He said: "Ooredoo is pleased to host Boursa Kuwait DR solution in its world-class

hosting Data Center located in Kuwait. Ooredoo Data Center meets Boursa mission critical application requirements and provides premium quality hosting and managed services. Ooredoo Data Center network platform and facilities meet the security requirements and provides high availability and reliability that address the needs of Boursa.

Ooredoo is committed to ensuring synergy in delivery and support, and is looking forward to a successful and long-term business relationship with Boursa that will bring real benefit to both companies.

"This partnership comes in tandem with the Ooredoo's strategy of being a leader in the market in terms of Digital Transformation and managed services," Al-Thani concluded.

Ford desert driving tips, episode 6: Getting out of sticky situations



DUBAI: The desert is an enjoyable place to drive but the risk of getting stuck is omnipresent. It happens, and it happens to even the most experienced drivers from time to time. Your turn will come, and having a decent grasp of a few basic techniques will have you back underway before you know it.

In the sixth and final episode of Ford's Desert Driving Tips series, Ford's in-house experts cover a few driving tips that will help drivers to 'self-recover' their vehicle should they get stuck.

"The first thing you really need to do is get out of the car and assess how badly you're stuck, the angle your vehicle is sitting at, and how deep the sand is. That way, you'll know what you need to do," said series co-host Mike Chavez, Product Development Lead Technologist for Ford Middle East and Africa.

Fellow series co-host Christoph Baur, Powertrain engineering Supervisor for Ford MEA, added, "If you think you can make it out by yourself, you will need some techniques to get unstuck."

That may include removing some of the sand from under the vehicle; adding traction under the wheels (sand ladders, mats, branches) to help drive out of trouble, or attempting to drive out by using the rocking, wriggling or lift and fill techniques. The rocking technique happens in 4L mode. Using first and reverse gears, you gently move the

car back and forth to help smooth a path that will help you to generate the momentum you need to pull out of the sand.

Wriggling also happens in 4L, and you'll need first or reverse gear (remembering to use gravity to your advantage). Holding constant RPM (between 1000-1500rpm), turn from lock to lock without spinning your wheels. The idea is that the sand will build beneath your tyres and help lift the car out of the sand. You need to be patient with this technique because progress can be quite slow.

You may find that you need to jack or use an airbag to lift the frame of the car off the sand before filling the space under the tyres with sand, stones or anything else that will give you a bit of traction.

"We've all been stuck in the desert, and it's just a matter of time and help from some friends, a little experience and you're going to get out," said Chavez.

"I see a lot of people try to get themselves out of trouble by using the throttle. They think that because they have tons of power they can get out of trouble. The reality is, they're not going forward, they're just going deeper into the sand. "You never stop learning how to drive in the desert, you just gather more information. No-one gets stuck in the sand forever - it's a temporary situation and something we can easily overcome," Chavez concluded.

KFH 'Top Primary Dealer' for ILM Sukuk Program in 2018

KUWAIT: The International Islamic Liquidity Management Corporation (ILM) has announced Kuwait Finance House (KFH) as a "Top Primary Dealer" for the ILM Sukuk Program in FY 2018.

The ranking is based on the total allocated amount at primary for 15 issuances this year accumulating a total of \$8.11 billion. Group Chief Treasury Officer at KFH, AbdulWahab Al-Roshood said that KFH ranking as the "Top Primary Dealer" on top of 11 ILM Primary Dealers of regional and global banks and financial institutions is a source of pride not only to KFH but also to Kuwait, indicating



AbdulWahab Al-Roshood

pioneering position of KFH in the primary dealers list in the ILM issuances came for the fourth year in a row. This confirms the leading role of the Bank as a market maker. KFH is keen on applying highest standards of competency and professionalism to contribute to the improvement of Sukuk market, added Al-Roshood.

He remarked that the Bank managed to achieve remarkable development in the Sukuk market at the regional and global levels as it

KFH came first followed by May Bank, First Abu Dhabi Bank (FAB) and Standard Chartered in second, third and fourth places respectively. This confirms the prestigious status of KFH in the Sukuk market.

Al-Roshood pointed out in a statement, that the

motivated and encouraged a number of conventional and Islamic financial institutions to enter the market.

Al-Roshood said that the Capital Markets Unit at KFH Treasury Department is managed 100% by Kuwaiti expertise. This emphasizes the Bank's keenness to support the national labor while building Kuwaiti leaders in all banking career levels. Meanwhile, International Islamic Liquidity Management, (ILM) expressed appreciation for KFH's excellent and strong performance, boasting the strong ties since the significant milestone of issuing the first highly rated, short-term, tradable, Shariah-compliant Sukuk in 2013. (ILM) looks forward to a greater partnership as to progress into 2019.

It is worth noting that the (ILM) is an international organization established by central banks including the Central Bank of Kuwait (CBK), monetary authorities and multilateral organizations to create and issue Sharia-compliant financial instruments to facilitate effective cross-border Islamic liquidity management.

Kuwait's tallest building Al-Hamra recollects years of transformation

KUWAIT: Marking its sixth year in Kuwait, Al-Hamra Real Estate Co, launched a memorial exhibition, narrative of its extraordinary journey over the years. The exhibition, highlighting various phases of the evolution of one of Kuwait's most iconic landmarks, opened in the presence of VIP guests, corporate partners, media, and Al-Hamra senior executives.

Risen to global critical acclaim for its outstanding architectural design, Al-Hamra Business Tower houses over 6,000 tenants in its contemporary Business Tower and a growing number of visitors to its Luxury Center every year.

The exhibition captured Al-Hamra's proud legacy, shone the spotlight on the key milestones and the vast regional and international recognition received over the past decade. It also featured videos of the pre-completion phase of Al-Hamra Tower, an exceptional design on an area of 24,000 square meters and a total area of 300,000 square meters, to emulate the sophistication of real estate development in Kuwait.

Speaking at the event, Al-Hamra Real Estate Co Marketing and Public Relations Manager, Abdullah Al-Mansour said: "This is an extraordinary day for us and a reminder of the vision, hard work, and unwavering commitment of everyone at Al-Hamra. Today, standing tall against this iconic design, we celebrate our successes, extend our gratitude to our partners, and look forward to usher in a new year and an era of new possibilities."

Situated at the heart of Kuwait City's commercial district, Kuwait's tallest building and the world's tallest carved skyscraper at 413m high across 80 levels operates by the highest standards providing



office space for a wide range of business activity and spectacular views of Kuwait. The Luxury Center encompasses modern fashion retail brands, renowned regional and international restaurants, and cafes and entertainment offerings.

Al-Hamra Business Tower is recipient of a number of international awards from Honey Well, Arabian Business Achievement Awards, American Institute of Architecture (AIA) - New York Chapter and American Concrete Institute. The exhibition will remain open to the public until 31 December 2018.



Abdullah Al-Mansour



Technology

Elon Musk bores tunnel to revolutionize city driving

Musk brushes aside earthquakes worries in temblor-prone California



HAWTHORNE, United States: The 'linestorm' second generation tunnel boring equipment is displayed before an unveiling event for the Boring Co. Hawthorne test tunnel in Hawthorne, south of Los Angeles. —AFP photos



HAWTHORNE, United States: A modified Tesla Model X drives into the tunnel entrance before an unveiling event for the Boring Co. Hawthorne test tunnel.

HAWTHORNE, United States: Elon Musk on Tuesday took a break from futuristic electric cars and private space travel to unveil a low-cost tunnel he sees as a godsend for city traffic. The billionaire behind Tesla and SpaceX late Tuesday put the spotlight on the 1.14 mile tunnel created by his Boring Company for about \$10 million. The sample tunnel is part of Musk's vision to have an underground network that cars, preferably Teslas, can be lowered to by lifts, then slotted into tracks and propelled along at speeds up to 150 mph.

"The only way to solve this is to go 3D, for the transport system to match the living quarters," Musk said of solving the problem of traffic congestion in urban areas. "It's all relatively simple. No Nobel Prize is needed here." An entrance to a sample tunnel was shown publicly for the first time in this city near Los Angeles as the initial stage of Musk's project to revolutionize city traffic by zipping along below congested streets.

Musk founded the Boring company two years ago as a self-financed, side-endeavor to his work at Tesla and SpaceX. Specially designed equipment drills tunnels wide enough to accommodate a car on a track. The

network envisioned is an expandable mesh of tunnels and elevators capable of having more than 4,000 cars pass through per hour. "The deepest mines are deeper than the tallest buildings," Musk said.

"The profound breakthrough is very simple: it's the ability to turn a normal car into a passively stable vehicle by adding the deployable tracking wheels, stabilizing wheels, so that it can travel at high speed through a small tunnel." Tunnels will eventually be open to all compatible self-driving electric vehicles, but for now Boring is using Teslas in the tube.

Soul-crushing inspiration

The idea for the project came to the billionaire of South African origin when he was fuming at the wheel of his car, trapped in traffic jams between his Bel Air villa and the SpaceX offices in Hawthorne. It is a journey that takes him more than 90 minutes and he considered soul-crushing. The "tunnel test" unveiled Tuesday appeared simple: a narrow tube, only 3.65m in diameter, freshly painted white, in which a Tesla Model X is fitted with stabilizers on wheels to slot into the track and avoid bumping the walls.

An early idea about placing cars on an electric sled of sorts was deemed too complex and abandoned, said Musk. The entrance to the tunnel was dug in a parking lot in Hawthorne, with an elevator platform on a street corner raising and lowering cars to the track. Journalists and others attending the event got to bolt through the short tunnel at about 40 mph in what felt somewhat akin to an amusement park ride. Musk brushed aside worries about earthquakes in temblor-prone California, repeatedly contending that tunnels were the safest place to be when plates shift and the earth shakes.

Slower than a snail

The broad vision is that electric vehicles on city streets would be able to easily drop into tunnels or rise out using elevator platforms built into streets, or ramps where space allows. Boring has partnered with public transit in Los Angeles to study the possibility of connecting tunnels with subway stations. Chicago chose Boring for its project for a high-speed, capsule-shaped train connecting the city center to the airport. Requests for drilling services flow in at a rate of five to 20 a week, according to Boring president Steve Davis. —AFP

SpaceX to retry US satellite national security launch

CALIFORNIA: Elon Musk's SpaceX was poised yesterday to launch a long-delayed navigation satellite for the US military, trying for a second day to complete its first designated national security mission for the United States. SpaceX's Falcon 9 rocket, carrying a roughly \$500 million global positioning system (GPS) satellite built by Lockheed Martin Corp, is due to take off from Florida's Cape Canaveral shortly after 9 am local time.

On Tuesday, SpaceX halted the planned launch minutes before liftoff due to a technical issue, though it said afterward the rocket and payload "remain healthy." A successful launch would be a significant victory for Musk, a billionaire entrepreneur

who spent years trying to break into the lucrative market for military space launches long dominated by Lockheed and Boeing Co. It marks SpaceX's first so-called National Security Space mission, as defined by the US military, SpaceX said.

SpaceX sued the US Air Force in 2014 in protest over the military's award of a multibillion-dollar, non-compete contract for 36 rocket launches to United Launch Alliance, a partnership of Boeing and Lockheed. It later dropped the lawsuit after the Air Force agreed to open up competition. In 2016, SpaceX won an \$83 million Air Force contract to launch the GPS III satellite, which will have a lifespan of 15 years. — Reuters

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- ◆ Gallstones & Abdominal Hernias Surgery
- ◆ Colonic Hydrotherapy & Fecal Incontinence Treatment
- ◆ Laparoscopic mini bypass
- ◆ Transanal minimally invasive surgery

Academic Certificates, Trainings & Fellowships:

- ◆ American Board of General Surgery
- ◆ Fellow of American College of Surgery
- ◆ Canadian Board of General Surgery
- ◆ Fellow of the Royal College of Physicians & Surgeons of Canada
- ◆ American Board of Colo – Rectal Surgery
- ◆ American Board of Surgical Critical Care

Dr. Abdullah Al Haddad
Surgery Department
Consultant General Surgery, Laparoscopic & Colo – Rectal Surgeon

مستشفى دار الشفاء
Dar Al Shifa Hospital
Tele:1802 555 **daralshifa**
Email: aalhaddad@daralshifa.com

DR. FAHAD AL-MUKHAIZEEM
Consultant Pediatrician

Consultant Pediatrician-Canadian & American
Board in Pediatrics-Canadian
Board in Pediatric Emergency

Tel.: 22269369 - Fax: 22269368 **Al-Jabriya - Block 1A - St.1 - Mazaya Building - 15th Floor - Clinic B**

DR. WALEED S BUHAIMED
Consultant of General Surgery
Laparoscopic and Bariatric Surgery

Academic Certificates – Training

- ◆ Kuwait Board of General Surgery.
- ◆ (IFSO) member .
- ◆ Faculty member of (BEST).
- ◆ Member of Kuwait Surgical Association.

Scope of clinical Practice.

- ◆ Bariatric surgeries.
- ◆ Gallbladder stones surgeries.
- ◆ Abdominal wall and hernia surgeries.
- ◆ G.I. surgeries.
- ◆ Thyroid and para - thyroid surgeries.
- ◆ Anal surgeries.

email: wbuhaimeed@gmail.com **Tel.: 965 22269411/ Mob.: 965 99212228** Jabriya, 4th Ring Road, Block 1A Floor 9 - Clover Center Mazaya Building

What's On



NBK pioneering CSR initiatives: A major approach to sustainability

National Bank of Kuwait (NBK) pioneered its corporate social responsibility programs in 2018, maintaining its position as the largest contributor to the Kuwait community in the private sector and moving a significant step forward towards a more sustainable community. "NBK considers sustainability an integral part of our success as a bank. On the occasion of the release of our 2018 sustainability report, we take the opportunity to shed the light on our CSR sustainability focused initiatives," said Manal Al Mattar, NBK Public Relations, Assistant General Manager.

"NBK has a long tradition supporting social and community oriented activities in the country. Our 2018 sustainable practices succeeded to maximize the positive impacts on our society enabling a socially smarter world, thereby making us a responsible bank today and for generations to come," added Al Mattar.

NBK's children hospital

NBK's Children Hospital is making its way to the regional and international standards. We are proud to see our project striving to the international standards regarding strategies, policies, processes and day-to-day practices," she noted. "NBK will always be committed in supporting the Specialty Hospital and its new unit to move forward in progress at the level of services and care," she claimed.

During 2018, NBK continued its social program for children the NBK Specialty Hospital and Stem Cell Therapy Unit. The program included the introduction of a library corner, storytelling sessions, fun children-oriented events and movie nights, honoring weekly heroes from the patients and rewarding a nurse every month.

'I Dream To Be' initiative

For the fifth year in a row, NBK continued to implement the first-of-its-kind 'I Dream to Be' program for children in hospitals Kuwait who are facing life-threatening conditions. The initiative rewarded more than 18 patients by the end of 2018 with the support of BAACH and KAACH. The initiative helps children live their 'dreams' in order to promote their emotional and psychological wellbeing and help them fight their illnesses with a positive mind.

Summer internship

For more than 17 years in a row, NBK organized its Summer Internship Program for school and college students. "This program is the beginning if a long road ahead

to empower youth and provide them with valuable insight into real business scenarios," Al Mattar said. A total of 120 students between the ages 14 and 21 years participated in the 2018 program. The students visited Kuwait Air Ambulance, KDD, Central Bank of Kuwait and Al Wazzan Food-Hectares to gain a combination of theoretical and practical learning.

Annual walkathon

NBK organizes an annual walkathon aiming at supporting health and raising awareness for outdoor practices. This year, more than nine thousand participated in NBK's Walkathon which included an awarding ceremony where NBK celebrated the top 100 participants, giving away many valuable prizes to both winners and participants.

'Do good deeds' in Ramadan

For more than two decades, NBK has provided charitable, social and philanthropic programs during the Holy Month of Ramadan. Among its most prominent and successful Ramadan programs is the 'Do Good Deeds in Ramadan' initiative. Comprised of a series of activities and events aimed at encouraging community engagement and charity in Kuwait, Do Good Deeds exemplifies NBK's efforts to serve as a role model and community leader. This year the program reached more than 48,000 Muslims fasting during this Holy month by distributing more than 50,000 iftar banquets. Forty families in need were also aided during this month as a part of the initiative.

Supporting Youth and Education

As part of this strategy, NBK honored outstanding high school graduates of public schools for the school year 2017-2018. The Bank expressed its appreciation to the 150 students for their hard work through cash rewards and more importantly, professional training opportunities to encourage them to always work hard and excel.

Al Shaheed Park

As part of its social responsibility, NBK sponsored Al Shaheed park's cultural events during the year 2018-2019 in order to support cultural and heritage activities and encourage Kuwait's youth to develop community responsibility and engagement.

JACC

NBK sponsored Kuwait Achievers for Future Opportunities "KAFO" which is a national database and is considered to be one of the achievements of the National Youth Project. The project is under the supervision of The Amiri Diwan as per the directives of HH the Amir Sheikh Sabah Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah and was held at the



Jaber Al-Ahmad Cultural Center (JACC).

Also, NBK supported the "80s show" at JACC. Its participation reflects the bank's distinguished legacy economically and socially. NBK's eighties era mirrors Kuwait's financial history being the first bank in Kuwait and one of the largest social contributors. NBK's camel money box which was a prominent part of the 80's era in Kuwait still remains as one of the most symbolic connection between the bank and the community.

KALD, LOYAC and KRCS

NBK continued its commitment and support for educational institutions and non-governmental organizations as well as with other social welfare programs partnerships for the development of Kuwait such as KRCS, LOYAC, KALD and Center 21 for Children with Autism. NBK is Kuwait Red Crescent Society's Humanitarian strategic partner for its social support and initiatives with the society. In 2018, the bank continued its support to KRCS's initiative to help fund the education of children of low-income families in Kuwait.

