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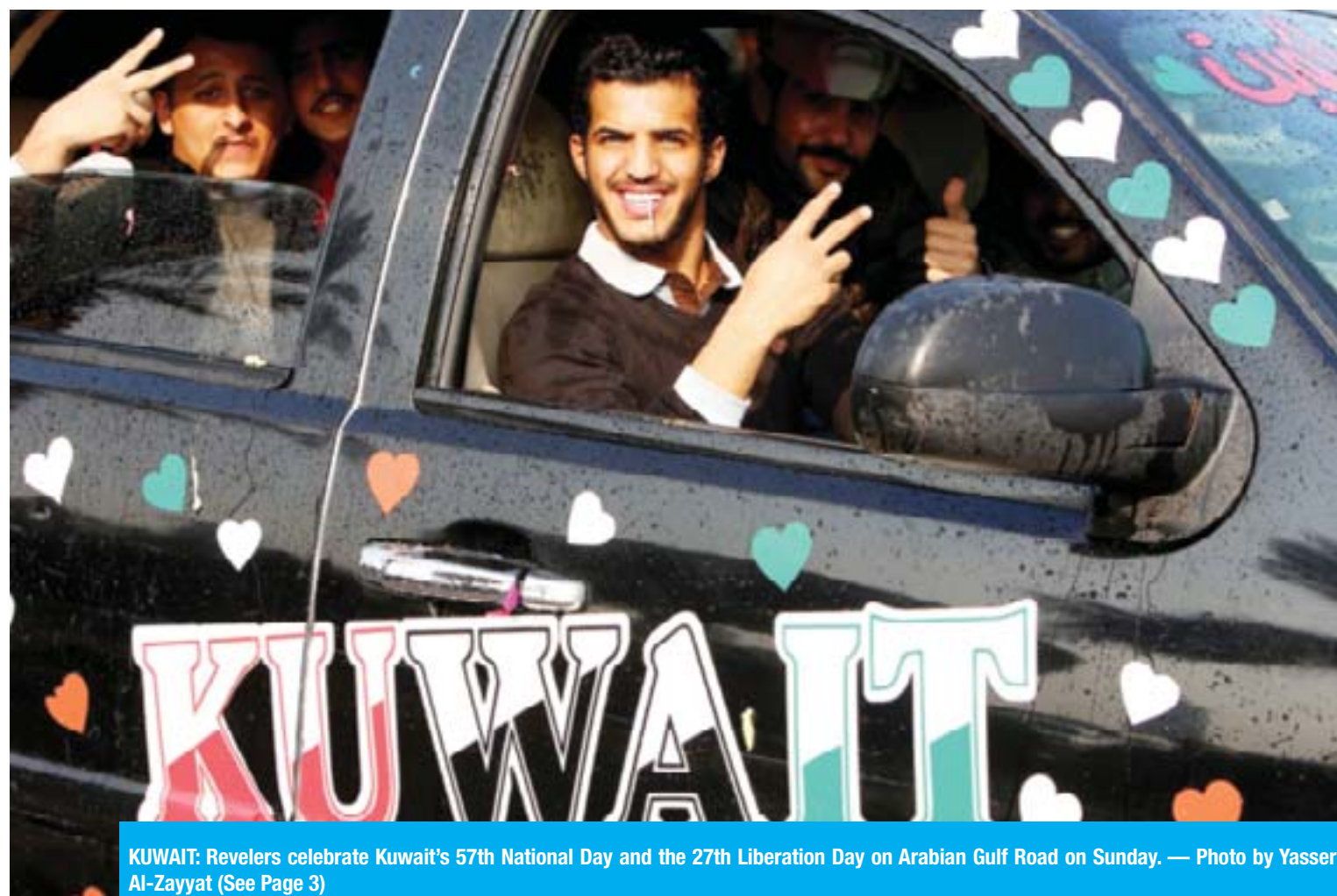


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Amir congratulates citizens, residents on national days

Sheikh Sabah calls for unity, hopes for Syria peace, thanks local bodies



KUWAIT: Revelers celebrate Kuwait's 57th National Day and the 27th Liberation Day on Arabian Gulf Road on Sunday. — Photo by Yasser Al-Zayyat (See Page 3)

KUWAIT: HH the Amir Sheikh Sabah Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah yesterday congratulated the Kuwaiti people and residents on the country's 57th National Day and 27th Liberation Day. The Amir urged both to work harder to maintain Kuwait's security and national unity, dedicating efforts and energies to carrying on the path of development and renaissance.

Meanwhile, Sheikh Sabah hoped the UN Security Council's recently-adopted resolution 2401 on the humanitarian conditions in Syria would usher in a new phase toward realizing peace, security and stability in the country. HH the Amir highly appreciated the overwhelming feelings displayed by citizens and residents during the festivities held to mark the dear national occasions well-organized nationwide by various official and private bodies.

They have formed a "national epic" reflecting loyalty to the nation and crystallizing a "cohesive one Kuwaiti family". The Amir highlighted the great efforts exerted by the ministries of interior and defense and the National Guard to secure a safe atmosphere for the celebrations. Thanks were also extended to official bodies that made arrangements for marking the occasions, topped with the national committee on national celebrations and the ministries of information, health, and education, together with the Kuwait Fire Service Directorate and the Municipality. They all worked har-



HH the Amir Sheikh Sabah Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah.

moniously together and displayed Kuwait's civilized image.

HH Sheikh Sabah recalled Kuwait's martyrs who sacrificed their lives to defend the nation over the years. The Amir greeted leaders of the GCC member states for their countries' participation in Kuwait's national days, both on the official and the popular levels. He stressed the deep-rooted bond binding the bloc's peoples together. Sheikh Sabah thanked leaders of the Arab and friendly countries for sharing with Kuwait its national celebrations. HH the Amir prayed to Almighty Allah to protect Kuwait and bless it with perpetual security, safety and prosperity. — KUNA

News in brief

Health fees being reassessed

KUWAIT: Health Minister Sheikh Dr Basel Al-Sabah reassessed that health fees for expats are being reassessed as they were imposed based upon a government proposal not a parliamentary one. Commenting on a study conducted by the health ministry to determine the pros and cons of the new fee regime, Sheikh Basel said a special committee had been formed to compare prices between public and private sector healthcare facilities. The minister added that the new fees will be reassessed according to feedback from various hospitals and polyclinics. — A Saleh

Suspect to be tried in Lebanon

KUWAIT: Detained Lebanese suspect Nader Assaf - who along with his Syrian wife Mona is accused of killing their Filipina maid and stuffing her body in a freezer before fleeing Kuwait - is going to be prosecuted in Lebanon. After he was arrested on Friday, Assaf told detectives that he had been hiding in Syria since he left Kuwait on Nov 7, 2016. Kuwaiti security sources said if Assaf is proven guilty, a Kuwaiti court order has to be sent to Lebanese security via Interpol before a Lebanese judge decides whether to hand him over to Kuwait. A Lebanese judicial source said an extradition agreement has been signed between Kuwait and Lebanon, but noted it does not apply to Lebanese citizens who commit crimes on foreign soil and return home. The source also refuted rumors that Assaf confessed to putting the maid in the freezer while she was still alive. — Al-Rai

Saudi envoy invites Hariri

BEIRUT: Lebanon's Prime Minister Saad Al-Hariri has received an invitation from a Saudi envoy to visit the kingdom and will go as soon as possible, his press office said yesterday. "Saudi Arabia's main goal is for Lebanon to be its own master, and it is keen on Lebanon's full independence," Hariri said after meeting Saudi envoy Nizar Al-Aloula in Beirut. Hariri's shock resignation in November, in a broadcast from Riyadh, had thrust Lebanon to the forefront of regional rivalry between Saudi Arabia and Iran. The premier returned to Beirut weeks later and rescinded his resignation. — Reuters

Kuwaiti aid reaches Ghouta as Russia calls for daily truce

DOUMA, Syria: Russia called a daily "humanitarian pause" in Syria's Eastern Ghouta, bowing to international pressure to halt the carnage in the rebel-held enclave where fresh strikes claimed more civilian lives yesterday. Meanwhile, Kuwait began delivering urgently needed aid to besieged civilians amid the bombardment. A UN Security Council resolution for a 30-day truce had remained a

dead letter since it was passed on Saturday, and Moscow, the Syrian regime's main backer, ended up setting its own terms to stem one of the worst episodes of bloodletting in Syria's seven-year-old conflict.

The United Nations, France and Germany had made pressing appeals for Russian President Vladimir Putin to demand its Damascus ally enforce a ceasefire, including in Eastern Ghouta where more than 500 civilians were killed last week. He eventually agreed to a five-hour daily window that would allow residents of the battered enclave east of the capital to come out of the underground shelters they have been covering in.

"On the instructions of the Russian president, with the goal of avoiding civilian casualties in Eastern Ghouta, from

Continued on Page 20

Saudi Arabia to auction detained billionaire's real estate and cars

DUBAI/KHOBAR: Saudi authorities are preparing to auction billions of dollars of real estate and cars belonging to billionaire Maan Al-Sanea and his company as they look to hasten an end to one of the kingdom's longest-running debt disputes. The planned sale is the latest signal that Saudi Arabia is serious about holding its elites to account. In an anti-corruption crackdown last November, authorities detained scores of senior officials on charges of alleged graft. Most have been released after being exonerated or agreeing to give the state money, assets or real estate.

The Sanea case is separate from the main anti-graft campaign. The businessman - in 2007 he was ranked by Forbes as one of the world's 100 richest people - was detained by authorities late last year for unpaid debt dating back to 2009 when his company, Saad Group, defaulted on debts. Creditors have spent the past nine years pursuing Saad, which is based in the city of Khobar in Saudi Arabia's Eastern Province, for debt that some estimate to be between 40 billion riyals (\$10.67 billion) and 60 billion riyals.

Etqaan Alliance, the consortium appointed by Saudi authorities to liquidate assets owned by Sanea and his company in an effort to repay creditors, plans to begin

selling the company's assets in Saudi Arabia, according to several sources familiar with the matter. The sales will happen in the coming weeks, the sources said. The liquidator has produced a slick video that it has posted on YouTube with the tagline "the sale everyone has been waiting for in Khobar" featuring some of the properties and land to be sold.

A brochure accompanying the sale includes a list of 20 plots of land owned by Saad Trading, part of Saad Group, and al-Sanea. The properties are mostly located in Khobar. The largest unit is a 484,407 sq m plot of land that includes buildings and a sewage water treatment plant. The brochure does not include valuations, but the sources said the real estate was valued at around 4.4 billion riyals, based on an official list of real estate provided to authorities.

A source at the ministry of justice confirmed to Reuters an auction would be launched this month to sell vehicles, equipment, a large quantity of building materials and some property before the Islamic fasting month of Ramadan, which starts in May. According to the sources who have seen the official list provided to authorities, Saad owns an estimated 3.5 bln riyals of real estate, while Sanea personally owns an estimated 6.8 bln riyals. Much of that is in Riyadh, Dammam and Khobar.

Reuters was unable to verify whether all of that real estate will be auctioned by Etqaan or the number of vehicles that will be sold. Saad owns 923 vehicles, including trucks, buses and cars, according to the sources who had seen the list provided to authorities, while Sanea has 26 vehicles, including a Rolls Royce, a Hummer, and Cadillac Concord. The sale does not include the 750-bed Saad Specialist Hospital in Khobar, which the government is in talks with private

Continued on Page 20



AL-SHIFUNIYAH, Syria: Syrian children receive treatment for a suspected chemical attack at a makeshift clinic in this rebel-held village in the Eastern Ghouta region on Sunday. — AFP

Dubai police say drowning caused Sridevi's death

MUMBAI: India yesterday mourned Bollywood superstar Sridevi Kapoor after her death in Dubai aged just 54, as police in the emirate said she drowned in her hotel bathtub. The body of Sridevi, one of the biggest names in Hindi cinema, had been due to be brought back to Mumbai yesterday by charter flight. It was not immediately clear however when Dubai authorities would release it. Hundreds of heartbroken fans gathered outside her Mumbai home hoping to catch a final glimpse of the star before her cremation, now likely to take place today at the earliest.



Sridevi

Initial reports had cited a heart attack as the cause of her death late Saturday at a hotel in the emirate, where she had been attending a nephew's wedding. "The death of Indian actress Sridevi occurred due to drowning in her hotel apartment's bathtub following loss of consciousness," Dubai police tweeted, citing an autopsy report. Police have now referred the case to the public prosecutor. — AFP (See Page 15)

Local

Saudi Crown Prince congratulates Kuwaiti Defense Minister on National Days

Kuwaiti forces in Saudi Arabia celebrate holidays



KUWAIT: A Kuwaiti car bearing the portraits of His Highness the Amir of Kuwait Sheikh Sabah Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah and Saudi King Salman bin Abdulaziz Al Saud, during a parade celebrating Kuwait's national days at the Arabian Gulf Road.