BACCH, KACCH

NBK works closely with the Kuwait Association for the Care of Children in Hospital (KACCH) and Bayt Abdullah for the Care of Children in Hospice (BACCH) to maximize its reach to children in need and to give top priority to sick children with life-threatening illnesses. In 2018, NBK organized and supported a children's carnival at Bayt Abdullah Children's Hospice, an initiative which included entertainment and activities for resident children.

CSR awareness campaigns

NBK takes a leading role in the Kuwaiti society to support and raise awareness about women's health issues. In 2018, the Bank supported women's health through the essential breast cancer awareness program. As part of the initiative, NBK distributed pink ribbon awareness pins to staff and also offered daily tips and information via NBK social media channels.

Clean up the world

NBK participated in the "Clean up the World" global campaign supported by UN that was organized in Kuwait through the Kuwaiti Community Group "MW6INIY". Also, NBK joined the clean-up campaign "#yistahl_w6any" to clean up Kuwait beaches. This participation is a part of the bank's support to "MW6INIY" in its membership in the "Clean Up The World" global campaign. NBK provided environmental tools to the participants in addition to recycled items to raise awareness. More than 20 NBK employees participated in this campaign that took place at the free zone in Shuwaikh.

Blood donation

As part of its social responsibility towards the community, NBK actively organized a Blood Donation Campaign for its staff. NBK staff voluntarily went to the Blood Bank and offered their participation for blood donation. The mobile blood unit of the Blood Bank was available at the Head Office and Arraya building to receive the donations from staff as well.

Awareness programs

NBK actively supported and celebrated many awareness programs through the year such as the GCC Traffic Awareness Week, Autism Awareness Day, International Children Book Day, Cancer Survivor Day, Mother's Day, World Cancer Day, Childhood Cancer Awareness Month and International Patient Safety Day.

Society related initiatives

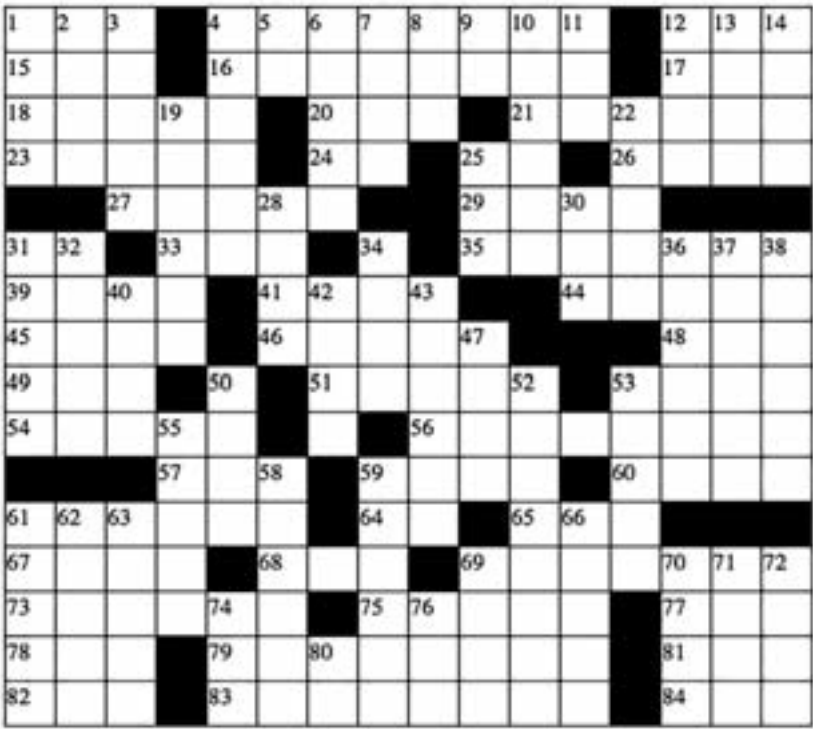
Throughout the year 2018, NBK sponsored several sports related events such as NBK Football and Cricket teams, Flare Fitness Festival, Salwa Football Tournament, KBA Night Run and Battle of the East.

Employee volunteering

National Bank of Kuwait organized many volunteer and charity initiatives during 2018. Employees arranged volunteer groups to help in organizing the Walkathon, distributing Iftar meals during the month of Ramadan and cleaning Shuwaikh Beach.



CROSSWORD 2089



ACROSS

- (music) The pace of music measured by the number of beats occurring in 60 seconds.
- Marked by great carelessness.
- A flexible container with a single opening.
- A constellation in the southern hemisphere near Telescopium and Norma.
- The second largest of Jupiter's satellites.
- South American wood sorrel cultivated for its edible tubers.
- Measuring instrument in which the echo of a pulse of microwave radiation is used to detect and locate distant objects.
- A humorous anecdote or remark.
- A gradual decline (in size or strength or power or number).
- Any of a group of heavenly spirits under the god Anu.
- An associate degree in nursing.
- Evergreen trees and shrubs having oily one-seeded fruits.
- American dramatist (1928-).
- Tropical starchy tuberous root.
- Being nine more than forty.
- A former agency (from 1946 to 1974) that was responsible for research into atomic energy and its peacetime uses in the United States.
- A mountainous republic in southeastern Asia on the Bay of Bengal.
- (New Testament) Disciple of Jesus.
- A close friend who accompanies his buddies in their activities.
- Widely distributed low-growing Eurasian herb having narrow leaves and inconspicuous green flowers.
- The United Nations agency concerned with atomic energy.
- A woman of refinement.
- The network in the reticular formation that serves an alerting or arousal function.
- The sign language used in the United States.
- (Roman mythology) The Roman god of doorways and passages.
- Largest crested screamer.
- Not one of the first three in a race or competition.
- A federal agency established to coordinate programs aimed at reducing pollution and protecting the environment.
- A member of an extinct North American Indian people who lived in the Pit river valley in northern California.
- A member of the Circassian people living east of the Black Sea.
- A silvery ductile metallic element found primarily in bauxite.
- A unit of absorbed ionizing radiation equal to 100 ergs per gram of irradiated material.
- The arch of bone beneath the eye that forms the prominence of the cheek.
- Black tropical American cuckoo.
- Of or relating to a wedding.
- Thin and fit.
- (often followed by `of') A large number or amount or extent.
- The compass point that is one point north of due east.
- Of or relating to semiotics.
- A Turkish unit of weight equal to about 2.75 pounds.
- European strong-scented perennial herb with gray-green bitter-tasting leaves.
- A river in northeastern Brazil that flows generally northward to the Atlantic Ocean.
- A rapid escape (as by criminals).

DOWN

- Capital city of the Apulia region on the Adriatic coast.
- Capital and largest city of the Czech Republic.
- Genus of sticky herbs with yellow flowers open in morning or evening but closed in bright light.
- French playwright (1791-1861).
- A white soft metallic element that tarnishes readily.
- Primitive chlorophyll-containing mainly aquatic eukaryotic organisms lacking true stems and roots and leaves.
- A series of steps to be carried out or goals to be accomplished.
- The site of an archeological exploration.
- A very poisonous metallic element that has three allotropic forms.
- Not subject to change or variation especially in behavior.
- (folklore) A small grotesque supernatural creature that makes trouble for human beings.
- A painful sore with a hard pus-filled core.
- An inflammatory disease involving the sebaceous glands of the skin.
- Mentally or physically infirm with age.
- (Greek mythology) One of the three Graces.
- (Irish) Goddess.
- A crystalline rock that can be cut and polished for jewelry.
- Electronic warfare undertaken to insure effective friendly use of the electromagnetic spectrum in spite of the enemy's use of electronic warfare.
- East Indian tree bearing a profusion of intense vermilion velvet-textured blooms and yielding a yellow dye.
- Restraint consisting of a rope (or light chain) used to restrain an animal.
- An ancient kingdom of southern Palestine with Jerusalem as its center.
- A percussion instrument consisting of a pair of hollow pieces of wood or bone (usually held between the thumb and fingers) that are made to click together (as by Spanish dancers) in rhythm with the dance.
- Cause to become awake or conscious.
- Any plant of the genus Reseda.
- A sails-shaped constellation in the southern hemisphere near Carca.
- A pilgrim who journeys to Mecca.
- Of or relating to the hands.
- Tough Asiatic grass whose culms are used for ropes and baskets.
- An informal term for a father.
- A cut of pork ribs with much of the meat trimmed off.
- Austrian composer who influenced the classical form of the symphony (1732-1809).
- A holy war by Muslims against unbelievers.
- Any of numerous ornamental shrubs grown for their showy flowers of various colors.
- Dried grape.
- Found along western Atlantic coast.
- United States abstract expressionist painter (1910-1962).
- Any of several tall tropical palms native to southeastern Asia having egg-shaped nuts.
- French filmmaker (1908-1982).
- Absent without permission.
- The basic unit of money in Bangladesh.
- Mild yellow Dutch cheese made in balls.
- Of southern Europe.
- Chiefly perennial grasses of cool temperate regions.
- A form of address for a man.

Yesterday's Solution



STAR TRACK



Aries (March 21-April 19)

Aries, it may seem you are the center of attention. Today could find you in the limelight. Your superiors at work seem to be paying close attention. Your job has become something you find great pleasure in and you actually enjoy going to work. Your peers seem to find great value in your ability to make practical decisions and admire you for your work ethic. You are able to clearly see what others want and need and seem to be in the right place at the right time to provide this for them. That brings much admiration your way. You may find you are looked at as a role model for many. You seem to have the ability to make clear decisions and will find this to be an extremely productive day, Aries.



Taurus (April 20-May 20)

Taurus, if you could choose a super power today it would be the ability to make yourself invisible. Enough is enough. When you are strong and independent with a kind heart, it seems like the weak and needy seem to be drawn to you. There are times when you need to learn to say no. Today is one of those days. You may find hiding in a dark movie theater would be a great escape for you today. Go to the movies, or curl up with a book. Just take some time to relax and rejuvenate, Taurus.



Gemini (May 21-June 20)

Gemini, hungry for knowledge would be a great way to describe you today. Spending time with family and neighbors is a good way to spend some of your time this evening. A long visit on the porch with a cold beverage and long talks will bring peace your way and satisfy a craving for you. Your feelings and the feelings of those close to you become very important right now. This is a time you may find yourself extremely sensitive. You are very understanding of others. Being more involved with family is very rewarding to you now. This is a peaceful time in your world, Gemini. Enjoy!



Cancer (June 21-July 22)

Cancer, dream on dreamer. You may find yourself lost in a dreamy mood and your mind may be far away from the day to day realities. This may catch your friends off guard and they may not appreciate this side of you. It seems as if the nature of time is starting to catch your attention now. You realize life is passing by and time is slipping away. It seems as if when you are older time seems to fly by faster with each passing year. You learn to appreciate each day and look at each day as a blessing. You are happy and thankful to be alive and plan on living it to the fullest, Cancer.



Leo (July 23-August 22)

Leo, what may come easy isn't always the right thing. You may find career decisions that point in the direction of true success may go against your sense of values. This is a road to success you just are not willing to take. If making it to the top means traveling this path then you will choose to take a detour. You have a choice to continue to ignore your responsibilities at home and push on towards career success, or focus on your family and do the right thing. Ask yourself who is going to be there in the long run, Leo? Follow your heart.



Virgo (August 23-September 22)

Virgo, make time for a loved one today. This doesn't have to take hours of time or big-time spending. Write a note. Make a phone call. Take a single long-stem flower. Don't scoff at double consequences. You may find your thoughtfulness enriches your life as much as theirs. Virgo. Sometimes the smallest of gestures mean the most to others.

Wordsearch Puzzle

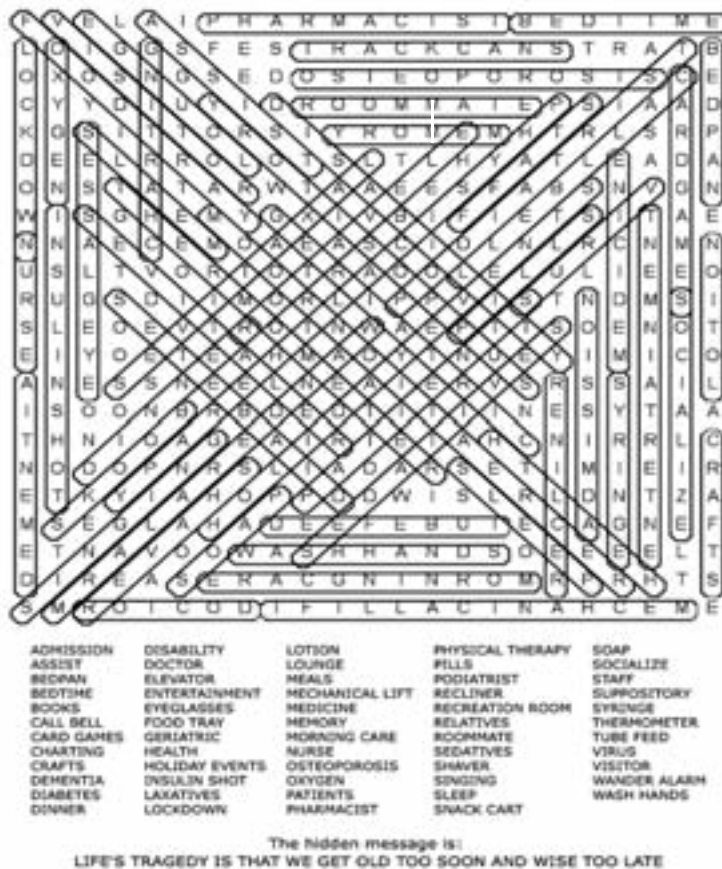
Nursing Home 3

Find and circle all of the words that are hidden in the grid. The remaining 40 letters spell an Albert Einstein quotation.