A reveler waves the Saudi flag during a cars' parade at the Arabian Gulf Road in celebration of Kuwait's National and Liberation Days.— Photos by Yasser Al-Zayyat

KUWAIT/RIYADH: Kuwait's First Deputy Prime Minister and Defense Minister Sheikh Nasser Sabah Al-Ahmad Al-Sabah received on Sunday congratulations from Saudi Crown Prince Mohammad bin Salman bin Abdulaziz Al Saud on the country's 57th National Day and the 27th Liberation Day.

This came during a telephone call from the Saudi prince to Sheikh Nasser Sabah Al-Ahmad, the Ministry's Directorate of Moral Guidance and Public Relations said a press statement. Prince Mohammad wished the State of Kuwait, and the Kuwaiti government and people further security and prosperity to achieve interests of the two sisterly countries, the statement noted.

Meanwhile, Sheikh Nasser expressed his thanks and appreciation to Prince Mohammad for his congratulations and good sentiments. Sheikh Nasser prayed to Allah Almighty to protect Saudi Arabia and its people under the leadership of King Salman bin Abdulaziz.

Saudi joins celebrations

The Kingdom of Saudi Arabia has joined the State of Kuwait in its celebrations of the 57th National Day and the 27th Liberation Day with several popular and official events and initiatives. On this occasion, the Saudi Ministry of Culture and Information held some events on Sunday in King Fahad

Cultural Centre that included a symposium and an art exhibition on the Kuwaiti-Saudi relations.

During the ceremony, Saudi and Kuwaiti popular bands made a number of performances and songs on the bilateral ties. In a wonderful image, some Saudi airports were decorated with the Kuwaiti flag and officials at the airports offered congratula-

Al-Jaber Al-Sabah alongside the picture of King Salman bin Abdulaziz at the stadium on Friday. Saudi TV channels allocated some programs to take part in the celebrations of the country's national days. They hosted some artists, media people and intellectuals from Kuwait and Saudi Arabia to speak about the relations between the two countries.

Forces celebrate holidays

Kuwait's armed force officers and personnel, currently stationed in the southern Jizan region of Saudi Arabia, extended their sincere congratulations to His Highness the Amir Sheikh Sabah Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah, His Highness the Crown Prince Sheikh Nawaf Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah, and the Kuwaiti people on national celebrations.

The forces expressed, in statements to Saudi Press Agency, their happiness, pleasure, and pride on the advent of such a precious anniversary, affirming their supportive stand by their Saudi and Arab counterparts in the Arab Coalition to restore legitimacy in Yemen and defend the Kingdom.

They also expressed their joy of the national festivities that represent significant marks in Kuwait's history, and through which the new generation of Kuwaitis reiterate their loyalty to their



Saudi joins Kuwait's celebrations

tions to Kuwaitis on this delightful occasion. In addition, Saudi Airways presented a 25-percent discount to all classes on February 25-26 on the country's national day festivals.

Some towers in Riyadh were adorned with the Kuwaiti flag in a manner which reflect the depth of relations between the two countries. During Al-Itihad and Al-Shabab match, Saudi soccer fans raised the Kuwaiti flag, and the picture of His Highness the Amir Sheikh Sabah Al-Ahmad



Saudi Crown Prince Mohammad bin Salman bin Abdulaziz Al Saud (left) and Kuwait's First Deputy Prime Minister and Defense Minister Sheikh Nasser Sabah Al-Ahmad Al-Sabah

country and support of their wise leadership. The Kuwaiti forces also assured their safety and good health to their families and relatives, and that they are commemorating their country's National days from their military posts in the Kingdom, praying to Allah Almighty to perpetuate the

grace of security and stability on Kuwait, and on Arab and Muslim nations. Kuwait is currently celebrating its 57th National Day, the 27th Liberation Day, and the 12th anniversary of His Highness the Amir Sheikh Sabah Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah's ascension to power.—KUNA



Kuwait's consulate in Jeddah celebrates the 57th National Day and 27th Liberation Day of Kuwait.



Kuwait's Ambassador to Australia Najeeb Al-Bader (left) participates in a reception held to celebrate his country's 57th National Day and 27th Liberation Day.

Embassies mark Kuwait's National Days

KUWAIT: The Kuwaiti embassies in Saudi Arabia and Australia, and the Consulate in western Saudi city of Jeddah, have marked Kuwait's 57th National Day, the Gulf country's 27th Liberation Day and 12th anniversary of His Highness Amir's ascendance to power.

In Riyadh, Kuwait's Ambassador to the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia Sheikh Thamer Jaber Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah held a reception at Tuwaiq Palace, in the Saudi capital's Diplomatic Quarter (DQ), themed "march of the Kuwaiti-Saudi charity."

The ceremony was attended by Governor of Riyadh region Prince Faisal bin Bandar bin Abdul Aziz Al Saud, princes, heads of Arab and foreign diplomatic missions, and leading political and media figures as well as intellectuals, besides many Kuwaitis in the country.

Sheikh Thamer congratulated His Highness the Amir Sheikh Sabah Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah, His Highness the Crown Prince Sheikh Nawaf Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah and the Kuwaiti people on the National Days. He recalled with the achievements by the "generation of independence" and Kuwait's martyrs.

He added that Kuwait has been blessed with sagacious leadership, conscious people, and security and stability, proceeding with steady steps on the path of development.

Sheikh Thamer highlighted the UN honoring of His Highness the Amir as a 'Humanitarian Leader.'

This has been the outcome of Kuwait's humanitarian work and initiatives extended around the globe. He said that Kuwait has been offering aid to Syrian people since the eruption of their crisis seven years ago, he said.

Kuwait also hosted the first, second and third International Pledging Humanitarian Conference for Syria, and co-chaired a fourth one held in London. In addition, the country has backed Iraq and Yemen, as well as offering aid to many world countries that were hit by conflicts or catastrophes, regardless of religious, political or ethnic considerations, he noted.

Meanwhile, the Riyadh Governor offered his congratulations to His Highness the Amir on the National Days. He stressed Kuwait's humanitarian initiatives around the globe. Sheikh Thamer and Prince Faisal toured an exhibition the embassy organized as part of the celebrations, with participation of several agencies from both countries.