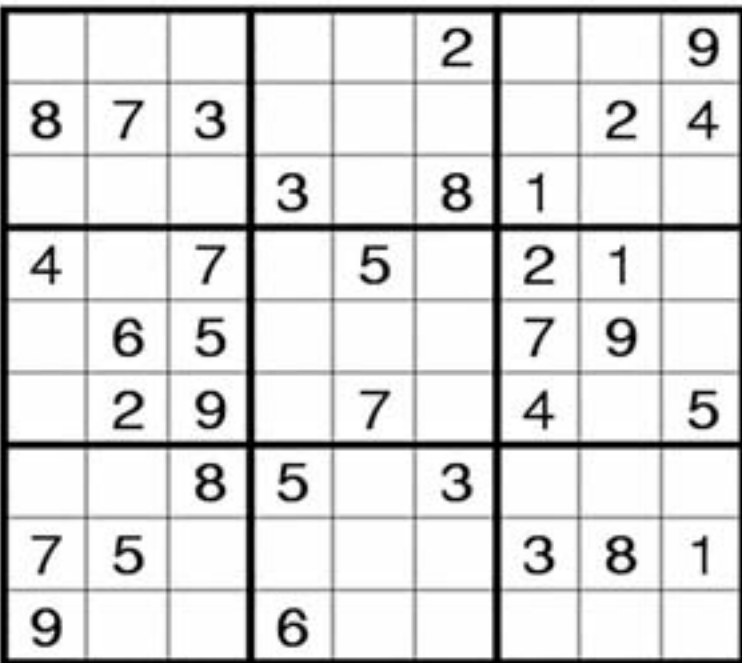


Yesterday's Solution

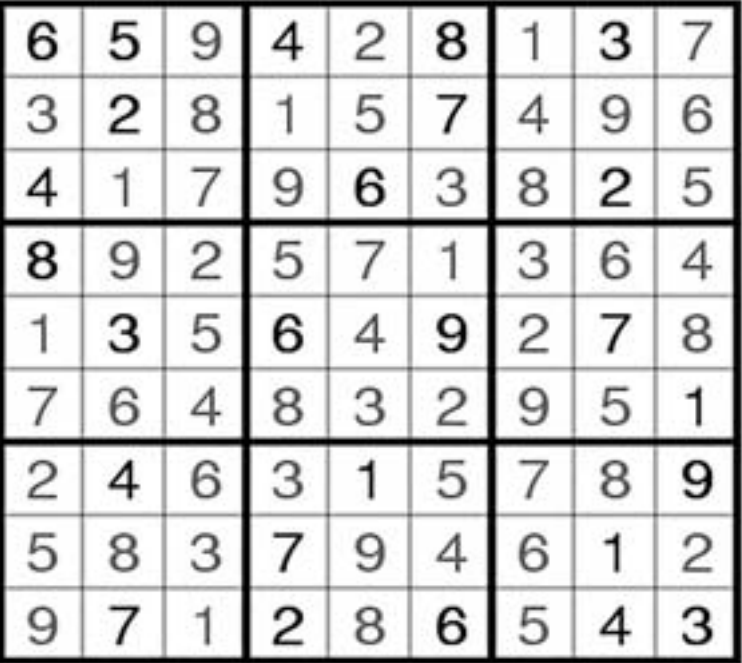
Nursing Home 2



Daily SuDoku

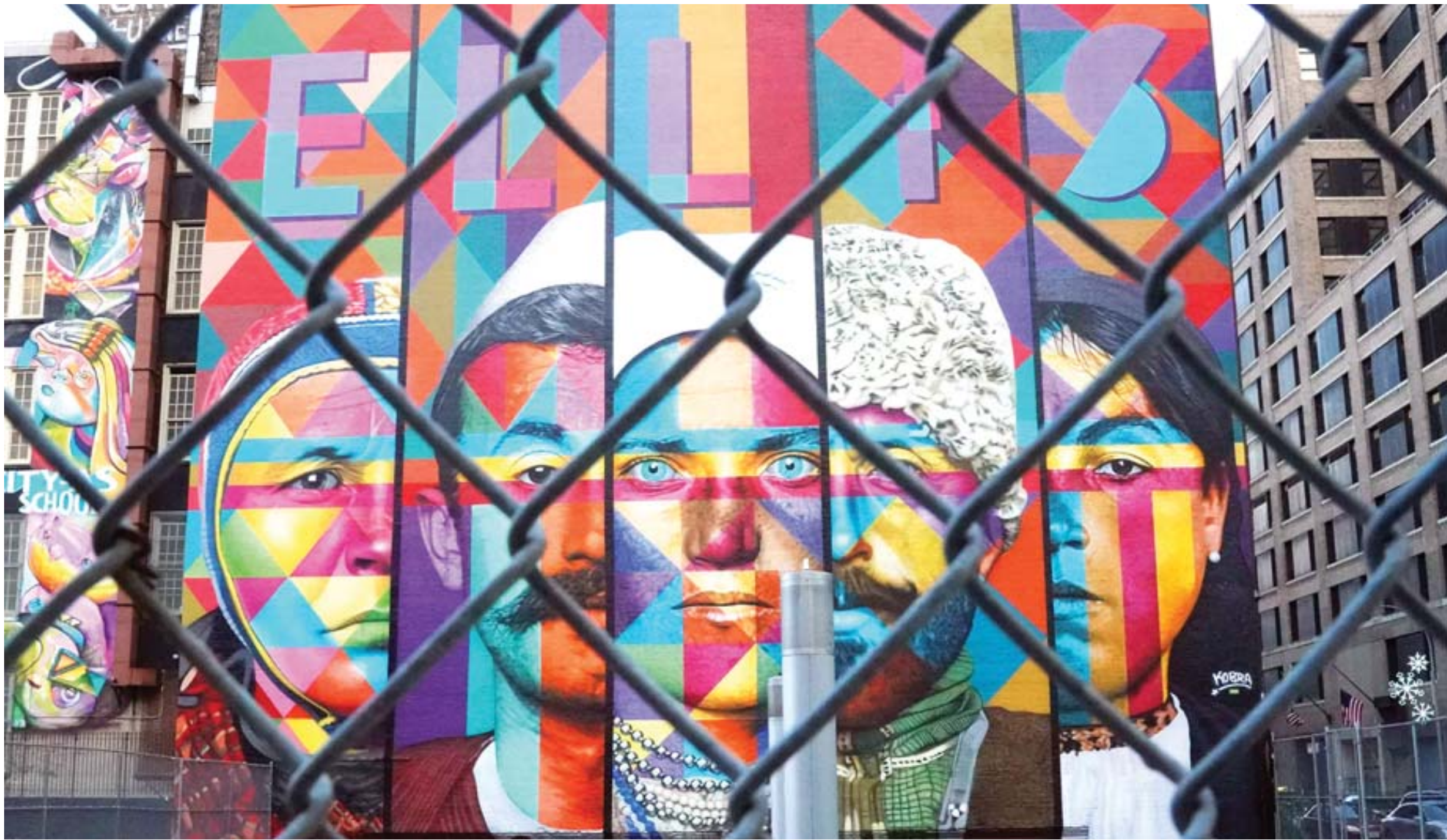


Yesterday's Solution



Lifestyle

THURSDAY, DECEMBER 20, 2018



Painted by renowned street artists Magda Love and Eduardo Kobra alongside students from City-As-School, an alternative transfer high school at the corner of Clarkson and Hudson streets in the West Village of New York, is seen. The colorful mural has been in the works for over two and a half year, it is said to be the largest mural in New York as it covers 20,000 square feet on the side of City-As-School High School in the West Village of Manhattan. — AFP

S Korean grain silo transforms into world's largest mural

A dreary grain silo that was transformed into an enormous colorful artwork in South Korea has been named by Guinness World Records as the largest outdoor mural in the world. The painting which depicts a young boy's journey into adulthood covers the outside of giant storage containers in the port city of Incheon, west of Seoul, taking up 23,688 square meters. The mural was commissioned by the city's government and port authority

as part of efforts to improve the negative view of aged industrial facilities, an idea which originated from the community art projects of the 1920s that swept the United States and Mexico, according to the South's Yonhap news agency. Twenty-two artists used more than 850,000 liters of paint to tell the story which reflects the seasons and resembles 16 individual book covers, at a cost of 550 mil-

lion won (US\$487,000). It topples the previous record holder by a significant margin—the Pueblo Levee Project in Pueblo, in the US state of Colorado, at 16,554 square meters. Government and port officials also hope the mural will give a boost to tourism on Wolmi Island, one of the top tourist spots near Incheon. — AFP



A mural listed by the Guinness World Records as the largest in the world is displayed on a grain silo in Incheon port, west of Seoul yesterday. — AFP photos

Paris goes Klimt crazy as a million pay to see digital show

More than a million people have flocked up to see a digital exhibition dedicated to the Austrian artist Gustav Klimt in Paris, according to the organizers. The show at L'Atelier des Lumieres, which claims to be the biggest video projection gallery in the world, comes as another show featuring Klimt's pupil Egon Schiele has become a hit on the other side of the French capital. The immersive exhibition in an old foundry in eastern Paris uses 140 projectors to flood the walls and floors of the space with the Viennese master's work on a 35-minute loop.

Culturespaces, the private company behind the Klimt show, said it will be extended until January 4. The exhibition will be followed in late February by another sound and light show using some of the best-known canvasses by Vincent Van Gogh, including "Sunflowers" and "The Starry Night". The Schiele show at the Fondation Louis Vuitton in western Paris closes on January 14. Klimt and Schiele's drawings are also the subject of a show at the Royal Academy in London which runs until February. — AFP



In this file photo people attend a press visit of the immersive exhibition "Klimt Hundertwasser Poetic_Ai" devoted to Austrian painters Gustav Klimt and Friedensreich Hundertwasser.

Auctioneer behind 'Salvator Mundi' sale leaves Christie's

Loic Gouzer, who led the record-breaking 2017 sale of Leonardo da Vinci's "Salvator Mundi," will step down as co-chairman of Americas postwar and contemporary art at Christie's by year's end, the auction house announced Monday. During his seven-year tenure, Gouzer developed a reputation as an innovator ready to take big risks to clinch history-making sales mixing contemporary and historical works.

The 500-year-old da Vinci painting depicting Jesus Christ went under the hammer for \$450.3 million in November 2017 — the most expensive work ever sold at auction. It is the only known work by the artist to still be held in a private collection. Gouzer also presided over a 2015 sale of Pablo Picasso's "Les femmes d'Alger (Version 'O') for the then record sum of \$179.4 million. And last month, he led the sale of David Hockney's "Portrait of an Artist (Pool with Two Figures)" for \$90.3 million, an auction record for a living artist.

Gouzer, a 38-year-old who spent his childhood in Geneva and is an avid Instagram user, gave no indication of his future plans. "Those who know me best know that my two great passions in life have always been art and the environment," he said in a statement. "I intend to spend the next few months concentrating on conservation and climate issues before coming back to the art world with a new project." In 2013, Gouzer had organized a sale with friend and actor Leonardo di Caprio that raised \$39 million for environmental initiatives. — AFP



In this file photo Loic Gouzer Deputy Chairman, Post-War and Contemporary at Christie's stands next to the artwork "Untitled" made by artist Jean-Michel Basquiat during a press preview of Christie's forthcoming evening auctions of the Contemporary, Impressionist, Modern and Post-War Art in New York. — AFP

Lifestyle | Gossip

Lil Pump angers China with racially offensive song

US rapper Lil Pump has triggered an uproar in China after posting a video of a song containing racially offensive lyrics and a squinty-eye gesture, inspiring Chinese rap artists to fire back with “diss tracks”. The 18-year-old Colombian-American rapper, whose real name is Gazzy Garcia, posted the song on his Instagram account on Monday, drawing more than four million views and a slew of angry comments, many written in Chinese. While pulling the corner of his eyes, Lil Pump mentioned China’s retired NBA legend Yao Ming and used a racial slur that mocks the way Chinese people talk: “They call me Yao Ming ‘cause my eyes real low (Ching Chong)”.

The song, “Butterfly Doors”, prompted Chinese rapper Li Yijie-whose stage name is Pissy-to hit back with a diss track titled “Fxxx Lil Pump”. Pissy, of Sichuan hip-hop group CD Rev-or Chengdu Revolution-told AFP he had “to take action if he humiliated me, a Chinese citizen, in a rapper’s way that we both understand”.

His lyrics go: “The fact is you and white racists the

same/Respect yourself, you’ve suffered the pain / You don’t know anything bout the history / Cuz you a nation of immigrants, and if you really won’t take it serious. Check it out on those Indians.” The hashtag “CD Rev’s official fightback” was one of the hottest topics on China’s Twitter-alike Weibo and was viewed more than 440,000 times.

Pissy’s original video was taken down on Weibo, and he acknowledged that it was probably due to him cursing in the song. He re-uploaded the track on his own music streaming site on NetEase. Pissy’s group CD Rev is famous for its close connection with the government and for singing patriotic rap.

“(The Chinese) hip-hop scene wants to give a voice to the public on international news. Rap is our weapon to protect ourselves or to fight,” Pissy told AFP. PG One, co-winner of a hit TV show “The Rap of China”, also posted a new diss track titled “Repeater” on Weibo, mocking the repetition in Lil Pump’s best-known song “Gucci Gang”.

The response comes as rap has faced some restrictions

in China, with a leaked government directive indicating this year that television programs should ban guests from “hip-hop culture”, “with tattoos” and “decadence culture”, though “The Rap of China” was not affected. Tommy Sire, a 29-year-old rapper living in Shanghai, said he thinks Lil Pump rapped such words due to “ignorance” but the counterattacks from Chinese artists could play a positive role in China’s hip-hop circle.

“I think it’s a good thing for a Chinese rapper to come out and diss back in the hip-hop culture, because this can allow American hip-hop enthusiasts to know that China has such a culture,” Sire, whose real name is Geng Tao, told AFP. “Although it may not be a positive exchange, it’s a form of exchange to some extent,” Sire said. “This may also cause the Chinese rap circle to be more united because they found a common enemy.”—AFP



Chinese rapper Geng Tao, also known as Tommy Sire, poses for a photo in Shanghai yesterday. — AFP

Thai Youtuber faces legal woes after Miss Universe dress comments

A Thai YouTube personality is facing defamation charges after making comments about dresses worn by Thailand’s Miss Universe candidate, one of which was designed by a daughter of the country’s king. The monarchy is considered sacred in Thai society and few dare to criticize the institution for fear of running afoul of strict royal insult laws, which are supposed to only cover the king, queen, heir-apparent and regent.

But criticism of other members of the royal family is still considered off-limits for members of the Thai public. The fashion fracas started on Monday after Wanchaleom Jamneanphol, a YouTube personality who goes by the nickname “Mixy Bigmouth”, made unflattering Facebook comments about a blue dress worn by the Thai Miss Universe contestant and designed by Princess Sirivannavari Nariratana. Jamneanphol’s comments went viral and Kitjanut Chaiyosburana, an aspiring politician contesting next year’s national election, told AFP yesterday he filed defamation charges against her.

“I think internet idols are like an actor or actress with many followers... so if they commit wrongdoing online it should not end up with just apologies,” Kitjanut said yesterday. Under local law, any Thai citizen is permitted to file defamation charges on behalf of another person, and convictions can carry prison sentences of up to two years. A Thai police spokesman confirmed that the woman was under investigation but she has yet to be formally charged.—AFP

‘Big’ director Penny Marshall dead at 75

Penny Marshall, the star of ABC’s “Laverne and Shirley” who became one of the most successful female directors in history at the helm of “Big,” “A League of Their Own” and a string of other hit movies, has died. She was 75. The filmmaker died peacefully in her Hollywood Hills on Monday due to complications from diabetes, her publicist told AFP.

Marshall’s family released a statement saying her death had left them “heartbroken” and describing her as a “tomboy who loved sports, doing puzzles of any kind, drinking milk and Pepsi together and being with her family.” Born in New York’s Bronx borough, Marshall was the daughter of producer Tony Marshall and his tap dance teacher wife Marjorie, and a sister to legendary comedy director Garry Marshall (“Pretty Woman”), who died in 2016.

She made her name as Laverne DeFazio on the TV sitcom “Laverne and Shirley” (1976-1983), earning three Golden Globe nominations, before making her directorial debut with “Jumpin’ Jack Flash” (1986). She is probably

best known in the movie world for directing Tom Hanks in his breakout role in “Big” (1988), which became the first film made by a woman to gross more than \$100 million at the domestic box office.

She went on to direct Robert De Niro and Robin Williams in medical drama “Awakenings” (1990), which was nominated for a best picture Oscar, before helming “A League of Their Own” (1992), starring Hanks alongside Geena Davis and Madonna. Marshall had a short-lived marriage with a football player she met at university in Albuquerque, with whom she had a daughter. She was married to Hollywood actor and director Rob Reiner for a decade, from 1971.

The family statement described Marshall as “a comedic natural with a photographic memory and an instinct for slapstick.” “We hope her life continues to inspire others to spend time with family, work hard and make all of their dreams come true,” it said. — AFP



In this file photo taken on April 07, 2004, actress/director Penny Marshall arrives for the 1st Annual Palms Casino Royale to benefit the Los Angeles Lakers Youth Foundation at Barker Hanger, Santa Monica, California. — AFP photos



Fans leave tributes on Penny Marshall's star on the Hollywood Walk of Fame shortly after the news that the actress died aged 75 was made public, in Hollywood, California.



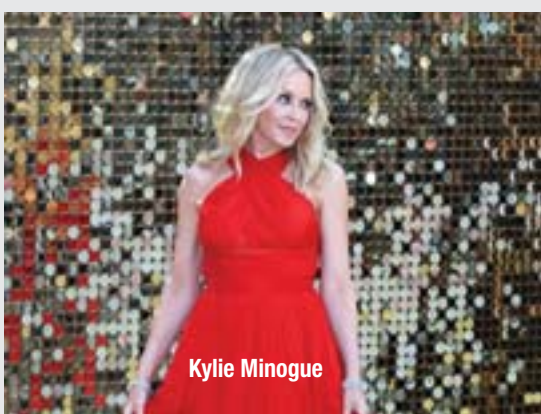
In this file photo taken on June 08, 2008, actress/director Penny Marshall (left) and actress Cindy Williams speak onstage during the 6th annual “TV Land Awards” held at Barker Hangar in Santa Monica, California.

Rihanna's vocal producer teases her 'incredible' new album

Rihanna’s long-time vocal producer has teased her ninth studio album is sounding “incredible”. Kuk Harrell – who worked with the star on her last LP ‘ANTI’, as well as co-writing her hit songs ‘Umbrella’ and ‘Only Girl (In the World)’ – recently responded to one of the 30-year-old singer’s fans who asked for an update on Rihanna’s new music. During an Instagram Live, they asked him: “How’s R9?”, to which he replied: “R9 is great. R9 is amazing. It’s incredible. And that’s all I’m going to say.” The ‘Diamonds’ hitmaker last updated fans in September, promising new music is “coming”. Rihanna hasn’t released any new music since 2016’s ‘ANTI’, but she assured fans that she’s working on new material and, although it’s not quite ready yet because she’s been busy focusing on her lingerie line, her make-up collection and film work – including ‘Ocean’s 8’ – the new tracks will arrive in the near future.

Responding to a fan on Instagram who asked where her new music was, she replied: “I know I know sis. I’m doing music. Simultaneously doing lingerie, makeup, film, amongst a couple other things that I enjoy. “When the music is ready, you won’t have to ask for it. But it’s coming. Just not today sis. I’m hype tho tho, it can’t come soon enough. (sic)” The Bajan beauty hasn’t given much away when it comes to her next release, but it’s believed she may be gearing up to drop a double-disc album next year.

A source said: “Rihanna wasn’t happy with how her last album performed – even though she loved how it turned out, she knows she needs a new project full of smash hits to avoid two back-to-back flops...she’s currently recording two albums – one full of chart-friendly songs, and another made up of moody and experimental tracks – and is considering releasing a double disc if she feels the songs won’t mesh well on the same album.” — Bang Showbiz



Minogue confirmed for Glastonbury legend slot

Kylie Minogue has been confirmed for Glastonbury’s Sunday afternoon Legend slot. The 50-year-old pop princess was scheduled to hit the stage at the music extravaganza, held at Worthy Farm, near Pilton, Somerset, England, 14 years ago but was forced to pull out a month before when she discovered that she had breast cancer. However, more than a decade on, the ‘Spinning Around’ hitmaker will finally get her chance to perform at the five-day festival on the Pyramid stage on June 30, 2019.

She wrote on Instagram: “I’m so thrilled to announce that I’ll be playing the ‘Legend slot’ on Sunday 30th June at @glastofest 2019. It will be 14 years since I was originally meant to appear there and so much has happened up to now. “I can’t wait to see you all there to share the special show.” The ‘Dancing’ hitmaker – who released her 14th studio album ‘Golden’ earlier this year – has made no secret of the fact that she’d love to perform at Glastonbury, and admitted in July that it would be a very “emotional” show for her to do.

She said at the time: “When I was supposed to do it I think I would have been the first solo female to headline in however many years it was, so I was really proud of that at that time. Obviously it didn’t happen. “So yes, it would be amazing and very emotional to be standing there and doing what I didn’t get to do all those years ago, for sure.” Kylie does have some experience when it comes to entertaining the Glastonbury crowd as she appeared on stage with the Scissor Sisters back in 2010.