A similar reception was held in the Kuwaiti Consulate in Jeddah, where the country's Permanent Representative to the Organization of Islamic Cooperation (OIC) Wael Al-Enzi welcomed guests who "shared beloved Kuwait and its honorable people their national celebrations." He recalled Saudi Arabia's stances in support of Kuwait and its people through history.

In Australia, a reception held by the Kuwaiti Ambassador Najeeb Al-Bader, was attended by a host of senior Australian officials, party members, MPs and Senators, together with businessmen, Arab and Islamic heads of missions, representatives of international organizations in the country.

Bader congratulated His Highness the Amir, His



RIYADH: Kuwait's Ambassador to Saudi Arabia Sheikh Thamer Jaber Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah is seen with Governor of Riyadh region Prince Faisal bin Bandar bin Abdul Aziz Al Saud.—KUNA

Highness the Crown Prince and the Kuwaiti people on the national occasions. He reiterated the deep-rooted ties with Australia, recalling the country's contribution to liberation from the Iraqi invasion of 1990.

In addition, the envoy reviewed the trade partnership

between the two nations, saying that Kuwait is a major investor in Australia, with investments totaling \$15 billion. Australia is a favorable destination for the Kuwaiti tourists, he said noting that 5,000 Kuwaitis visited the country in 2017.—KUNA

Local

Celebrators converge on Arabian Gulf Road to mark national festivals

Lt Gen Dowsary commends security personnel's effort



KUWAIT: The Arabian Gulf Road hosted parades on Sunday and Monday in celebration of Kuwait's National Day and Liberation Day anniversaries. — Photos by Yasser Al-Zayyat and Joseph Shagra

KUWAIT: People flocked en masse to the Arabian Gulf Road during the past two days to mark Kuwait's national and liberations days.

Meanwhile, Undersecretary of the Ministry of Interior Lt Gen Mahmoud Al-Dowsary said Sunday the security personnel helped show the civilized nature of Kuwait during the

national day celebrations. The senior security official has made an inspection tour of all security checkpoints along the Arabian Gulf Road and the sites of celebrations in the northern and southern parts of the country. Lt Gen Dowsary also made a maritime trip along the country's coastline, according to a press

release issued by the Ministry's General Department of Public Relations and Security Media. During the trip, he applauded the security personnel for their contribution to the organization of the festivities in an orderly, decent and civilized way. He also commended the effective cooperation and coordination

among the various security bodies that helped offer reassurance to the holidaymakers, according to the statement.

Lt Gen Dowsary conveyed to the security personnel the greetings of Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Interior Sheikh Khaled Al-Jarrah Al-Sabah on the occasion of the

national days. The inspection tour aimed to make sure of the orderly implementation of the security plan for the celebration of Kuwait's 57th National Day, the 27th Liberation Day and the 12th anniversary of the assumption of office by His Highness the Amir Sheikh Sabah Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah. — KUNA



Local

Sabah Al-Ahmad Heritage Village offers rare escape from the city

Park opens in winter season; closes March 1st



KUWAIT: Flags decorate the Sabah Al-Ahmad Heritage Village in celebration of Kuwait's National and Liberation Days. —Photos by Nawara Fattahova



Um Turki weaves traditional Sadu at her booth.

By Nawara Fattahova

KUWAIT: If you are bored of the city and do not mind driving for 100 km, then you should visit the Sabah Al-Ahmad Heritage Village located in Salmi north of the country. This village only operates during the winter season as it mostly hosts outdoor activities. It is open daily from 8:00 am to 10:00 pm, while Thursday, March 1st marks the last day of this season.

To attract more visitors who otherwise would be deterred by the long travel distance, the village's administration set reasonable prices for visitors to enjoy its activities. In addition, the administration holds daily raffle draws for a brand new car or a motorcycle. Entrance is free of charge while each visitor receives a coupon for the draw.



Dozens of activities at reasonable prices

A train located just after the main entrance takes visitors on a tour around the whole village. It charges 500

Fils for each passenger. There is an artificial lake in the middle of the village, which is surrounded by tables and chairs. Then at the end of the village, there are hotel rooms with tents that can be rented either for the day or overnight stay.

Dozens of restaurants and cafes are available at the resort. The visitor does not have to worry about where or what to eat as a wide variety of options are available. Furthermore, there are various shops selling toys for kids. In addition, there is a section for local handicrafts and different products such as perfumes, traditional costumes and foods.

The village includes a museum illustrating different scenes of old Kuwait such as rooms of old Kuwaiti houses, some handicrafts, and some popular products in old Kuwait. It also includes photos of the past.

An old Bedouin lady was standing in one booth, weaving traditional Sadu and selling her products. Um Turki said she came daily to the village to display her handmade products. She makes some of her products at home, and each piece takes several days or even weeks to be finished.

For kids, there are many other attractions. They can have a camel, horse, or donkey ride at the village, or enjoy dozens of outdoor games including slides, trampolines and others. To add more options for visitors, there is an Italian circus outside the village which presents three shows daily featuring different animals and acrobatic shows. The asphalt parking lot has a capacity of over 500 vehicles. And on the opposite side of it, there are huge empty spaces for parking, so finding a place to park should not be a problem for visitors.

Legalese

National and Liberation days



By Attorney Fajer Ahmed

I hope my readers enjoyed the long four-day weekend in Kuwait as we celebrated the National and Liberation days. It is a blessing to be able to celebrate Kuwait and all the accomplishments of the country and the people of Kuwait. It is also a great time to look back and contemplate on our weaknesses and try to improve. We are blessed to have access to education, medical care, housing, subsidized food and essentials, and therefore we should use those blessings and that feeling of stability to be able to move the country forward with our work, to be supportive of other cultures, to be creative, to create a nurturing environment and a society that welcomes everyone.

I know there has been a lot of discussions in Kuwait, especially with the Philippine's recent labor ban, which might be unfortunate in a sense, but is an opportunity for us to discuss other violations that happen so that we can prevent them in the future. I have received a certain question repeatedly in the past two days, and therefore I have decided to dedicate today's column to answer it.

Not Kuwaiti

Question: I was working on Sunday the 25th and Monday the 26th of February, and I requested overtime before my boss scheduled me in for the holidays, but my boss said that since I am not Kuwaiti I am not entitled to any off days. Is this true? Is this holiday exclusive for Kuwaitis?