The ‘Love At First Sight’ singer follows in the footsteps of the likes of the Bee Gee’s Barry Gibb, Dolly Parton, Neil Diamond and Lionel Richie in performing the Legend slot. The Australian star will be joined at the festival in June by Friday night headliner Stormzy. — Bang Showbiz

McMahon wants solo Doctor Doom movie

Julian McMahon wants to bring Doctor Doom back to the big screen. The star played the Marvel super-villain in two movies – in 2005’s ‘Fantastic Four’ and 2007’s ‘Rise of the Silver Surfer’ – and received a mixed response at the time, but he thinks there is an opportunity to bring the Latveria dictator back for a solo outing. He told Digital Spy: “I would like to do a Doctor Doom movie. I think that character can do his own kind of thing. “This is at the core of, I think, Marvel stuff – your villains always start as good people, and became what they became because of the elements that happened around them.

“They’re not just born evil. They’re not just crazy. It was circumstance. It was situations. It was challenges of personalities and ego and all those kind of things that just kind of turned the wheels in a different direction.” In the comics, Victor Von Doom overcame a difficult childhood to become one of the world’s best scientists. However, he found himself outdone throughout his career by Reed Richards – the alter ego of superhero Mr. Fantastic. McMahon has suggested there is a lot of potential when it comes to delving into Doom’s backstory to explain how he became who he is.

He added: “Even while I was playing Doctor Doom, we had to find a way... actually, we even kind of explored it with this whole trip to space. “Everyone got affected, and that’s how they got their powers. Well, unfortunately, for Doctor Doom, it scarred him for life. “Even while I was playing Doctor Doom, we had to find a way... actually, we even kind of explored it with this whole trip to space. Everyone got affected, and that’s how they got their powers. Well, unfortunately, for Doctor Doom, it scarred him for life.” While Noah Hawley has penned a script for Fox for a possible standalone film, Disney’s acquisition of the company has meant plans for its production have stalled. — Bang Showbiz



Bianca Del Rio wants to replace Victoria Beckham in Spice Girls

Bianca Del Rio wants to replace Victoria Beckham for the Spice Girls tour. The comedian drag star has insisted while she admittedly isn’t a big fan of the ‘Wannabe’ hitmakers, she still thinks she could be a perfect fit for the group’s comeback shows in the absence of the fashion designer. Speaking to the Daily Star newspaper, she said: “I’m not a fan but Adore Delano and Courtney Act are huge Spice Girls fans, they can quote the movie, and I know nothing.

“If they need an uppity who doesn’t want to be there, I’ve been that person on my many tours, so why not. Nothing gayer than that! “She is fashionable but when you’re a pencil does it really matter what you wear? She’s like: ‘Ooh I’m a designer’. Please girl!” The ‘RuPaul’s Drag Race’ star is no stranger to a passionate fanbase either, although she has begged her own supporters to stop sending her such strange gifts. She explained: “It started with some very interesting packages, first letters, some very long letters, they were unstable letters. “And then it became the catheter because she was a nurse who sent me catheter and support socks that she said would work on long flights. “Was thoughtful but obviously didn’t realize I wasn’t going to walk around with a purse full of p**s while I’m on a flight!” Spice Girls – made up of Mel B, Mel C, Emma Bunton and Geri Horner – are set for a reunion tour in 2019, but they won’t be joined by Victoria. — BangShowbiz





An Iraqi woman undergoes a facial treatment at an aesthetic clinic in the northern city of Mosul. — AFP photos



An Iraqi woman gets a lip injection.



An Iraqi man undergoes an aesthetic treatment.



An Iraqi woman gets a lip injection.

After shedding IS, Mosul embraces makeovers

For three years, Mosul's women were covered in black from head to toe and its men had to keep their beards long. Salons were shut, and plastic surgery considered a crime. But more than a year after the Islamic State group's ouster, the Iraqi city is flaunting its more fabulous side. Need to zap away a scar or a burn? Cover up a bald spot with implants? Whiten teeth for a dazzling smile? Mosul's plastic surgeons and beauticians are at your service. Raji Najib, a Syrian living in Mosul, recently made use of the city's aesthetic offerings.



A picture shows the reception area of an aesthetic clinic.

The 40-year-old had long been self-conscious of his bald spots, until his Iraqi friends told him what had worked for them—hair implants at a new clinic in their hometown. "They told me the equipment was modern, the nurses competent and the prices good," Najib said. In Mosul, the average hair implant procedure costs around \$800, including the follow-up after the operation.

Nearly 90 kilometers (50 miles) to the east in Iraq's Arbil, or even further north in Turkey, the same operation costs at least \$1,200. Plasma injections to prevent hair loss cost around \$63 in Mosul, but at least \$20 more in Arbil. In addition to the difference in price, Najib would have had to put up money and time for travel. "Going to a clinic in Mosul is much easier, as I don't have time to travel outside Mosul," he told AFP.

Makeovers in Mosul

Decades ago, only one department in Mosul's hospitals offered plastic surgery, and only to those who had a

severe accident or were trying to eliminate a physical handicap from birth. Mosul, and Iraq more broadly, have been shaken by waves of conflict since the 2003 U.S.-led invasion that toppled Saddam Hussein and paved the way for a sectarian war. Religious hardliners forced women to cover up or stay at home, and extremists in particular targeted hairdressers, many of whom closed their shops in fear.

Another shock came in 2014 when the Islamic State group swept across much of Iraq's north, with the jihadists making Mosul their de facto capital. The religious police of IS enforced ultra-strict rules on dress for all residents, making sure women showed no skin and men wore ankle-length capris and long beards, with no moustache. The city has since gotten a makeover. Five beauty clinics have opened since Mosul was recaptured last summer by Iraqi security forces, and they can hardly keep up with the flow of customers, most of them men.

Muhammad Kazem told AFP he was the first to relaunch his city's beauty business with his clinic, Razan, which offers teeth whitening services and other dental care. His secret? "The employees came from Lebanon, and the treatments and machines were imported," said Kazem, 40.

Scars, inside and out

The city's medical services were hit hard by IS's three-year reign and the months-long battle to oust it. The available hospital beds in Mosul dropped from 3,657 before 2014 to just 1,622 last year, according to the local human rights commission. But the city is rebuilding, and one new commercial center houses the Diamond Dental Clinic in the bottom floor, with the Shahrzad beauty center upstairs. A poster at the entrance advertises what's on offer: injections of botox and other fillers, slimming surgeries, dermatological operations, and more. Inside the glossy interior are men and women alike, an unthinkable sight under the iron-fisted rule of IS.

A female employee carefully injected serums to prevent hair loss into the scalp of a woman gritting her teeth, one of the dozen customers streaming in per day. Beautician Alia Adnan said the physical and mental impact of the jihadists on people in Mosul has been long-lasting. "They have hair or skin problems because of the stress and the pollution that Mosul's residents were exposed to, both under IS and during the clashes," she told AFP. — AFP



A picture shows advertisements of beauty treatments outside an aesthetic clinic in the northern Iraqi city of Mosul.



An Iraqi man gets a facial injection at an aesthetic clinic.



A hairdresser styles the hair of a customer at a beauty salon.



'Pineapple leather' offers vegan fashion alternative

Pineapples aren't just good to eat. A Spanish businesswoman is on a mission to convince us they're also good to wear. Carmen Hijosa has created Pinatex, a textile woven from the long fibres in the fruit's discarded leaves that she hopes will give the fashion industry a sustainable alternative to leather. A clothes designer by trade and having abandoned leather on environmental grounds, she spent eight years developing her alternative textile.

"Because of their characteristics - they're very fine and strong and flexible - my idea was what if I make a mesh with these fibres, not unlike what leather is," Hijosa told Reuters. "And that was the beginning of this new material." Hijosa, who founded the company Ananas Anam to market Pinatex, works with pineapple farmers in the Philippines who harvest and strip the fibres, which are finished into Pinatex in Spain. To make one square meter of Pinatex takes 460 leaves - but there's no shortage of raw material. Global pineapple production topped 25 million tons in 2016, according to statistics portal Statista.

Ananas Anam says the waste from the top 10 producer countries could theoretically replace over 50 percent of global leather output. Since its commercial launch in 2015, Pinatex has been used by about 500 manufacturers, including vegan sneakers sold by fashion house Hugo Boss. All of smaller-scale brand Altir's biker-style jackets are made from it. "People come in, they'll touch it, they're attracted to it. At first, most of the time, they think it's

leather and then they feel it and it doesn't feel like leather," said its creative director Timothy Turner-Sutton. "...It's its own material. When it gets wet it dries like leather and it behaves like leather in every way except it's completely sustainable."

Aside from the resources needed to raise cattle to slaughter, critics of the leather industry point to its use of chemicals with tannery waste containing large amounts of pollutants. High-profile opponents to the use of animal products include British designer Stella McCartney, who has said the fashion industry needs to radically cut the damage it is doing to the environment. However, at least for now, going vegan doesn't come cheap. Altir's jackets retail for a cool 680 pounds (\$860). — Reuters





An employee of the Bodet Company restores an old bell at the plant of Tremontines, western France. — AFP photos



An employee of the Bodet Company restores an old bell.



Wooden pegs used for belfry construction are pictured at the Bodet company plant of Tremontines, western France.



An employee of the Bodet Company makes a bell clapper.



An employee of the Bodet Company restores an old bell.

Re-sounding recovery for French church bells nursed back to health



An employee of the Bodet Company restores the clock of a bell tower.



An employee of the Bodet Company restores the clock of a bell tower.



An employee of the Bodet Company restores an old bell.

Deep in the French countryside, laid out on beds of wood and metal, some of the grand dames of liturgical music are receiving treatment for injuries sustained throughout their long and storied careers. The “patients” at Bodet, a company in the western Maine-et-Loire region that restores old church bells rescued from steeples, have quaint names such as Marie-Josephine, Marguerite and Melanie-Cornelie. Each weighs between several hundred kilos (pounds) and a few tons and they all look as if they have been in the wars. “When you see the state in which they arrive we’re delighted to be able to give them a second wind,” says 39-year-old Tanguy, one of two welders tasked with breathing new life into the bronze heavyweights.

Crouching down over his charges, Jean-Luc Ferrant, director of Bodet’s bell restoration business, delivers his diagnosis. “On this one, it’s the clapper which has ended up denting the metal by dint of striking,” he says. Another has a gash running down the body, while a third has lost one of its “ears”, one of two holes in the crown used to hang the 750-kilo instrument. Like clocks, Ferrant explains, bells “always repeat the same movement, decade after decade. And so they wear out, lose their ringing sound and can even break”. Mercifully, the prognosis is good: within a few weeks they should back in their bellfries, ringing in the new year.

Surviving wars and revolutions

Over two centuries after the French Revolution, when churches were attacked as a symbol of the hated Ancien Regime, France has around 150,000 bells which toll for weddings, funerals and other religious celebrations. Only a few thousand of those that survived the Revolution remain, however, with many melted down during World War I and II to provide metal for weapons. Treasured as works of art, 5,000 are listed on the national heritage register. Bells sent to Bodet to be restored are immersed in a purple dye that shows up cracks.

The workers then strip off any damaged metal and put the bell in an oven. It is heated slowly for several hours until reaching several hundred degrees—the exact temperature is part of a secret, patented technique—which turns it from a weathered green to a sooty black in the process. Once out of the oven, the welder has less than an hour to repair cracks, fill out worn striking points and replace missing sections.

After that, the bell goes back into the oven so that the new metal blends into the structure. It is then cooled, any extraneous metal is filed off, and worn inscriptions and motifs are restored. The final stage of the makeover sees it brushed to restore the original bronze patina.



An employee of the Bodet Company restores an old bell.

‘Precious heritage’

Bodet—one of only three companies in Europe that restores old church bells along with Germany’s Lachenmeyer and Eijsbouts in the Netherlands—has nursed some 1,100 bells back to health since 1991. They include France’s oldest bell, a 1239 model from the central Cher region, and the bells of an abbey from Aveyron in the south-east, as well as some offerings from neighboring Spain.

Some were lurking incognito in steeples until being dusted off. “Sometimes people tell us ‘I was baptized under that bell and my grandchildren got married in that church!’”, said Christian, another welder who like Tanguy was forbidden from giving his surname by Bodet to prevent him being poached by the competition. Ferrant notes that, although few French Catholics practice their faith—only 7 percent of those who identified as Catholic attended mass at least once a month, according to a 2010 poll—they remain deeply attached to church chimes. “It lays down markers and gives rhythm to everyday life,” he said, arguing: “This precious heritage must be kept alive.” — AFP



An employee of the Bodet Company (right) builds a belfry.



An employee of the Bodet Company restores an old bell.

Classifieds

Thursday, December 20, 2018



STATE OF KUWAIT
DIRECTORATE GENERAL OF CIVIL AVIATION
METEOROLOGICAL DEPARTMENT



Tel: (+965) 161 Ext: 6819 - 6817
Fax: (+965) 24348714
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Expected Weather for the Next 24 Hours

BY DAY: Sunny with light to moderate north westerly wind to light variable wind, with speed of 06 - 26 km/h .

BY NIGHT: Cool with light variable wind, with speed of 06 - 20 km/h .

WEATHER WARNING			No Current Warnings	
STATION	MAX. EXP.	MIN. REC.	<div>SFC. CHART 19/12/2018 0000 UTC</div>	
KUWAIT CITY	21 °C	15 °C		
KUWAIT AIRPORT	21 °C	14 °C		
ABDULY	22 °C	13 °C		
BUBYAN	--- °C	---- °C		
JAHRA	23 °C	14 °C		
FAILAKA ISLAND	21 °C	14 °C		
SALMIYAH	21 °C	16 °C		
AHMADI	21 °C	16 °C		
NUWAISIB	24 °C	15 °C		
WAFRA	24 °C	14 °C		
SALMY	19 °C	11 °C		

4 DAYS FORECAST					
DAY	DATE	WEATHER	Temperatures		Wind Speed
			MAX.	MIN.	
Thursday	12/20	Mostly Sunny	25 °C	12 °C	SE 10 - 32 km/h
Friday	12/21	Mostly Sunny	22 °C	14 °C	NW 12 - 32 km/h
Saturday	12/22	Cool	18 °C	12 °C	NW 15 - 40 km/h
Sunday	12/23	Cool	18 °C	10 °C	NW 15 - 35 km/h

PRAYER TIMES	
Fajr	05:12
Sunrise	06:37
Zuhr	11:45
Asr	14:35
Sunset	16:53
Isha	18:16

RECORDED YESTERDAY AT KUWAIT AIRPORT	
MAX. Temp.	22 °C
MIN. Temp.	15 °C
MAX. RH	96 %
MIN. RH	66 %
MAX. Wind	E 36 km/h
TOTAL RAINFALL IN 24 HR.	2.34mm

Hospitals

Sabah Hospital	24812000
Amiri Hospital	22450005
Maternity Hospital	24843100
Mubarak Al-Kabir Hospital	25312700
Chest Hospital	24849400
Farwaniya Hospital	24892010
Adan Hospital	23940620
Ibn Sina Hospital	24840300
Al-Razi Hospital	24846000
Physiotherapy Hospital	24874330/9

Clinics

Kaizen center	25716707
Rawda	22517733
Adaliya	22517144
Khaldiya	24848075
Kaifan	24849807
Shamiya	24848913
Shuwaikh	24814507
Abdullah Salem	22549134
Nuzha	22526804
Industrial Shuwaikh	24814764
Qadsiya	22515088
Dasmah	22532265
Bneid Al-Gar	22531908
Shaab	22518752
Qibla	22459381
Ayoun Al-Qibla	22451082
Mirqab	22456536
Sharq	22465401
Salmiya	25746401

CHANGE OF NAME

Arwa Mithawala. (C 5439)
20-12-2018

I, Batyl, holder of Indian Passport No. S2091663 and Civil ID no. 297122301821, has changed my name to Batyl Khojema Kanchwala. (C 5439)

I, Hozefa, holder of Indian Passport No. Z3201289 and Civil ID no. 277021101304, has changed my name to Hozefa Mithawala. (C 5439)

I, Arwa, holder of Indian Passport No. L6663051 and Civil ID no. 2822012002028, has changed my name to

I, Santhosh Theruparambil (House), S/o. Bhaskaran, Kariyannoor, Erumappetty (PO), Thrissur, 680584, holder of Indian Passport No: J5238774, Civil ID No: 277021014999, converted to Islam and has changed my name and address to Muhammed Suhail, S/o. Bhaskaran, Theruparambil (House), Kaippuram (PO), Thiruvengapura, Naduvattam, Palakkad, Kerala-679308, hereinafter in all my dealings and documents. (C 5438)

Airlines

Kuwait Airways	171
Jazeera Airways	177
Wataniya Airways	22 066 536
Turkish Airlines	1884918
American Airlines	22087425
	22087426
Jet Airways	22924455
FlyDubai	22414400
Qatar Airways	22423888
KLM	22425747
Royal Jordanian	22418064/5/6
British Airways	22425635
Air France	22430224
Emirates	22921555
Air India	22438184
Sri Lanka Airlines	22424444
Egypt Air	22421578
Swiss Air	22421516
Saudia	22426306
Middle East Airlines	22423073
Lufthansa	22422493
PIA	22421044
Bangladesh Airlines	22452977/8



Directorate General of Civil Aviation Home Page (www.kuwait-airport.com.kw)

DIAL161 FOR AIRPORT INFORMATION

Arrival Flights on Thursday 20/12/2018						Departure Flights on Thursday 20/12/2018					
Airlines	Flt	Route	Time	KNE	231	Airlines	Flt	Route	Time	UAE	872
JZR	254	Amman	00:05	JZR	667	JZR	976	Goa/Chennai	00:05	AXB	394
JAI	572	Mumbai	00:15	SVA	500	AIC	502	Alexandria	00:05	JZR	103
KAC	503	Beirut	00:45	FDB	059	FDB	072	Dubai	00:40	IAW	158A
KAC	102	London	00:50	KAC	672	JZR	707	Luxor	01:00	IAW	158B
THY	772	Istanbul	00:50	KAC	618	JAI	571	Mumbai	01:15	KAC	661
SAI	441	Lahore	00:50	FDB	8065	JZR	111	Doha	01:45	QTR	1079
JZR	734	Cairo	00:50	GFA	221	KAC	677	Dubai	01:50	KNE	382
PGT	858	Istanbul	00:55	KAC	412	SAI	442	Lahore	01:50	IRA	666
DLH	625	Dammam	01:25	KNE	529	KAC	417	Manila	02:00	FDB	060
RJA	642	Amman	01:35	KAC	788	DLH	625	Frankfurt	02:25	JZR	125
UAE	853	Dubai	01:45	ETD	303	THY	773	Istanbul	02:30	GFA	222
THY	764	Istanbul	01:50	OMA	645	PGT	859	Istanbul	02:30	KAC	673
IGO	1757	Kochi	01:55	KAC	562	IGO	1758	Kochi	02:55	FDB	8066
ETH	620	Addis Ababa	02:15	KAC	304	ETH	621	Addis Ababa	03:05	SVA	501
JZR	722	Alexandria	02:15	UAE	857	UAE	854	Dubai	03:40	KAC	775
GFA	211	Bahrain	02:30	JZR	732	KLM	446	Amsterdam	03:55	KNE	530
KLM	446	Bahrain	02:30	SAW	705	OMA	644	Muscat	03:55	KAC	615
QTR	1086	Doha	02:40	KNE	531	KKK	1269	Istanbul	03:55	KAC	563
KKK	1268	Istanbul	02:55	KAC	118	THY	765	Istanbul	04:00	KAC	619
OMA	643	Muscat	02:55	ABY	127	QTR	1087	Doha	04:00	ETD	304
ETD	305	Abu Dhabi	03:05	JZR	212	ETD	306	Abu Dhabi	04:05	OMA	646
MSR	612	Cairo	03:15	KAC	542	MSR	613	Cairo	04:15	KAC	785
QTR	1076	Doha	04:00	KAC	502	LMU	261	Cairo	05:00	JZR	261
LMU	510	Cairo	04:00	QTR	1072	IGO	1752	Chennai	05:10	ABY	128
IGO	1751	Chennai	04:10	FDB	051	QTR	1077	Doha	05:30	KNE	532
KAC	418	Manila	04:25	FEG	341	DHX	173	Bahrain	05:30	SAW	706
KAC	784	Jeddah	04:30	JZR	114	FDB	070	Dubai	05:50	KAC	675
DHX	170	Bahrain	04:35	SVA	510	JZR	215	Jeddah	06:00	KAC	691
SGL	9053	Tbilisi	04:40	GFA	215	KAC	303	Mumbai	06:10	KAC	503
FDB	069	Dubai	05:00	JZR	104	JZR	713	Sohag	06:15	FDB	052
KAC	382	Delhi	05:05	JZR	214	SGL	9053	IL76	06:30	KAC	283
JZR	404	Hyderabad	05:10	UAE	875	JZR	121	Dubai	06:35	UAE	858
KAC	1544	Cairo	05:10	FDB	063	THY	771	Istanbul	06:40	QTR	1073
THY	770	Istanbul	05:10	JZR	124	JZR	251	Amman	07:05	FEG	242
JZR	112	Doha	05:25	QTR	1080	KAC	167	Paris	07:10	KAC	343
KAC	332	Trivandrum	05:40	MSR	620	RJA	643	Amman	07:15	KAC	331
KAC	344	Chennai	05:50	RJA	640	GFA	212	Bahrain	07:15	JZR	733
JZR	402	Mumbai	06:05	ABY	123	KAC	413	Bangkok	07:20	SVA	511
KAC	284	Dhaka	06:10	RBG	555	KAC	173	Munich	08:20	GFA	216
KAC	362	Colombo	06:10	GFA	217	JZR	601	Baku	08:30	KAC	621
KAC	302	Mumbai	06:10	NIA	161	KAC	163	MXP	08:40	JZR	403
KAC	678	Dubai	06:55	KAC	616	BAW	156	London	08:50	JZR	253
BAW	157	London	07:05	KAC	156	FDB	054	Dubai	08:50	KAC	381
JZR	708	Luxor	07:15	KAC	662	KAC	501	Beirut	09:00	JZR	721
QTR	8511	Doha	07:35	FDB	057	KAC	787	Jeddah	09:05	FDB	064
KAC	206	Islamabad	07:35	KAC	776	KAC	613	Bahrain	09:05	UAE	876
KAC	354	Bengaluru	07:35	JZR	126	QTR	8512	Doha	09:05	MSR	621
FDB	053	Dubai	07:50	KNE	381	KAC	791	Madinah	09:10	QTR	1081
KAC	384	Delhi	08:00	KAC	620	JZR	731	Cairo	09:10	RJA	641
KAC	358	Kochi	08:05	DHX	172	KAC	117	Shannon/New York	09:15	RBG	556
UAE	855	Dubai	08:35	OMA	647	KAC	541	Cairo	09:30	ABY	124
MSC	411	Asyut	09:00	QTR	1088	KAC	561	Amman	09:40	GFA	218
ETD	301	Abu Dhabi	09:05	KAC	674	KAC	101	London	09:45	NIA	162
ABY	125	Sharjah	09:05	DLH	624	KAC	741	Dammam	09:45	FDB	058
QTR	1070	Doha	09:30	KAC	174	KAC	671	Dubai	09:45	KNE	232
FDB	055	Dubai	09:40	ETD	307	ABY	126	Sharjah	09:45	KAC	301
IAW	157	Al Najaf	09:55	ALK	229	UAE	856	Dubai	10:00	JZR	401
SAW	703	Damascus	10:30	MEA	402	MSC	412	Asyut	10:00	KAC	357
GFA	213	Bahrain	10:40	KAC	164	KAC	773	Riyadh	10:10	OMA	648
IRA	675	Lar	10:50	KAC	168	ETD	302	Abu Dhabi	10:10	DLH	624
SYR	341	Damascus	11:00	UAE	859	FDB	056	Dubai	10:35	DHX	171
JZR	122	Dubai	11:20	GFA	219	KAC	617	Doha	10:35	QTR	1089
QTR	1074	Doha	11:35	KAC	676	JZR	211	Jeddah	10:40	ETD	308
JZR	216	Jeddah	11:45	KLM	445	KAC	155	Istanbul	10:45	KAC	1543
MEA	404	Beirut	11:55	KAC	564	QTR	1071	Doha	10:45	KAC	203
KAC	614	Bahrain	12:25	JAI	574	IAW	158	Al Najaf	10:55	MEA	403
JZR	252	Amman	12:30	MSC	405	GFA	214	Bahrain	11:25	ALK	230
JZR	714	Sohag	12:35	QTR	1082	SAW	704	Damascus	11:30	KAC	383
UAE	871	Dubai	12:50	ETD	309	IRA	668	Mashhad	11:50	KAC	383
KAC	742	Dammam	12:50	AIC	981	SYR	342	Damascus	12:00	GFA	220
ABY	121	Sharjah	12:55	RBG	213	JZR	213	Jeddah	12:00	KLM	445
MSR	610	Cairo	13:10	KAC	622	KAC	405	Kochi	12:45	KAC	783
AXB	393	Kozhikode	13:15	KAC	786	MEA	405	Beirut	12:55	UAE	860
QTR	1078	Doha	13:35	KAC	692	QTR	1075	Doha	13:00	MSC	406
IAW	157B	Al Najaf	13:55	BBC	043	JZR	113	Doha	13:30	JAI	573
IAW	157A	Al Najaf	13:55	MSC	501	ABY	122	Sharjah	13:35	ETD	310
KAC	774	Riyadh	14:00	GEC	8456	JZR	123	Dubai	13:40	RBG	214
KAC	792	Madinah	14:05	FDB	071	MSR	611	Cairo	14:10	QTR	1083
				JZR	262						

Little room to maneuver as Saudi Arabia slows drive to cut deficit

DUBAI: Saudi Arabia is slowing a drive to cut its huge fiscal deficit in order to revive the economy, but the state budget plan for 2019 suggests it may not have room to boost growth by much. With unemployment among Saudis at a record 12.9 percent, creating jobs is becoming increasingly important to justify reforms launched over two years ago by Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman, who aims to diversify the economy beyond oil exports.

The 2019 budget, released on Tuesday, reflected that. It promised a 7 percent increase in spending, which officials said would lift growth in the non-oil part of the economy and start bringing down unemployment from next year. But even that moderate rise in spending will come at a major cost, the budget plan showed: a dramatic reduction in the pace at which Riyadh shrinks the deficit, which it has pledged to eliminate entirely by 2023.

For three years - ever since Riyadh ran an eye-popping deficit of 367 billion riyals (\$98 billion) in 2015, or about 15 percent of gross domestic product, threatening its financial stability - fiscal policy focused to a large extent on reassuring markets by cutting the deficit. The finance ministry said on Tuesday that the deficit shrank to 136 billion riyals or an estimated 4.6 percent of GDP this year, from 230 billion riyals in 2017. The 2019 budget, however, projected the deficit would shrink only marginally to 131 billion riyals or 4.2 percent of GDP next year. Many private analysts said the budget's spending and revenue numbers implied the deficit would actually rise.

Bilal Khan, senior regional economist at Standard Chartered, predicted a deficit of 5 percent in 2019 and Monica Malik, chief economist at Abu Dhabi Commercial Bank, forecast over 7 percent. Jason Tuvey, senior emerging markets economist

at Capital Economics, estimated that if oil prices did not rebound from current levels, the deficit would near 10 percent in 2019 - a figure that Saudi Arabia could not sustain in the long run.

That would leave Riyadh in danger of missing the 2023 target for eliminating the deficit by a wide margin, which could revive markets' concern about the health of Saudi finances, or of being pressured into drastic austerity steps between 2020 and 2023 in order to hit the target. For these reasons, Saudi Arabia's room to pursue a go-for-growth fiscal policy is limited, and it will not be able to abandon austerity steps entirely next year, economists said. This could keep expansion of the non-oil sector sluggish. "While there may be some fiscal loosening in the first half of next year, we think that austerity will probably resume in the second half of 2019," Tuvey said.

Target

The non-oil part of the economy grew just 2.3 percent in 2018, far too slowly to have much of an impact in cutting unemployment in a country where the population of Saudi citizens is expanding at an annual rate of close to 2 percent. Riyadh originally set a 2020 date for balancing its budget, pushing that back to 2023 a year ago as the economy struggled. In recent months, officials have not abandoned the 2023 deadline but they have sought to soften its significance.

In late October, after much planning for the 2019 budget was completed, Finance Minister Mohammed Al-Jadaan told Reuters that while Riyadh would balance its budgets over the medium term, it would accept some deficits after 2023 if they were needed to spur the economy. In post-budget news conferences yesterday, senior officials said they remained committed to fiscal balance but did not specifically mention 2023.



RIYADH: This picture taken on Tuesday shows a view of skyscrapers in King Abdullah financial district (KAFD) in the Saudi capital. — AFP

Some aspects of the budget indicated key austerity policies would go ahead, however. Jadaan said Riyadh had no intention of changing policy towards fees that it charges for hiring expatriates and issuing residence permits to their dependents. The fees are due to rise next year, increasing financial

pressure on the private sector, which had lobbied for the rises to be delayed.

Also, officials declined to rule out yesterday the possibility of further hikes in domestic fuel prices. Under previously announced policy, domestic prices of fuels including gasoline, diesel and kerosene

may be raised in 2019. Domestic fuel price rises may be the only way that Riyadh can achieve a projection in its 2019 budget for oil revenues to rise 9 percent to 662 billion riyals, as many economists think international oil prices are unlikely to rise much if at all. — Reuters

US begins to pull forces...

Continued from Page 1

It could also undercut US leverage in the region and undermine diplomatic efforts to end a civil war in Syria that has killed hundreds of thousands of people and displaced around half of the country's pre-war 22 million population. The US State Department is evacuating all of its personnel from Syria within 24 hours, a US official told Reuters.

Reports of a full US military withdrawal drew immediate criticism, including from some of Trump's fellow Republicans. Trump has previously expressed a strong desire to bring troops home from Syria when possible, and his tweet yesterday showed he saw no further grounds for remaining. US officials, who spoke to Reuters on condition of anonymity, did not disclose details about the deliberations on the troop withdrawal, and the timing was not immediately clear.

But one official told Reuters that partners and allies had been consulted. Two US officials said a decision to withdraw had already been reached but that could not be immediately confirmed. A US official said Trump's decision was finalized Tuesday. "Full withdrawal, all means all," the official said when asked if the troops would be pulled from all of Syria. The official would not provide a timeline for a withdrawal, saying only: "We will ensure force protection is adequately maintained, but as quickly as possible." The Pentagon would not confirm the US troop pullout. "At this time, we continue to work by, with and through our partners in the region," Pentagon spokesman Colonel Rob Manning said.

Republican US Senator Lindsey Graham, often a Trump ally, said a withdrawal would have "devastating consequences" for the United States in the region and throughout the world. "An American withdrawal at this time would be a big win for ISIS, Iran, (President) Bashar Al-Assad of Syria, and Russia," Graham said in a statement, using the acronym ISIS for Islamic State.

Charles Lister, a senior fellow at the Middle East Institute, called the decision "extraordinarily short-sighted and naive". "This move will look like a 'withdrawal,' not a 'victory,' and yet more evidence of the dangerous unpredictability of the US president," Lister said. "This is not just a dream scenario for ISIS, but also for Russia, Iran and the Assad regime, all of whom stand to benefit substantially from a US withdrawal."

Many of the remaining US troops in Syria are special operations forces working closely with an alliance of Kurdish and Arab militias known as the Syrian Democratic Forces, or SDF. The partnership with the SDF over the past several years has led to the defeat of Islamic State in Syria, but has also outraged NATO ally Turkey, which views Kurdish YPG forces in the alliance as an extension of a militant group fighting inside Turkey.

Two MPs unseated after court rules...

Continued from Page 1

MP Al-Humaidi Al-Subaei said it was decided that a letter will be submitted to the Assembly to discuss the consequences of the verdict. He regretted that the verdict calls for stripping the lawmakers of their seats, adding the ruling deals a heavy blow to the Assembly's constitutional powers and prevents it from practicing its supervisory powers, which is a very dangerous matter. MP Thamer Al-Suwait denied he has resigned from

The deliberations on US troops come as Ankara threatens a new offensive in Syria. To date, US forces in Syria have been seen as a stabilizing factor in the country and have somewhat restrained Turkey's actions against the SDF. A complete withdrawal of US troops from Syria would still leave a sizeable US military presence in the region, including about 5,200 troops across the border in Iraq. Much of the US campaign in Syria has been waged by warplanes flying out of Qatar and other locations in the Middle East.

Still, Defense Secretary Jim Mattis and US State Department officials have long fretted about leaving Syria before a peace agreement can be reached to end the brutal civil war. Islamic State is also widely expected to revert to guerilla tactics once it no longer holds territory. A US withdrawal could open Trump up to criticism if Islamic State reemerged. Trump has previously lambasted his predecessor, Barack Obama, for the withdrawal of US forces from Iraq that preceded an unraveling of the Iraqi armed forces. Iraqi forces collapsed in the face of Islamic State's advance into the country in 2014.

A pullout would allow other countries, like Iran, to increase their influence in Syria, experts said. "If we withdraw then who fills the vacuum, who is able to stabilize and that is the million dollar question," said Andrew Tabler, a Syria specialist at the Washington Institute for Near East Policy think-tank. "The timing is hard to understand," Tabler said.

Islamic State declared its so-called "caliphate" in 2014 after seizing large swathes of Syria and Iraq. The hardline Islamist group established its de facto capital in the Syrian city of Raqqa, using it as a base to plot attacks in Europe. According to US estimates, the group oversaw about 100,000 sq km of territory, with about 8 million people under Islamic State control. It had estimated revenues of nearly one billion dollars a year.

McGurk, the US special envoy for the global coalition to defeat Islamic State, said last week that the group was down to its last 1 percent of the territory it once held in its self-styled "caliphate." The group has no remaining territory in Iraq, Hajin, the group's last major stronghold in Syria, is close to being seized by US-backed SDF forces. After losing Hajin, Islamic State will control a diminishing strip of territory along the eastern bank of the Euphrates River in the area where US-backed operations are focused. The militants also control some desert terrain west of the river in territory otherwise controlled by the Damascus government and its allies.

But US officials have warned that taking back the group's territory would not be the same as defeating it. "Even as the end of the physical caliphate is clearly now coming into sight, the end of ISIS will be a much more long-term initiative," McGurk told a State Department briefing on Dec 11. US Marine General Joseph Dunford, the chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, cautioned earlier in December that the United States had trained only about 20 percent of Syrian forces required to stabilize areas captured from Islamic State. — Agencies

the Assembly because of the verdict, adding that the response to the ruling will be through issuing legislation to restrict the constitutional court's powers to achieve a real separation of authorities.

A number of MPs however welcomed the verdict as a victory of the constitution, saying that the voting on the membership was unconstitutional. MP Mohammad Al-Dallal said the court was not neutral in its ruling and its verdict violates article 50 of the constitution on the separation of the executive, legislative and judicial authorities. Dallal said that the ruling deprives the Assembly from one of its powers to determine the fate of its members. He said the verdict is unconstitutional and surpasses the authority of the Assembly and interferes in its powers, and will drag the country into a political crisis.