Fajer: No it is not true, the rights under the Kuwaiti labor law are for all employees working in the private sector; the only right under the law that can be interpreted not benefiting all employees is the Hajj time off or similar rights that are only for Muslims. Another example would be that mourning time for Muslim widowers is four months and 10 days, while it is 21 days for non-Muslims.

As for National and Liberation days, it is a national holiday for everyone and as per article 68 of Kuwait's labor law, you should be receiving double your daily wage, plus an additional day off to compensate.

Article 68 stipulate the following:

"The fully-paid official holidays are as follows:

- a-Islamic New Year: 1 day
- b-Isra' and Mi'raj day: 1 day
- c-Eid Al-Fitr: 3 days
- d-Waqfat Arafat: 1 day
- e-Eid Al-Adha: 3 days
- f- Prophet's Birthday (Al-Mawlid Al-Nabawi): 1 day
- g-National Day: 1 day
- h-Gregorian New Year: 1 day

In the event where the worker is required to work during any of the above mentioned holidays, he shall be entitled to a double remuneration and an additional day off."

I hope the above helped. If you have a concern, please email us at info@ftl-legal.com



A train taking visitors on a tour around the village.



An artificial lake located in the middle of the village.



People are seen inside the Sabah Al-Ahmad Heritage Village.



A booth decorated as a traditional shop in Kuwait featured at the village.

Philippine Embassy celebrates Kuwait's national days

KUWAIT: Philippine Ambassador to Kuwait Renato Villa sent the following message on the occasion of the 57th National Day and 27th Anniversary of the Liberation Day of Kuwait:

"I convey my heartfelt greetings of peace and continuous prosperity to the State of Kuwait and its people on the occasion of the 57th National Day and the 27th Anniversary of the Liberation of the State of Kuwait. We cannot deny that in the past few days, the good and friendly relations between the Philippines and Kuwait have been strained due to incidents involving Filipino workers in the country. Despite these incidents, our relations with Kuwait remain as strong as both sides exert their best effort and undertakes measures to maintain and enhance relations.

"Kuwait has proven to be a friend in need to the Philippines, always ready to extend humanitarian aid to Filipinos. In November 2013, His Highness Sheikh Sabah Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah, the Amir of Kuwait,

donated \$10 million worth of emergency aid to the Philippines through the Kuwait Red Crescent Society (KRCS) for the victims of typhoon Yolanda in the Philippines' Western Visayas region, whose houses were totally devastated and destroyed. The KRCS oversaw the construction of 297 housing units for the Yolanda victims who lost their homes in Samar. The housing project was completed and inaugurated in January 2018. KRCS is keen to provide more assistance by building some 500 more housing units for the Yolanda victims.

"The Philippines sided with Kuwait during the 1990-1991 Iraqi invasion and occupation offering political support and joining the UN Coalition. The Philippines sent some 200 military medical personnel to assist coalition forces in the liberation of Kuwait.

"We consider the National Day of Kuwait and Anniversary of its Liberation as fortuitous events as it coincides with the Philippines' celebration of the Anniversary of the EDSA Revolution, which freed the Philippines from tyranny and dictatorship. Both countries thus share the abiding love for freedom, having known the pain of losing it and the tremendous struggle necessary to regain it.

On this occasion, I extend my best wishes for Kuwait's continued stability, peace and progress as well as the continuous good health of the Amir, His Highness Sheikh Sabah Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah."

Author urges families to encourage children to read

MUSCAT: Kuwaiti author Heba Mandani yesterday urged Arab families to encourage their children to read books. In remarks on the sidelines of the 23rd Muscat International Book Fair, Mandani said that improving the cultural and intellectual aspects of children is a social responsibility, as everybody should contribute effectively in this matter. Mandani participated in an interactive reading session with the children in "book friends" pavilion.

Praising the large variety of fair's cultural activities for children, including the 'scientific village', Mandani said the village introduces children with the latest technological and

modern scientific developments. She also endorsed the remarkable efforts exerted by Oman in encouraging Arab children books' authors, as well as welcoming them in such cultural venues to interact with their audience of young readers.

The children's paper books became "rarely" purchased and read, as smart tablets invaded the children's lives; a technology that deprived them from the joy of touching and smelling paper books, as well as listening to bedtime stories from their parents, Mandani noted. In this vein, she pointed out that children's books authors are facing the dilemma of attracting children to paper books.

The 23rd Muscat International Book Fair kicked off last Thursday and will last until March 3, with the participation of 783 publishing houses, exposing around half a million books. The participating countries are namely: Kuwait, Egypt, UAE, Lebanon, Jordan, Saudi Arabia, Bahrain, Qatar, Tunisia, Algeria, Morocco, Turkey, Iran, Japan, Pakistan, Germany, Italy, Canada, and US. —KUNA



MUSCAT: Kuwaiti author Heba Mandani participates in the 23rd Muscat International Book Fair. —KUNA

Local

Celebrating the national anniversaries, Al-Safat decorates HQ with largest Amir's photo in the world

Amir's reign has witnessed economic development, cultural openness: Al-Terkait

KUWAIT: On the occasion of celebrating Kuwait's national and liberation anniversaries, Al-Safat Investment Company decorated the front facade of its headquarters' building with the world's largest poster of HH the Amir Sheikh Sabah Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah. A press release issued by Safat said that the poster's artistic work and design took over two weeks of constant work, starting with the idea and followed by designing, execution and installation. The poster covers 936 square meters of the frontage of Safat Tower in Hawally, which overlooks three main roads: Fahaheel, Cairo and Beirut.



Al-Safat Investment Company's Chairman Abdullah Hamad Al-Terkait

Chairman Abdullah Hamad Al-Terkait said raising HH the Amir's photo on the tower represents the group's appreciation of his role in various economic, cultural and political arenas. Terkait expressed appreciation for the constant development Kuwait has witnessed under HH the Amir and for his vision on achieving economic development and moving towards turning Kuwait into a financial and economic hub.

Terkait highlighted that a lot of development of Kuwait's economic structure had taken place hand in hand with targeted development in the form of establishing the Capital Markets Authority to attract more investments, establishing the Kuwait Direct Investment Promotion Authority to attract more funds and economic expertise and establishing the SME Fund, in addition to privatizing the Kuwait Stock Exchange and establishing the Bursa Kuwait company.

In terms of culture, Terkait said Kuwait has witnessed unprecedented cultural openness with full support from HH the Amir and through building various cultural edifices such as AlShaheed Park, Jaber Al-Ahmad Cultural Center and Abdullah Al-Salem Cultural Center - an international museum displaying scientific achievements and various nations' histories.

Politically speaking, Terkait said HH the Amir played a significant role in containing regional challenges, thanks to his wise leadership and emphasis on GCC solidarity. He also reviewed a number of Kuwait's bright stances such as hosting an international conference of donors for Syria, all the way to the recently-held Iraq recon-



A poster of HH the Amir Sheikh Sabah Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah decorates the front facade of Al-Safat Investment Company headquarters' building.

struction conference. "This makes him a real Amir of humanity and a foreign policy sage," he said.

Terkait added the poster will be assessed by the Guinness World Records as the largest in the world to link it to Kuwait, which has witnessed various positive developments guided by HH the Amir. Terkait said as a Kuwaiti firm, Al-Safat

Investment Company is keen on taking part in national anniversaries through a number of activities.

Terkait also noted that Al-Safat is a leading company investing according to Islamic sharia, established in 1983. He added Al-Safat has wide-ranging investments and interests in real-estate, finance and other sectors; in addition, it offers a

diverse set of financial and consultancy services that support shareholders' aims and goals including portfolio management, special wealth and asset management and funding and market studies. He noted that Al-Safat focuses on hiring citizens within a comprehensive strategy that will positively affect the company's performance and protect shareholders' rights.

MPs to amend 'bad reputation' laws: Damkhi

By A Saleh

KUWAIT: MP Adel Al-Damkhi said the current parliament had succeeded in monitoring and is now eyeing to legislation through amending what he described as 'laws with a bad reputation' that had been passed by the previous parliament. Commenting on the performance of the current parliament, Damkhi stressed that it will focus on qualitative legislation and amending laws such as



MP Adel Al-Damkhi

those of minors, DNA, Human Rights Divan, precautionary detention and public tenders. He added that other laws such as the e-media law are against freedom of expression.

Construction worker dies in fall

By Hanan Al-Saadoun

KUWAIT: A construction worker died

after he fell at a construction site in Hawally yesterday. Firemen had rushed to the scene in response to an emergency call reporting a worker going missing after falling from a high place. They searched the place and found the Asian worker lying motionless on the ground, and paramedics pronounced him dead on the scene. A case was filed and further investigations are in progress.



KUWAIT: A construction site where a worker was pronounced dead after a fall yesterday.

Kuwait ready to advocate moderation

CAIRO: A Kuwaiti official said yesterday that his country is willing to contribute to any efforts to promote moderation, a virtue embedded in Islamic teachings. The undersecretary of Kuwait's Ministry of Awqaf and Islamic Affairs Fareed Amadi's remarks came in a speech he delivered at the 28th International Conference of the High Council for Islamic Affairs, sponsored by Egyptian President Abdelattah Al-Sisi. "Time is ripe to take decisive action on false and

misguided ideologies that have caused nothing but bloodshed," Amadi, who heads Kuwait's delegation to the meeting, pointed out.

He spoke of a recent conference hosted by Kuwait's Awqaf and Islamic Affairs Ministry, in which participants outlined goals and plans to keep radicalization at bay. On the Egypt-hosted conference, the Kuwaiti official said he hoped it proves successful in putting an end to the scourge of terrorism, "which is unlike any other menace humanity has had to deal with." He lamented how radical ideologies have been the root cause of violent crimes that sullied the image of the Islamic faith, saying more cooperation is needed to crush these sordid beliefs. Amadi went on to thank Egyptian officials for organizing the conference. —KUNA

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'Emperor Xi'? China gambles on return to indefinite rule

Old tensions clash with grand ambition in new Indian city

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PARKLAND, Florida: Students visit Marjory Stoneman Douglas High School on Sunday. —AFP

After shooting, students return to school

Calls for swift action to address gun violence

MIAMI: Students and teachers returned Sunday to a Florida school for the first time since 17 people were shot dead there, consoling each other even as they called for swift action to address gun violence. "Imagine (being) in a plane crash and then having to get on the same plane every day and fly somewhere else - it's never going to be the same," David Hogg, a survivor of the February 14 shooting at a Parkland, Florida high school, told ABC television's "This Week."

The school held a voluntary "orientation" Sunday, with teachers and staff due back starting yesterday and classes resuming on Wednesday - a prospect described as "daunting" and "scary," but which is also a step for survivors to move forward after the attack. One teacher who had already been back told NPR radio that the shock of returning to a classroom left exactly as it had been during the carnage - notebooks still on desks, the calendar still set to Feb 14 - made her so physically ill she had to leave.

But Cameron Kasky, a student who survived the slaughter, tweeted a picture of people on campus, saying: "It is GOOD TO BE HOME." "I have all my friends here with me and it just makes me feel like I'm not alone in this situation," student Michelle Dittmeier, who attended the orientation, told ABC.

Marjory Stoneman Douglas High School also received support from alumni, with previous graduating classes making banners to decorate the school, WSVN TV news

reported. In nearby Fort Lauderdale Sunday night, religious leaders gathered for an inter-faith vigil that left 17 chairs empty in memory of the victims, WSVN reported, after protesters gathered outside the Kalashnikov USA gun manufacturer in neighboring Pompano Beach. "Gun reform now!" said one of the protesters' signs, while another called for the "death factory" to be shut.

With ardent demands by students like Hogg for action, President Donald Trump has said he is open to raising the minimum age for gun purchases and to banning so-called bump stocks, which can effectively convert semi-automatic weapons into automatic firearms, but which were not used in the Parkland killings. Speaking at the Governors' Ball ahead of meetings with the top officials from all 50 states on Monday, Trump said school safety is a top priority: "I think we'll make that first on our list."



Public support surging for stricter gun laws: Poll

'Red flag' law
A new CNN poll, conducted a week after the Florida

shooting, shows surging public support for stricter gun laws - surpassing levels seen even after other horrific shootings in recent years - and for a ban on powerful semi-automatic weapons like the AR-15 used in Parkland. Overall, 70 percent of those surveyed said they supported

stricter gun laws, up from 52 percent in October, and 57 percent favored a ban on semi-automatic arms, an increase from 49 percent. The United States has more than 30,000 gun-related deaths annually.