Indian journalist jailed after Modi Facebook post

GUWAHATI: An Indian television journalist has been detained for criticizing the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) government on social media under laws intended to ensure national security, leading to protests in the capital, New Delhi. Kishorechandra Wangkhem was working for a television channel in the northeastern state of Manipur when he uploaded several video clips last month calling the state's BJP chief minister, N Biren Singh, a "puppet" of the central government led by Prime Minister Narendra Modi.

"It is nothing but a blatant abuse of the law and powers of the government," Wangkhem's lawyer, N. Victor, told Reuters by telephone. Victor said he planned to appeal against his client's detention, with a hearing likely today. India has one of the world's largest and most diverse media industries, but its journalists often face harassment and violence. The country is ranked 138th in the World Press Freedom Index run by Reporters Sans Frontieres - lower than Zimbabwe, Afghanistan and Myanmar - as a result of censorship laws and the murder of several journalists.

Wangkhem was initially arrested on separate

Israeli lawmakers advance bill to expel Palestinian attackers' kin

JERUSALEM: Members of the Israeli parliament gave preliminary approval yesterday to controversial legislation enabling the forced displacement within the West Bank of Palestinian attackers' family members. The bill comes after a wave of deadly Palestinian attacks against Israeli civilians and soldiers in the occupied West Bank, with its sponsors saying it would deter future attackers. A statement from parliament noted the bill passed yesterday's vote 69-38 in a stormy session, during which Arab lawmakers were expelled from the chamber for disrupting procedures.

The bill would enable the expulsion of family members from one West Bank location to another within seven days of an attack, or attempted

charges of sedition on Nov 21, before being released on Nov 25, his wife, Ranjita Elangbam, told Reuters. He was then detained on Nov 27 under India's National Security Act, which allows for detention of up to a year without trial, and has since been held at a jail in the state capital Imphal. A board of judges set up under the Act approved his detention last Thursday.

In the posts, Wangkham criticized the state government for commemorating a north Indian freedom fighter, the Rani of Jhansi, a symbol of resistance against British colonial rule in the mid-1800s, who he said had nothing to do Manipur's own struggle against the British. "Don't betray, don't insult the freedom fighters of Manipur," he said in one of the posts. Manipur's deputy home minister Charanjeet Singh said in a statement the state had considered the evidence and stood by its decision to detain Wangkham.

Several Indian journalist unions have condemned his arrest and demanded his release. At least a dozen people have been arrested across the country this year over similar social media posts against Modi. Last month a teacher was arrested in the neighboring state of Assam after he compared Modi to a "dog". Divya Spandana, social media chief for the main Congress opposition party, was charged with sedition in September. She had tweeted a meme that showed an altered image of Modi's wax statue with a placard emblazoned with "thief". Many journalists have faced increased harassment or even violence since Modi came to power in 2014. — Agencies

attack, by their relative. It will now be debated and voted upon in the parliament's foreign and defense committee, before returning to the chamber for final readings by lawmakers. Education Minister Naftali Bennett, whose far-Right Jewish Home penned the bill, called yesterday's vote "A huge step in the right direction" aimed at "ensuring the security of Israel". "Every terrorist should know that his family will pay a price for his despicable deeds," he said in a statement.

The justice ministry, however, said that such legislation would violate both Israeli and international law. "There is legal prevention from advancing this proposed legislation," the ministry said in a statement on Monday. "In addition, this proposal creates significant difficulties in the international arena." Even if passed, the legislation could subsequently be blocked if a legal challenge is launched successfully at Israel's high court. On Dec 9, Palestinians opened fire at a bus stop near a West Bank settlement, wounding seven and leading to the death of a baby prematurely delivered after his mother was shot. On Thursday, a Palestinian shot dead two Israeli soldiers at a bus stop and wounded others. — AFP

to the United States," he told reporters. "These are not easy questions."

But such exceptions to Trump's ban are exceedingly rare. The American Civil Liberties Union, which opposes Trump's order, said that only two percent of applicants have been granted waivers. Trump vowed during the 2016 campaign to ban all Muslims from entering the United States, despite constitutional protections of freedom of religion, after a mass shooting in California by a couple of Pakistani descent. In an executive order that triggered chaos before court challenges and revisions, Trump blocked new visas to nearly all citizens of five Muslim-majority countries - Iran, Libya, Somalia, Syria and Yemen - as well as North Korea and some officials from Venezuela. A divided Supreme Court in June upheld the ban, which it said was within the president's powers. — AFP

Yemeni mom to see dying...

Continued from Page 1

apart by the heinous travel ban." "We can't stop until we end this un-American policy for good," she wrote on Twitter. State Department spokesman Robert Palladino voiced sympathy for the family in the "very sad case". But he said that visas are "decided on a case-by-case basis" in accordance with US laws. The State Department is "ensuring the integrity and security of our country's borders and at the same time making every effort to facilitate legitimate travel

Sports

Hart and Gordon win debuts as Flyers edge Detroit Red Wings

Lightning earn feisty win over Canucks

DETROITS: James van Riemsdyk and Shayne Gostisbehere each had a goal and an assist to carry the host Philadelphia Flyers past the Detroit Red Wings 3-2 on Tuesday. Radko Gudas added a goal for the Flyers, who snapped a four-game losing streak. Flyers goaltender Carter Hart, one of the most highly touted prospects in the organization, made his NHL debut and recorded 20 saves. Hart became Philadelphia's sixth different starting goaltender through the first 32 games to set a league record. It was the first game for the struggling Flyers since the dismissal of head coach Dave Hakstol. Scott Gordon was named the interim head coach for the remainder of the season. Dennis Cholowski and Jacob de la Rose each scored a goal for the Red Wings. Detroit goaltender Jonathan Bernier received the start and made 30 saves after Jimmy Howard appeared to get injured during warmups.

BLUES 4, OILERS 1

Patrick Maroon, Vladimir Tarasenko and Jaden Schwartz scored third-period goals as St. Louis broke open a tie game to win at Edmonton. Jake Allen made 22 saves to record the win, the Blues' third in four outings. David Perron scored in the first period for St. Louis. Jesse Puljujarvi collected a second-period goal for Edmonton. Cam Talbot stopped 26 shots for the Oilers, who have lost two straight games and saw a six-game home-ice winning streak snapped.

RANGERS 3, DUCKS 1

Kevin Hayes scored the go-ahead, short-handed goal with 40 seconds left as New York rallied with three third-period goals to stun visiting Anaheim. Filip Chytil added an empty-netter with 18.6 seconds left to cap a comeback that began when Vladislav Namestnikov scored the tying goal just before the midway point of the third. Backup goalie Alexandar Georgiev, making his first start since Dec. 1, notched 14 saves as the Rangers ended a three-game losing streak and won for only the third time in 11 games (3-5-3). Pontus Aberg was credited with the lone goal for the Ducks, who had a four-game winning streak snapped.

PANTHERS 5, SABRES 2

Evgenii Dadonov had a pair of goals and an assist in Florida's four-goal third period, leading to a victory at Buffalo. Aleksander Barkov, Dadonov and Frank Vatrano all scored in a span of 3:44 early in the period as the Panthers erased a 2-1 deficit. Dadonov added an empty-net goal with less than three minutes to play. Troy Brouwer also

scored for the Panthers, who beat Buffalo for the seventh straight time overall and the second time this season. Jeff Skinner and Rasmus Ristolainen scored goals for the Sabres, who had gone 9-1-2 in their past 12 games on home ice.

STARS 2, FLAMES 0

Jamie Benn and Radek Faksa scored goals, and Ben Bishop and Anton Khudobin combined to turn away 24 shots as Dallas defeated visiting Calgary to end a four-game losing streak. Bishop was forced from the game with a head injury at the 13:37 mark of the second period after being clipped on the chin by Calgary's Garnet Hathaway as he worked behind the net. Khudobin finished the second period, stopping the three shots the Flames tested him with in his six-plus minutes of action, before Bishop returned for the third period.

ISLANDERS 3, COYOTES 1

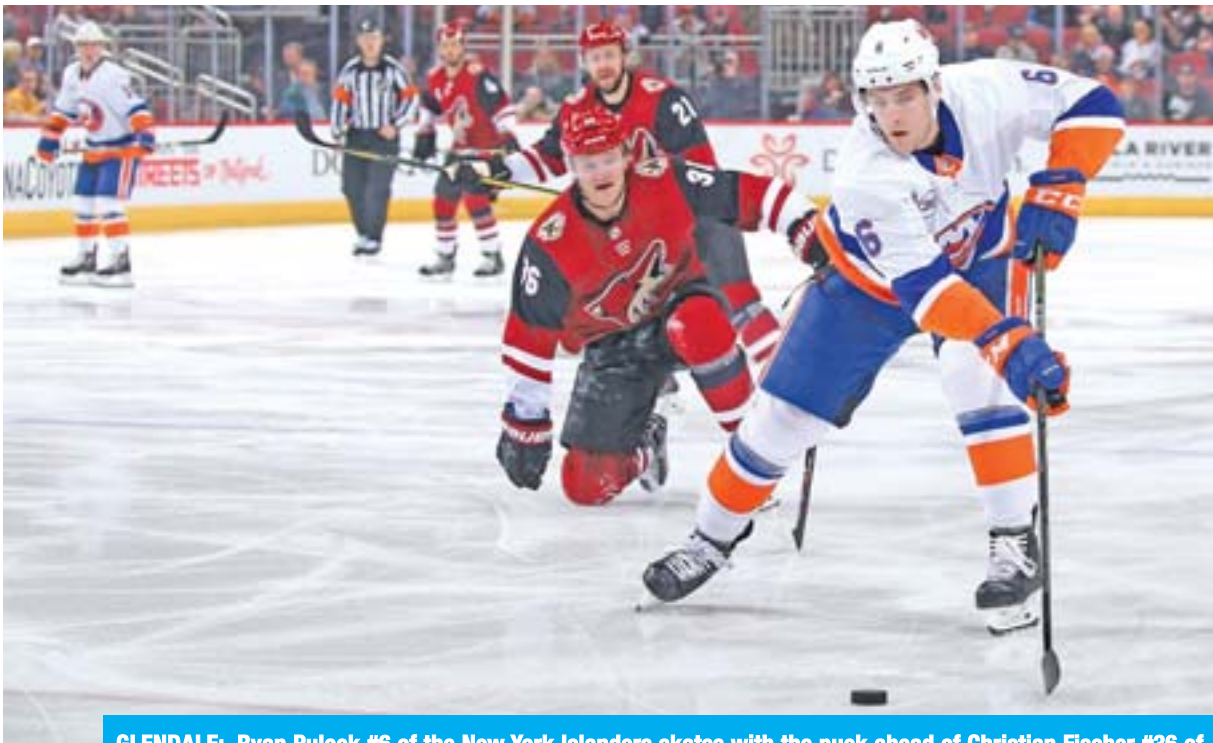
Brock Nelson and Anthony Beauvillier scored in a five-minute span of the second period, and New York ran its winning streak to three games by prevailing in Glendale, Ariz. Islanders winger Joshua Ho-Sang scored his first goal of the season, and goaltender Robin Lehner made 36 saves while improving to 4-0-0 in his career against the Coyotes. Lehner had not won since Oct. 30 at Pittsburgh, going winless in his past six starts. Mario Kempe scored his first goal of the season for the Coyotes, who are 1-6-0 since a four-game winning streak.

KINGS 4, JETS 1

Austin Wagner scored two goals, and Los Angeles ended a four-game losing streak with a win over visiting Winnipeg. Alex Iafallo and Nate Thompson also scored, and Jonathan Quick made 27 saves for the Kings, who have the fewest points in the NHL. (27). Mathieu Perreault scored a goal for the fifth consecutive game, and Connor Hellebuyck made 27 saves for the Jets, who had won a season-high five consecutive games.

LIGHTNING 5, CANUCKS 2

Cedric Paquette, Adam Erne and Nikita Kucherov each recorded a goal and an assist as Tampa Bay won a penalty-filled game at Vancouver. The clubs combined for 58 penalty minutes — 36 for Tampa Bay. Surprisingly, all the goals came at even strength as the each team was blanked on five power plays. The Lightning improved to 9-0-1 in their past 10 games, while the Canucks slipped to 5-1-1 in their past seven games. Ondrej Palat and Steven Stamkos



GLENDAL: Ryan Pulock #6 of the New York Islanders skates with the puck ahead of Christian Fischer #36 of the Arizona Coyotes during the first period of the NHL game at Gila River Arena on Tuesday in Glendale, Arizona. — AFP

also scored for Tampa Bay, while Tyler Motte and Chris Tanev tallied for Vancouver.

BLACKHAWKS 2, PREDATORS 1

Gustav Forsling and Erik Gustafsson each scored, and host Chicago held on for a win over Nashville. Chicago won for only the second time in the past 12 games. Blackhawks goaltender Cam Ward made 30 saves on 31 shots in his first appearance since primary starter Corey Crawford was placed on injured reserve because of a concussion. Kevin Fiala scored Nashville's lone goal, and Pekka Rinne stopped 34 of 36 shots. The Predators failed to collect a point for the first time in five games.

SHARKS 4, WILD 0

Logan Couture scored two goals, and Martin Jones made 26 saves to lead San Jose to a victory at Saint Paul,

Minn. Joe Pavelski and Lukas Radil also scored for the Sharks, who won their season-high fifth straight game and are 7-1-0 in their past eight. Radim Simek and Tomas Hertl each had two assists and Radil had one. Couture has 19 points (seven goals, 12 assists) in his past 15 games. Devan Dubnyk stopped 21 of 24 shots for Minnesota, which went 2-2-0 on a four-game homestand.

MAPLE LEAFS 7, DEVILS 2

Tyler Ennis scored twice, Auston Matthews and John Tavares each had a goal and an assist, and Toronto cruised to a win at Newark, N.J. Patrick Marleau, Mitch Marner and Morgan Rielly added one goal each for the Maple Leafs, who had lost two in a row. Nazem Kadri and Connor Brown each notched three assists for Toronto. Sami Vatanen and Nico Hirschier scored for the Devils, who lost their second in a row. — Reuters

Kuwait Stars beat Bahrain in Gulf Ice Hockey tournament

KUWAIT: "Kuwait Stars" hockey team beat its Bahraini counterpart (5-0) in the opening match of the first Gulf Professional Ice Hockey Clubs that began Tuesday with the participation of five Gulf clubs.



Fuhaid Al-Ajmi president of the Winter Games Club

Kuwait stars which includes local and pro plays gave an impressive performance led by best player Ahmad Al-Ajmi. Players dictated their styles at both ends of the game, securing the first win for Kuwait.

Meanwhile, "Abu Dhabi Storms" from UAE defeated "Oman Rockies" by a score of 5-0 also.

The tournament is being held under the patronage of Information Minister, State Minister for Youth Affairs Mohammad Al-Jabri and is being held at the skating rink. Saudi Arabia, Bahrain, UAE, Oman and Kuwait are participating in the five day tournament. Deputy Director General of Public



Start of the tournament

Authority for Sports Dr Saqr Al-Mulla told journalists the authority is keen on supporting such tournaments as they bring Gulf brothers together in Kuwait and wished participants success.

He said Kuwait winter sports club, the tournament organizer, is considered an outstanding club in developing winter games in Kuwait. He also val-

ued the support of minister Al-Jabri of Kuwait sports in general. Chairman of Kuwait Winter Sports Club Fuhaid Al-Ajmi said he is happy to organize the first Gulf ice hockey clubs tournament, after organizing the first national hockey teams championship few years earlier, and this confirms the club's pioneership at the Gulf level.



Stars team of Kuwait against Al-Bahrain of Bahrain.



Opening ceremony of Gulf Ice Hockey Clubs tournament. — Photos by Yasser Al Zayyat

Kuwait beat UAE in wheelchair basketball tourney

KUWAIT: Kuwait's basketball wheelchair team on Tuesday beat UAE 48-31 at the Ninth Gulf tournament, while Saudi Arabia defeated Bahrain 65-18. The Kuwaiti team, which made a second win at the event, dominated most of the match. This takes the team's aggregate points up to four. Saudi Arabia's team also has four points in the second day of the tournament, which runs until Saturday. Both Bahrain and UAE have no win so far. On Monday, the Kuwait team defeated Bahrain 56-31 in the opening game of the event that kicked off Monday evening. — KUNA



Hamilton deserves more recognition, says Wolff

LONDON: Lewis Hamilton may be the greatest Formula One driver of all time but 'negativity and envy' are denying him the recognition he deserves, according to his Mercedes team boss Toto Wolff.

Comparing the five-time world champion to retired

Ferrari great Michael Schumacher, Wolff suggested people might not appreciate the 33-year-old Briton's achievements until he too had left the scene.

"Not everybody recognizes a great career, a great sportsman or greatness overall while it's happening. There is a lot of negativity and envy whilst it happens," Wolff told Reuters in a telephone interview. "It's only being recognized once a career has ended as having been really great and I don't know why that is. We are extremely privileged in following a career of maybe the greatest racing driver of all time.

"Obviously Michael has set the records and was unbelievable but Lewis is on a similar trajectory," he

added. "Also with Michael, it was only recognised after he retired and even more when tragedy struck. And I think it's a pity." Schumacher, who turns 50 in January, has not been seen in public since the German suffered severe head injuries in a skiing accident five years ago. Hamilton has set a string of records on his way to his fifth title this season, and could go on to match Schumacher's seven championships and 91 wins.