Florida Governor Rick Scott has laid out a plan to station a police officer at every public school in the state, raise the legal age for gun purchases from 18 to 21 and pass a "red flag" law for authorities to more easily remove guns from the mentally ill or people with violent histories. The age change and "red flag" law are staunchly opposed by the influential National Rifle Association, of which Scott is a member. Scott, who holds the NRA's highest rating of A+, noted on "Fox News Sunday" that "there will be some that disagree. But... I

want my state to be safe." Dana Loesch, an NRA spokeswoman, told ABC that her organization opposes most of the proposed gun measures. Instead, she placed blame on politicians, for their inaction, and on law enforcement - specifically the Broward County Sheriff's Office, which she said had ample warning of the violent tendencies of Nikolas Cruz, 19, who is charged in the killings. She accused the sheriff's office of "abdication of duty" for not arresting Cruz sooner.

'A terrible idea'

In an often-contentious interview on CNN, Sheriff Scott Israel strongly defended his officers' work. Of the 23 calls to his department about Cruz's erratic or threatening behavior, nearly all were minor and had been handled appropriately, and a few others were being investigated, he said. Trump has also proposed arming some teachers, a step many educators passionately oppose. Randi Weingarten, president of the American Federation of Teachers, told C-Span in an interview that "it's a terrible idea, period, full stop." Children, parents and teachers, she said, "want schools to be safe sanctuaries for teaching and learning, not armed fortresses." Delaney Tarr, another young survivor of the Florida shooting, said she was girding herself as best she could to return to school. "It's daunting... (and) scary because I don't know if I'm going to be safe there," she told Fox. "But I know that I have to." —AFP

Iran's shift shows patience running out with the West

TEHRAN: Iran's supreme leader has signaled a decisive shift in favor of relations with China and Russia, indicating that patience is running out with efforts to improve ties with the West. One of the most popular slogans during the 1979 revolution was "Neither East nor West", a defiant vow that Iran would no longer favor either of the world's major forces at the time - American-style capitalism or Soviet Communism. It was therefore striking to hear its current leader, Ayatollah Ali Khamenei, declare on February 19 that: "In foreign policy, the top priorities for us today include preferring East to West."

Analysts say this does not change the basic idea that Iran refuses to fall under the sway of outside powers. But it does suggest that the latest attempt at détente with the United States - represented by the 2015 nuclear deal in which it agreed to curb its nuclear program in exchange for a lifting of sanctions - is running out of steam.

"Khamenei has repeatedly outlined that the 2015 nuclear deal was a test to see if negotiations with the West could yield positive results for Iran," said Ellie Geranmayeh, of the European Council on Foreign Relations. "The leadership perceives the US as acting in bad faith on the deal. Khamenei's statement signals a green light for the Iranian system to focus greater diplomatic effort on deepening ties with China and Russia," she said.

Khamenei's comments come at a critical moment, with US President Donald Trump threatening to tear up the deal and reimpose sanctions unless Iran agrees to rein in its missile program and "destabilizing activities" in the Middle East. Even before Trump, Iran felt Washington was violating its side of the bargain as it became clear

that remaining US sanctions would still hamper banking ties and foreign investments, even blocking Iranian tech start-ups from sharing their products on app stores.

Tehran argues this violates a clause stating the US must "refrain from any policy specifically intended to directly and adversely affect the normalization of trade and economic relations with Iran". "From day one, the US, the Obama administration, started violating both the letter and the spirit of the agreement," said Mohammad Marandi, a political analyst at the University of Tehran. He said Khamenei's latest statement recognised the simple fact that relations with eastern countries were much stronger, particularly since Iran and Russia allied over the Syrian war. "It's a very different world now. Iran's relationship with Russia and China and an increasing number of Asian countries is much better than with the West because they treat us much better," he said. "We are partners with Russia in Syria. We are not subordinate."

'A pragmatic approach'

Anger over foreign interference was a key driver of the 1979 revolution after more than a century of intrigues, coups and resource exploitation by the United States, Britain and Russia. But despite being depicted by critics as dogmatic and uncompromising, the Islamic republic that emerged after the revolution has been surprisingly flexible in its foreign policy. "At certain moments since 1979, Iran has taken a pragmatic approach to dealings with the United States when necessary or in its interest," said Geranmayeh. She highlighted the infamous Iran-Contra arms deal in the 1980s and cooperation in Afghanistan in 2001, as well as the nuclear deal.

Yet many hardliners in Washington refuse to accept that Iran has ever been serious about rapprochement. The American Enterprise Institute, a think-tank, this month released a series of articles calling for "a more confrontational policy toward Iran", including the threat of regime change. Its main justification was that "the men who run Iran's foreign policy have no interest in a better relationship". —AFP

Five killed in building fire in central England

LEICESTER: Rescuers yesterday pulled another body from the wreckage of a building fire in the central English city of Leicester, bringing the death toll to five, with five more people still in hospital. An explosion on Sunday evening caused a blaze to rip through a shop and two-storey flat above it, in an incident police said was not related to terrorism. After initially confirming a toll of four, a police spokesman said: "Sadly, in the last few hours, the number of people found dead in the collapsed building has risen to five."

The number of people being treated in hospital also rose from four to five, one of whom remains in a critical condition. Police said there were still some people unaccounted for, but rescue efforts had to be suspended at one point due to concerns about the structural integrity of a neighboring building. "It may be some days yet before we will be able to establish the probable cause of the explosion," added Matt Cane, group manager from Leicestershire Fire and Rescue Service.

Neighbors reported that their own homes shook with the force of the blast, which occurred shortly after 7:00pm (1900 GMT) on Sunday. Firefighters worked through the night to control the blaze, but by early yesterday afternoon, it was still not extinguished. "There are still pockets of fire in the basement area of the building," Cane said in a statement. "We have a significant number of specialist search and rescue teams who are supported by two search dogs, and this level of resourcing is likely to be in place throughout the day." Electricity to a number of homes nearby was affected, but no properties were evacuated overnight. Pictures and videos posted on social media showed a property engulfed in flames, with rubble and debris scattered around. "It was very scary," local resident Graeme



LEICESTER: A screengrab taken from a video shows a fire burning after an explosion on Sunday. —AFP

Hudson told AFP. "I live five minutes away... but my house shook. I went out and saw massive smoke and big flames."