The Briton, now on 73 victories, has won 51 of the 100 grands prix in the V6 turbo era that started in 2014 and four of the last five championships. Hamilton also has a record 83 pole positions and is only the third driver ever to win five titles or more. Last Sunday, he was runner-up

in the BBC's Sports Personality of the Year awards-a public vote-to Tour de France winner Geraint Thomas.

He was condemned on social media for 'slum' comments about his boyhood town Stevenage, words he later clarified, and has been criticised for moving to the tax haven of Monaco where many other Formula One drivers reside. "We are live spectators, live witnesses of a great racing driver at the peak of his abilities," said Wolff. "In the U.S. you are very much inspired by success. In Europe it triggers much more envy and negativity.

"I am certainly biased because I have an emotional attachment to Lewis, for me the greatest sports person that is in his career in Britain." — Reuters

Sports

Rain, epic stand save Sri Lanka in New Zealand Test

Mendis unbeaten on 141 and Mathews 120 not out at stumps

WELLINGTON: Sri Lanka battled to a rain-affected draw in the first Test against New Zealand yesterday after the Black Caps were unable to break an epic stand by Kusal Mendis and Angelo Mathews.

The tourists were 287 for three in their second innings-still nine runs away from an innings defeat-when the umpires called time with only 13 overs bowled on the final day. Mendis was unbeaten on 141 and Mathews 120 not out at stumps after a stubborn 274-run stand that, along with the weather, allowed Sri Lanka to salvage a draw.

New Zealand captain Kane Williamson was left to rue missed opportunities after controlling the match for three days then failing to land a killer blow. "Obviously it's a shame to have the weather around today because we felt if we could pick up a wicket and get into their lower order, there was still very much a chance of a result," he said.

New Zealand's early dominance was built on a mammoth 578 in the first innings, featuring an unbeaten 264 from Tom Latham. The left-hander's career-best effort overhauled former England captain Alastair Cook's 244 as the highest score by an opener carrying their bat in Test history.

The emphatic performance should have given the New Zealand bowlers two full days to attack a Sri Lanka line-up that showed little fight in the first innings, but Mathews and Mendis responded with a masterclass of their own.

The pair came together late on day three with Sri Lanka reeling at 13 for three in their second dig, trailing New Zealand's first inning total by 296. They batted through the whole of day four, fending off a barrage of bouncers from the New Zealanders.

"Both boys out there showed a lot of character," said

skipper Dinesh Chandimal. "They fought hard when the situations came." It was the only time in New Zealand that a full day's play has been completed without a Test wicket falling, and the first time anywhere since South Africa achieved the feat against Bangladesh in Chittagong in 2008.

The partnership was also a Sri Lankan record against the Black Caps. The draw snaps Sri Lanka's four-Test losing streak against the Black Caps on New Zealand soil. It will give the world's sixth-ranked team confidence after they arrived in New Zealand smarting from a 3-0 Test whitewash against England last month.

They have also had to contend with disarray in their coaching and selection ranks. The fourth-ranked Black Caps entered the two-match contest buoyed by their first away Test series win over Pakistan in 49 years.

They are looking for a fourth straight Test series win after also defeating England and the West Indies in the past 12 months. The second and final Test begins on December 26 in Christchurch, where the tourists have not won in three attempts.

Williamson did not expect the Christchurch pitch to flatten out as it did in Wellington, offering more for his seamers. Chandimal said his team had benefitted from a hit-out in New Zealand conditions but needed to improve on the slow starts they made in Wellington.

"When we were batting we lost three early wickets in both innings and when we were bowling we couldn't get early wickets," he said. "So that's an area we'll have to improve as a team... we've got a lot of youngsters in our side, so I'm sure they will learn and execute their plans." — AFP



WELLINGTON: New Zealand's Tim Southee (R) holds his leg in pain beside Sri Lanka's Angelo Mathews during day five of the first Test cricket match between New Zealand and Sri Lanka at the Basin Reserve in Wellington yesterday. — AFP

Opening woes continue to blight India Down Under

NEW DELHI: Captain Virat Kohli has thrown his weight behind India's struggling openers but the tourists' defeat in Perth showed they have yet to find a solution to their top order woes.

Lokesh Rahul and Murali Vijay have managed only one double-digit stand midway through the four-Test series in Australia, hardly the starts that would help bring India a first test series win Down Under.

Their struggles have intensified pressure on the middle

order of a team with a lengthy tail, and number three Cheteshwar Pujara has had to walk out to bat inside four overs on three of the four occasions.

Opening stands made telling difference in Perth, where Australia prevailed by 146 runs to square the four-test series. The 112-run first innings stand between Marcus Harris and Aaron Finch laid the platform for Australia's 300-plus total in a low-scoring contest and they raised 59 in the second to help set India a target which the tourists could not achieve.

Rahul, who has managed 48 in four innings, has looked like a sitting duck, with batting great Sunil Gavaskar demanding the 26-year-old be sent home to work on his game. "I think he should come back and play Ranji Trophy for Karnataka," the former India captain told Aaj Tak channel. "It is not just that he is out of form, he is just not there and you can see that."

Rahul has not managed a fifty in his last seven Test outings and equally worrying has been the manner of his dismissals, with the right hander either bowled or

trapped LBW in 11 of his last 14 innings. India batting coach Sanjay Bangar lamented last month that the opener was "finding new ways to get out" and many believe Rahul needs to work out the flaws with his technique. Opening partner Vijay has not covered himself in glory either on his return to the squad after he and fellow opener Shikhar Dhawan were dropped following modest returns in England.

Vijay has managed 49 runs from four innings but may still continue as opener purely because India have lost the exciting Prithvi Shaw to an ankle injury for the entire series. "I'm sure those guys have figured out what's gone wrong in this game especially and they're very keen to correct it themselves," Kohli said in Perth of his misfiring openers.

The tourists have flown in Mayank Agarwal as replacement, rewarding the uncapped opener for his consistency in domestic cricket. The series shifts to the traditional Boxing Day Test in Melbourne followed by the finale in Sydney. — Reuters

Shaw ruled out of Australia series

PERTH: Young Indian batting phenomenon Prithvi Shaw has been ruled out for the final two Tests against Australia after failing to recover from an ankle injury picked up during a warm-up game before the series began.

Team management had previously suggested the 19-year-old, who scored a sparkling debut century against the West Indies in October and has been compared to Sachin Tendulkar, could be fit for the Boxing Day Test in Melbourne.

But they have now decided to send him home with Mayank Agarwal called up as his replacement.

"Opening batsman Prithvi Shaw, who had suffered a left ankle injury while attempting a catch in the practice game against CA XI, has been ruled out of the ongoing Test series against Australia," governing body, the BCCI, said in a statement late Tuesday.

In addition to Agarwal, they also added all-rounder Hardik Pandya to their squad for the third and fourth Tests in Melbourne and Sydney, with the series tied 1-1.

India won the first Test at Adelaide with Australia claiming the second in Perth-their first Test victory since the ball-tampering scandal in South Africa in March.

India squad for Melbourne and Sydney: Virat Kohli (capt), Murali Vijay, KL Rahul, Cheteshwar Pujara, Ajinkya Rahane, Hanuma Vihari, Rohit Sharma, Rishabh Pant, Parthiv Patel, Ravichandran Ashwin, Ravindra Jadeja, Kuldeep Yadav, Mohammed Shami, Ishant Sharma, Umesh Yadav, Jasprit Bumrah, Bhuvneshwar Kumar, Hardik Pandya, Mayank Agarwal.



Prithvi Shaw

‘Disrespectful, silly’ Kohli blasted at home and abroad

NEW DELHI: Indian captain Virat Kohli faced stiff criticism both Down Under and at home yesterday after his side's crushing loss to Australia in the second Test. Former Australian paceman Mitchell Johnson called Kohli "disrespectful" and "silly" over his heated exchanges with fellow skipper Tim Paine during the Perth Test.

Former India great Sunil Gavaskar meanwhile hit out at "selection blunders" and the Indian Express daily slammed Kohli's "explicit lack of confidence" in some of his players. Kohli and Paine exchanged barbs, at one point prompting intervention from the umpire, during the game that Australia won by 146 runs on Tuesday to level the four-match series 1-1.

It was reported that Kohli belittled Paine as just "a stand-in captain"—a claim angrily denied by India's team management. The retired Johnson said the famously combative Kohli's antics were unnecessary.

"At the end of the match, you should be able to look each other in the eyes, shake hands and say 'great contest,'" he wrote in a column for Fox Sports. "Virat Kohli could not do that with Tim Paine, shaking the Australian captain's hand but barely making eye contact with him. To me, that is disrespectful.

"Kohli gets away with more than most cricketers simply because he is Virat Kohli and he gets placed on a pedestal but this Test left the Indian captain looking silly," he added. After the game both Paine and Kohli played down their on-field sledging, which was picked up by stump microphones.

Kohli described it as simply banter that was part and parcel of Test cricket. "As long as there is no swearing the line doesn't get crossed. And no personal attacks," he said. He added that the remarks in Perth were nothing compared to their Australian tour in 2014, when he claimed to have been called a "spoilt brat".

But Johnson said Kohli's behaviour made a mockery of his pre-series claims that he was a changed man and didn't plan to initiate any confrontations. "What we saw this Test says otherwise," he said. "From my experiences with him and what I am seeing as an observer now, not much has changed. It was disappointing and that is not the only area where he let himself down."

Johnson and Kohli have history. In 2014 at Melbourne, Johnson threw the ball that hit Kohli in the back when attempting a run out, sparking a heated debate.

Gavaskar said that the roles of Kohli and coach Ravi Shastri need to be assessed if India fail to perform in the final two Tests in Melbourne and Sydney. He said that since India's tour of South Africa at the start of the year, picking the wrong players "has lost matches which could've been won."

If India fail to win the next two matches, "the selectors need to think whether we are getting any benefit from this lot—the captain, coach and support staff," Gavaskar told Aaj Tak TV news network. The Indian Express said that the biggest bone of contention in Perth was not selection but that Kohli "has little confidence in some of his teammates". "It's a viciously self-fulfilling prophecy: the more you think they can't do it, they won't be able to do it," the paper said. — AFP



PERTH: India's captain Virat Kohli (C) sits on the players bench at the end of second Test cricket match between Australia and India in Perth. — AFP

Bangladesh's Shakib fined for shouting at umpire

DHAKA: Bangladesh captain Shakib Al Hasan was fined 15 percent of his match fee for shouting at the umpire during Monday's opening Twenty20 international against West Indies, the International Cricket Council said.

Shakib was also handed one demerit point, his second such penalty since the introduction of the system in September 2016, for the offence during hosts' eight-wicket defeat.

Shakib now has two demerit points, having been handed one for an offence during a Twenty20 against Sri Lanka

Titans, Redskins square off with playoffs within reach

WASHINGTON: The Washington Redskins and Tennessee Titans will try to put pressure on their fellow playoff pursuers when they kick off Week 16 on Saturday in Nashville. The Titans (8-6) are one of three teams tied for the second AFC wild card along with the Baltimore Ravens and the Indianapolis Colts, with the Ravens holding the tiebreaker.

Washington (7-7) is tied with the Philadelphia Eagles, one game behind the Dallas Cowboys (8-6) in the NFC East and one-half game behind the Minnesota Vikings (7-6-1) for the second NFC wild card. Tennessee has won three straight, including a 17-0 shutout of the New York Giants last Sunday. Running back Derrick Henry has rushed for 408 yards and scored six touchdowns in his past two games after producing 474 yards and five scores in the first 12 contests.

"It helps the offense tremendously," quarterback Marcus Mariota told the team's website regarding Henry. "When you are able to do that and get in third-and-manageable, you have an opportunity to throw the ball down the field. So, we definitely have to continue to do that."

While quarterback injuries got most of the attention during Washington's four-game losing streak that ended last week, a leaky defense was as much to blame. After being near the top of the total-defense rankings early in the season, the Redskins are 18th in the NFL, allowing 357.4 yards per game, including 116.6 on the ground (also 18th). However, with their playoff chances on the verge of extinction, the Redskins held the Jacksonville Jaguars to 192 total yards in a 16-13 win last Sunday. "I think they've done a great job on defense," Mariota said of the Redskins. "They've got some veteran guys throughout, and they've done a good job getting after the passer. And from what I have seen, they've done a good job of attacking the football."

Josh Johnson, Washington's fourth starting quarterback of the season, was successful in his first start since 2011 and will benefit from another week of practice before facing the Titans. Against the Jaguars, Johnson completed 16 of 25 passes for 151 yards, one touchdown pass and no interceptions. His mobility, behind a battered offensive line,



JACKSONVILLE: File photo shows Cody Kessler #6 of the Jacksonville Jaguars is sacked by Jonathan Allen #93 of the Washington Redskins during the game at TIAA Bank Field on December 16, 2018 in Jacksonville. — AFP

was vital as he rushed nine times for 49 yards.

"He's got a lot of poise for a guy who just got here. A lot of confidence," Redskins coach Jay Gruden said. "We blew a protection, he got hit a few times pretty hard, but he didn't let that affect his next drop. He continued to read the field, scan the field, stand tall, and made some big-time throws. So, I was impressed with him."

The Titans' defense is ranked seventh in the NFL, allowing 329 yards per game. One week after the Giants gained 402 yards in a rout of the Redskins, the Titans held New York to 260 yards. Washington running back Adrian Peterson has topped 70 yards in a game just once in the past seven weeks, but on Sunday, 24 of his 51 yards came on the game-winning drive. "Adrian has been great all year. I was a little nervous when we first got him. I was like, man, if I don't give it to this guy 20 times a game, he's going to kick my butt," Gruden joked. "He's been very good, man, he's been very patient, very understanding about the rotations, about what we try to do."

Tennessee linebacker Brian Orakpo, a former Redskin, missed last week's game with an elbow injury, and his status for Saturday is uncertain. Redskins tackle Ty Nsekhe (knee) is day-to-day for Washington. — Reuters

Sports

Man City survive shoot-out to reach League Cup semis

Burton into semi-final for the first time in their history

LONDON: Holders Manchester City held their nerve to beat Leicester City 3-1 on penalties and reach the League Cup semi-finals after an entertaining last-eight tie ended 1-1 on Tuesday. City's Oleksandr Zinchenko fired the winner in the shootout after hosts Leicester missed three of their four spot kicks.

City had taken the lead through Kevin De Bruyne's rifled finish early on but Leicester clawed their way back into the encounter with a brilliant finish from Marc Albrighton. With no extra time in League Cup matches this season, the game went straight to penalties where Leicester's Christian Fuchs fired over, while James Maddison and Caglar Soyuncu saw tame efforts saved by City keeper Arijanet Muric.

"In the end the keeper helped us," said De Bruyne. "He's got veins of ice. He did what he had to do in the shootout." City will be joined in the last four by Nigel Clough's Burton Albion after the third-tier side shocked Championship (second-tier) team Middlesbrough with a goal from Jake Hesketh.

Manchester City and Leicester fielded heavily-changed sides although the visitors looked far more potent on paper with Sergio Aguero and De Bruyne returning to the starting lineup, having only just returned to action after injury.

FIRST BLOW

It was the Belgian playmaker De Bruyne who struck the first blow, showing delightful quick feet before firing a skidding shot from outside the area into the net at the near post.

City had a great chance to extend their lead early in the second half when Riyad Mahrez played Aguero in behind the defence but the Argentine's early shot was saved by Danny Ward.

The visitors were made to pay in the 73rd minute when Albrighton controlled a superb pass from Wilfred Ndidi then thrashed his finish into the far corner. The Leicester fans had their hearts in their mouths when City appealed for a penalty with five minutes remaining as Gabriel Jesus looked to burst clear before Hamza Choudhury dived into a last-ditch tackle and just got a toe to the ball.

It was a brief reprieve as Pep Guardiola's side dominated the shootout with only Raheem Sterling failing to convert. Burton reached the semi-finals for the first time in their history after Hesketh grabbed the only goal at 'Boro, slotting home a rebound from the edge of the area in the 48th.

The remaining quarter-final ties will be played when Arsenal host neighbours Tottenham Hotspur, while fellow London club Chelsea welcome south-coast side Bournemouth. — Reuters



LEICESTER: Leicester City's English midfielder Hamza Choudhury (R) slides in to tackle Manchester City's Spanish-born midfielder Brahim Diaz (C) during the English League Cup quarterfinal football match between Leicester City and Manchester City at King Power Stadium in Leicester. — AFP

Solskjaer handed caretaker manager role by Man Utd

LONDON: Manchester United have turned to former striker Ole Gunnar Solskjaer to steady the ship until the end of the season, confirming the Norwegian as caretaker manager in the wake of Jose Mourinho's sacking on Tuesday.

Solskjaer, who leaves his role as manager of Norwegian club Molde, will be joined by Mike Phelan as assistant manager. Phelan previously carried out that role under former United boss Alex Ferguson for five seasons before leaving in 2013.

United parted company with Mourinho with the club in sixth spot in the Premier League having made their worst start to a season for 28 years, culminating in a limp 3-1 loss to bitter rivals Liverpool at Anfield on Sunday.

The appointment of Solskjaer to inject some life into United in some ways mirrors his playing career at the club where he scored 126 goals between 1996-2007, often as an impact sub.

His most memorable contribution came in the 1999 Champions League final victory over Bayern Munich when he netted a stoppage-time winner.

"Manchester United is in my heart and it's brilliant to be coming back in this role," the 45-year-old former Cardiff City manager, said in a statement.

"I'm really looking forward to working with the very talented squad we have, the staff and everyone at the club."

Coincidentally Solskjaer's first task will be to try and guide United to a much-needed three points away at Cardiff-the club who were relegated from the top flight on his watch in 2014 — on Saturday.



Ole Gunnar Solskjaer

CLUB LEGEND

"Ole is a club legend with huge experience, both on the pitch and in coaching roles," United executive vice chairman Ed Woodward said. "His history at Manchester United means he lives and breathes the culture here and everyone at the club is delighted to have him and Mike Phelan back."

"We are confident they will unite the players and the fans as we head into the second half of the season."

Michael Carrick and Kieran McKenna, both part of Mourinho's backroom staff, will be retained at the club to work under Solskjaer, who won six Premier League titles and two FA Cups to go along with the 1999 Champions League triumph at United.

Solskjaer was given the blessing of Molde, who he

steered to two Norwegian titles in 2011 and 2012, and even earned some plaudits from Norway's Prime Minister Erna Solberg, who tweeted: "FINALLY CONFIRMED! Great day for Norwegian football. Good luck keeping control of the Red Devils, @olegs26_ole"

Molde said that their manager's 'temporary' departure to United was an endorsement of the team's success.

"The fact that Manchester United asked to borrow Molde's manager is in itself a happening, and a vote of confidence in both Ole Gunnar and in Molde FC," the Norwegian club, who begin their new season in March, said in a statement.

"We're happy to lend them Ole Gunnar and wish both him and the club success," it added.

First team coach Erling Moe will take temporary charge of Molde, who finished second in the league last season.

Following the loss to league leaders Liverpool, Manchester United (26 points) are 19 points adrift of their rivals after 17 matches and 11 behind fourth-placed Chelsea.

Tottenham Hotspur manager Mauricio Pochettino has emerged as the early favourite to take over as United's permanent boss next season and the Argentine did little to quell speculation during a news conference on Tuesday.

"Like always in football nobody can guarantee anything. What's going to happen in the summer? What is going to happen tomorrow? Nobody knows. The most important thing is to enjoy the journey," Pochettino told reporters.

The 46-year-old Pochettino, who joined Tottenham from Southampton in 2014, has guided the London club to three consecutive top-three finishes in the Premier League but is yet to win a trophy.

However, his attacking style and youth development are traits that were synonymous with the dominant United sides under Ferguson but largely absent since the Scot retired in 2013. — Reuters

Mutko steps down as head of Russian football federation

MOSCOW: Russian Deputy Prime Minister Vitaly Mutko, who has been banned for life from the Olympic Games over doping, yesterday stepped down as the head of the country's football federation.

The move was widely expected after Mutko announced last year he would temporarily step back from the Russian Football Union to concentrate on his role in government. "Vitaly Mutko is leaving his post as president of the Russian Football Union," the organisation said in a tweet on its official account.

The position will be temporarily filled by Sergei Pryadkin, the head of the Russian Premier League, RFU committee member Igor Lebedev said on Twitter. A permanent president will be chosen at a meeting of the RFU in February, he added.

Mutko in December last year also left his position as chairman of Russia's 2018 World Cup organising committee, in the wake of his Olympic ban. The International Olympic Committee at the end of last year banned Russia from competing in the 2018 Winter Games over its state-orchestrating doping programme.

Mutko, who was sports minister during the Russia-hosted previous Winter Olympics, was singled out. But he has denied state involvement in doping and dismissed allegations as an attempt to tar his country as an "axis of evil."

Mutko last year was barred from sitting on the FIFA Council, the world body's ruling top table where the Russian sports official had a seat since 2009. His participation was blocked because of potential conflicts of interest with his government role. — AFP

Fortuna hand Dortmund shock loss

BERLIN: Borussia Dortmund were left reeling on Tuesday after a breathtaking goal from Jean Zimmer saw them lose 2-1 to relegation candidates Fortuna Duesseldorf in a sensational first league defeat of the season.

The defeat saw Dortmund's lead at the top of the table shrink to six points after Thorgan Hazard inspired Borussia Moenchengladbach to a 2-0 win against Nuremberg earlier in the day.

Gladbach have the chance to narrow the gap to just three points when they travel to Dortmund this Friday. Marco Reus had an early goal ruled out for offside but Dortmund were sent into shock when Dodi Lukebakio gave Duesseldorf the lead on 22 minutes. The Belgian striker broke free of the back line to latch onto Kevin Stoeger's through ball and place the ball into the bottom corner.

The league leaders looked helpless in their search for an equaliser before Duesseldorf delivered the next hammer blow 15 minutes into the second half. Zimmer doubled the lead for the underdogs, blasting a 20-metre screamer into the top corner.

"We weren't hungry enough for the win today, and we deserved to lose," Reus told Sky. "It's been harder of late because teams have been sitting deeper against us. We were already running into a brick wall when it was 0-0, and it was even more like that at 2-0 down."

Coach Lucien Favre attempted to force the issue by bringing on Jadon Sancho and Paco Alcacer in the second half, but Alcacer's 81st-minute header was too little too late for Dortmund.

In Moenchengladbach, Hazard missed a penalty in the first half but led his team to victory after the break as Gladbach maintained their perfect home record. After surviving an early scare at one end, Gladbach wasted two superb chances at the other shortly before half-time. On 39 minutes, Hazard's cross picked out



DUSSELDORF: Dortmund's US midfielder Christian Pulisic (C), Fortuna Duesseldorf's Austrian midfielder Kevin Stoeger (L) and Fortuna Duesseldorf's German midfielder Oliver Fink vie for the ball during the German first division Bundesliga football match Fortuna Duesseldorf vs Borussia Dortmund in Duesseldorf. —AFP

Denis Zakaria a few metres in front of goal, only for the Swiss to fire his header straight at Tim Leibold on the line.

Hazard himself was left blushing moments later, after Gladbach were awarded a penalty for a foul on Florian Neuhaus. The Belgian attempted to chip his spot-kick down the middle, and watched on aghast as it floated over the bar.

His redemption came immediately after the break, as Gladbach counter-attacked and Hazard slotted in Ibrahima Traore's low cross at the far post. Four minutes from time, the home side broke away again and Alassane Plea secured the three points with a coolly taken finish to make it eight wins in eight home games

for Gladbach.

"We are looking forward to the game in Dortmund," said Gladbach goalkeeper Yann Sommer. "First against second, a game in a great stadium against a very good team, and we can end the year on a positive note."

Elsewhere, Wolfsburg's good run of form continued with a 2-0 win at home to Stuttgart, while Augsburg held Hertha Berlin to a 2-2 draw in the capital. Martin Hinteregger's powerful header gave Augsburg an early lead, but the Austrian was at fault for Hertha's equaliser. Davie Selke beat the Augsburg defender in the air before setting up scorer Mathew Leckie. Minutes later, the Berliners had turned the game on its head as Ondrej Duda fired them in front. — AFP

Late penalty gives Caen Ligue 1 win, PSG progress in Cup

PARIS: Caen scored a stoppage-time penalty to beat Toulouse 2-1 in a Ligue 1 relegation battle on Tuesday, while League Cup holders Paris St Germain won their opening tie to reach the last eight.

Faycal Fajr coolly slotted home Caen's winning penalty in the ninth minute of added time after the referee gave the spot kick with the help of the Video Assistant Referee (VAR).

Saif-Eddine Khaoui had put the home side ahead after 18 minutes but Toulouse captain Max Gradel equalised with a penalty a minute before halftime.

The win takes Caen up two spots to 16th on 17 points, a point and a place behind Toulouse. The Normandy club are also a point ahead of Amiens and Dijon, four in front of AS Monaco and seven clear of bottom side Guingamp with all four having a game in hand.

League leaders Paris St-Germain were on League Cup duty as they opened their campaign with Edinson Cavani and substitute Moussa Diaby scoring either side of Joseph-Romeric Lopy's equaliser for second-tier Orleans to record a 2-1 last-16 win.

Record eight-time winners PSG have claimed the League Cup every year since 2014 and Tuesday's hard-fought win extended their unbeaten run in the competition to 21 games as they bid for an unprecedented sixth title in a row. —Reuters

25 Hart and Gordon win debuts as
Flyers edge Detroit Red Wings



26 Rain, epic stand save Sri
Lanka in New Zealand Test

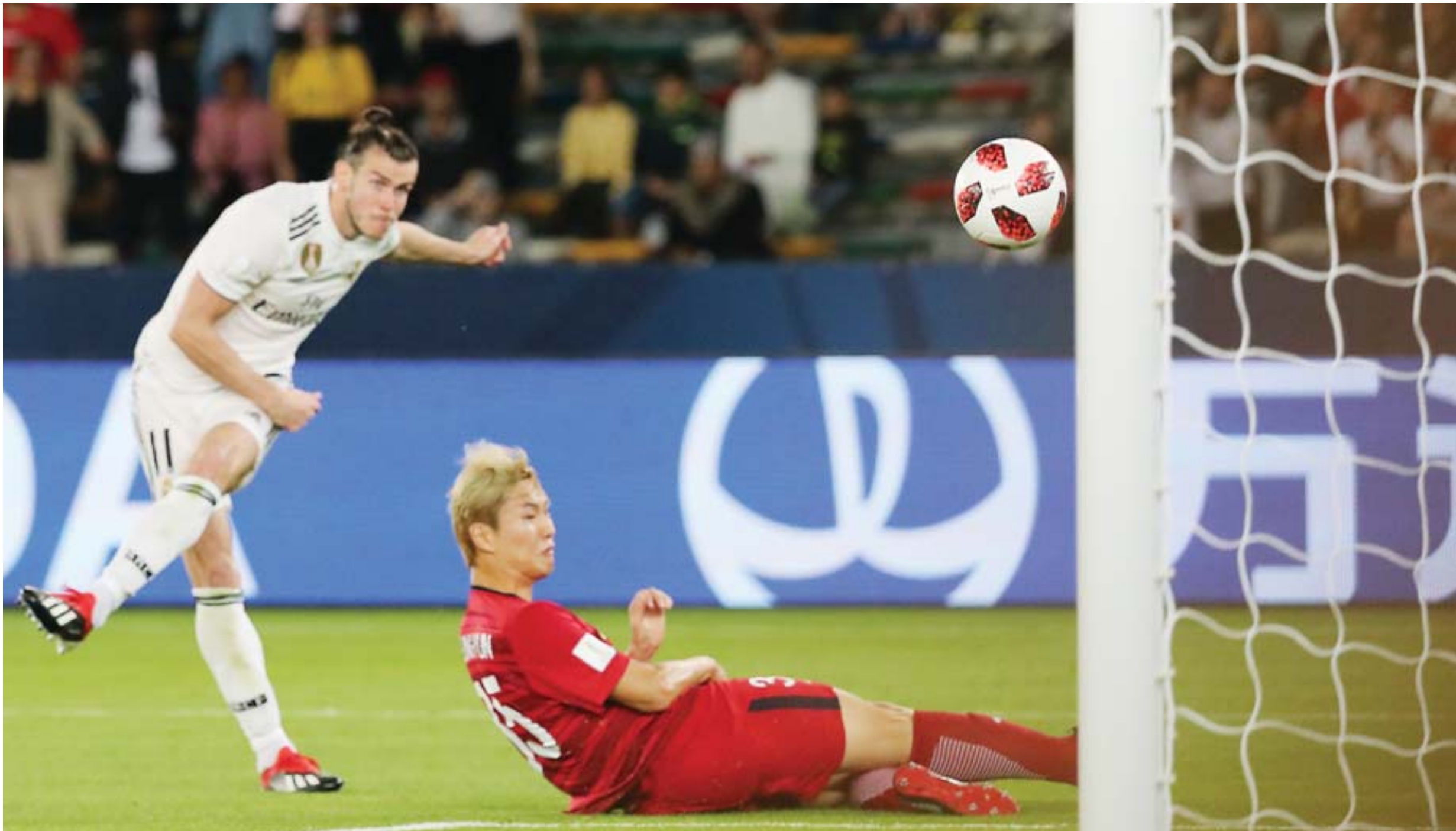


27 Solskjaer handed caretaker
manager role by Man Utd



Bale fires Real into Club WCup final

Hat-trick hero Gareth now has 10 goals in 21 games



ABU DHABI: Real Madrid's Welsh forward Gareth Bale (L) shoots to score during the semi final football match of the FIFA Club World Cup 2018 tournament between Japan's Kashima Antlers and Spain's Real Madrid at the Zayed Sports City Stadium in Abu Dhabi, the capital of the United Arab Emirates, yesterday. — AFP

ABU DHABI: Gareth Bale hit an 11-minute hat-trick yesterday as Real Madrid strolled into the Club World Cup final by beating Kashima Antlers 3-1 in Abu Dhabi. Bale scored in the 44th, 53rd and 55th minutes at the Zayed Sports City Stadium to put Madrid within touching distance of a record fourth success in this competition, and their third triumph in a row.

Real are currently tied with their La Liga rivals Barcelona, having each won it three times before, but it would be a major surprise if the European champions were not hoisting the trophy again on Saturday, when

they face hosts Al Ain in the final.

Bale had missed the 1-0 victory over Rayo Vallecano last weekend with an ankle problem but he was in irresistible form, albeit against limited opposition. The Welshman joins Lionel Messi and Cristiano Ronaldo as the only player to score in three separate Club World Cup tournaments while his treble, coming either side of half-time, is the fastest in the history of the competition.

Kashima Antlers, from Japan's J1 League, qualified after winning the Asian Champions League last month but, despite a lively start and a late consolation from Shoma Doi,

they were clearly second best. Bale now has 10 goals in 21 games for Real Madrid this season while victory will also come as a relief to coach Santiago Solari. A handful of underwhelming performances had been badly timed given the sacking of Jose Mourinho by Manchester United, with speculation linking the Portuguese with a return to the club never far away.

Madrid were still sleeping during the opening 10 minutes and Antlers should have led, as Serginho's shot was tipped wide by Thibaut Courtois before Gen Shoji failed to connect with a free header three yards out.

They soon found their rhythm, however, with Karim Benzema twice shooting straight at the goalkeeper while Bale had an effort blocked after nipping between the Antlers central defenders.

Madrid's front two were tying Antlers in knots and two minutes before half-time, Bale struck. A neat one-two with Marcelo on the edge of the area set him in behind and Bale guided the bouncing ball into the far corner.

Benzema had a shot cleared off the line at the start of the second half but Madrid did not have long to wait. Bale scored twice

in as many minutes as first, he capitalised on a poor backpass from Shuto Yamamoto and then drove into the far corner after Marcelo had, again, tied him up.

Three clear, Madrid were home and dry, and Bale departed on the hour, replaced by Marco Asensio while Casemiro, recovered from an ankle injury, came on to make his first appearance since November 12.

Antlers pulled one goal back with 13 minutes left as Doi drove in after Yasushi Endo headed down. Initially ruled offside, VAR showed Endo was level but a comeback never looked likely. —AFP

Nets overcome James, Lakers

NEW YORK: D'Angelo Russell collected 22 points and a career-high-tying 13 assists as the Brooklyn Nets overcame 36 points from LeBron James on Tuesday night and held on for a 115-110 victory over the Los Angeles Lakers in New York. Facing his former team for the third time since being acquired by Brooklyn on draft night in 2017, Russell posted his second double-double of the season, hitting 9 of 21 shots, including a clutch 3-pointer from the top of the key over Kyle Kuzma with 22 seconds left to put Brooklyn ahead 113-107.

Joe Harris added 19 points, reserve Spencer Dinwiddie contributed 18 and Hollis-Jefferson finished with 17 as the Nets extended their winning streak to six games. James nearly posted his third triple-double as a Laker, finishing with 13 rebounds to go along with eight assists. Lonzo Ball hit five 3-pointers and contributed 23 points. Kyle Kuzma

contributed 22 points and 11 rebounds as the Lakers lost for the third time in four games.

CAVALIERS 92, PACERS 91

Larry Nance Jr. tipped in a missed shot by Rodney Hood at the buzzer as Cleveland defeated Indiana in Indianapolis. Indiana had a chance to ice the game, but Victor Oladipo missed three consecutive free throws to give Cleveland the opportunity to win only its eighth game of the season. The Pacers had their seven-game win streak snapped, while the Cavaliers ended a two-game skid. Nance, starting in place of the injured Tristan Thompson, finished with 15 points and 16 rebounds. Hood scored 17. Domantas Sabonis scored 17 points to lead six Indiana players in double figures. Oladipo struggled to score 12 points on 4-of-15 shooting from the field.

NUGGETS 126, MAVERICKS 118

Jamal Murray had 22 points, including a big 3-pointer late, and also added a career-high 15 assists as host Denver turned back Dallas. Nikola Jokic scored a game-high 32 points and also had 16 rebounds to help Denver sweep a four-game homestand and

stay atop the Western Conference standings. Trey Lyles and Monte Morris scored 16 points each off the bench for the Nuggets. Denver has won 11 of its past 13, and its 21-9 record ties the best start in franchise history. Harrison Barnes tied a season high with 30 points, and rookie sensation Luka Doncic had 23 points and 12 assists for the Mavericks, who have lost three straight.

HAWKS 118, WIZARDS 110

Jeremy Lin scored 10 of his 16 points during a 22-9 fourth-quarter spurt that allowed host Atlanta to defeat Washington and end a three-game losing streak. Lin was one of seven players who scored in double figures for Atlanta. He shot 6-for-12 from the field with four assists and three rebounds. John Collins had a double-double for the seventh time in eight games with 20 points and 13 rebounds. Trae Young scored 19 points and handed out four assists. The Wizards, who have lost five of their past six, got 29 points from Bradley Beal, who was 11-for-17 from the floor and added 10 rebounds. Trevor Ariza had 19 points and eight rebounds in his Washington debut. —Reuters



NEW YORK: LeBron James #23 of the Los Angeles Lakers shoots the ball against the Brooklyn Nets on December 18, 2018 at Barclays Center in Brooklyn . — AFP