Another witness, Tahir Khan, who was driving past when it happened, said: "I looked on the road and half the building was on the road. Literally the whole of the side of the building had been blown out. I couldn't believe it, it was like a Hollywood movie." —AFP

International

Merkel vows party renewal in bid to subdue rebellion

Chancellor has paid a high price to coax SPD back into 'grand coalition'

BERLIN: Chancellor Angela Merkel promised yesterday renewal for her conservative party as she moved to quell a rightwing rebellion and seek blessing for a hard-fought coalition deal after five months of political impasse in Germany. Merkel's Christian Democratic Union (CDU), the party she has led for nearly 18 years, held a delegates' meeting in Berlin to vote on a government pact hammered out in early February with the Social Democrats (SPD).

Merkel, who was left without a majority in September elections, paid a high price to coax the reluctant SPD back into another loveless "grand coalition", the alliance which has ruled Germany for eight of her 12 years in power. The deal included the CDU ceding control to the Social Democrats of the powerful finance ministry, seen by conservatives as a guarantor of budgetary rigor in Germany and the eurozone.

Merkel, once the seemingly invincible leader of her party and the nation, has looked severely weakened in recent months given her protracted struggle to put together a viable coalition for her fourth and likely final term. Opponents of her liberal refugee policy have grown more outspoken as the country's major parties face pressure from the far-right AfD party which has rallied against a mass influx of more than one million asylum seekers since 2015. While the CDU was expected to approve the coalition deal, Merkel said it also needed to examine the implications of its worst post-war election score. To this end, she vowed to "set the party on course towards... renewal".

To tamp down the rumblings, Merkel moved on Sunday to co-opt one of her most outspoken CDU critics, Jens Spahn, by bringing him into her next cabinet as health minister. Spahn, 37, a former deputy to hardliner Wolfgang Schauble at the finance ministry, has repeatedly slammed

Merkel's centrist policies, particularly on immigration. He has also advocated a sharp conservative shift in a bid to woo back voters from the AfD, which garnered nearly 13 percent in the September election.

Announcing the new line-up, Merkel called Spahn "a representative of the younger generation" who would play a constructive role. "People sometimes make critical comments - Jens Spahn is not the only one and that's OK," she said. "Nevertheless we have the task to do something good for Germany and that's what he wants to do, just like all the other cabinet members."

Political analyst Timo Lochock said the cabinet choice illustrated the difficult position Merkel finds herself in within her party. "Clearly, she felt that she had to make concessions to the conservative wing to remain able to take action," he said. Merkel filled the remaining CDU ministries with loyalists, keeping Ursula von der Leyen at the defence ministry, putting close ally Peter Altmaier on the economic affairs brief and placing Julia Klöckner in the

Merkel brings critic Spahn into her cabinet as health minister

agriculture job.

Two relatively obscure CDU politicians, Anja Karliczek and Helge Braun, are to take the education and chief-of-staff briefs respectively, said Merkel, noting that at 63 she will be the oldest member of the government. The cabinet picks "are future-oriented - they bring together experience with new faces in a good mix", Merkel said, but admitted it had required some "painful" choices.

'Clear profile'

Faced with calls to "renew" the party, Merkel last week tapped the popular female premier of Germany's tiny Saarland state to take over as CDU general secretary, fuelling speculation the veteran chancellor is lining



BERLIN: German Chancellor and leader of the conservative Christian Democratic Union (CDU) party Angela Merkel talks with designated German Health Minister Jens Spahn (left) and German chairman of the CDA (Christian Democratic Employees' Association) Karl-Josef Laumann during the CDU's party congress yesterday. — AFP

up her successor. Annegret Kramp-Karrenbauer, dubbed AKK or "mini-Merkel" by German media, was expected to be formally appointed at yesterday's meeting. A staunch Catholic who despite her centrist stance has also advocated a tougher line on migration, Kramp-Karrenbauer was also seen as a wise choice to soothe internal discontent.

Carsten Linnemann, a Merkel sceptic in the party, welcomed the personnel choices but said they must go along

with a return to conservatism. "We need to set new priorities and show a clear profile, so the CDU is recognizable again and can hold its own in a grand coalition," he told the Funke Mediengruppe newspaper group. The SPD still needs to approve the coalition arrangement, with the results of a crunch membership ballot to be announced on Sunday, March 4. If its members vote "no", Germany faces more political paralysis and likely snap elections that would threaten to end Merkel's long tenure. — AFP

Snow falls in Rome as Europe hit by icy weather

ROME: Rome woke to its first snowfall in six years yesterday as chilling winds from Siberia swept across Europe, bringing freezing temperatures that have claimed at least seven lives, disrupted travel and closed schools. The "Beast from the East", as Britain's media have named it, is expected to bring cold air from Russia over the next few days that will make it feel even chillier than thermometers indicate.

The toll from the icy weather has been mounting, with two people dying in Poland since Saturday, bringing the winter's toll to 48 since November, according to the center for national security. Three people in Lithuania have also died due to exposure over the past three days, the Baltic News Service (BNS) reported, as weekend temperatures plunged to minus 24 degrees Celsius (minus 11 degrees Fahrenheit).

In France, where temperatures were forecast to drop to minus 10 C and feel as low as minus 18 C over the coming days, fears ran high for people living on the streets. On Sunday, a 35-year-old homeless man was found dead in the southeastern city of Valence, and two days earlier, a 62-year-old man died in his cabin in the woods outside Paris. French officials have opened emergency shelters for the homeless, with national forecaster Meteo France saying the so-called "Moscow-Paris" cold snap will peak on Tuesday and Wednesday.

'Coldest period in years'

Overnight, Rome saw its first snowfall since Feb 2012, with about three to four centimetres settling on the ground. Schools were closed in the Italian capital as local authorities opened several train stations as emergency shelters for the homeless, but no more



ROME: People walk in central via dei Fori covered with snow yesterday. — AFP

snow is expected despite a forecast low of minus 6 C. In the northern city of Turin, heavy snow had on Sunday forced the postponement of a Serie A football game between Juventus and Atalanta.

In Britain, snow was falling in eastern England and was expected to spread. "This week looks like being the coldest period we have had in the UK for a number of years," Britain's weather service, the Met Office, said on Sunday, warning of travel delays. "Parts of England and Wales are likely to see their coldest spell of weather since at least 2013 - perhaps 1991," said the Met Office's chief forecaster Frank Saunders.

Homeless rounded up

In Belgium, a local mayor in a municipality of Brussels ordered homeless people to be forcibly detained if they refused to go to shelters. Etterbeek mayor Vincent De Wolf said the cold was a "major risk", stressing that it was his responsibility to avoid potential deaths with temperatures set to drop to minus 15 C on Wednesday night. Snow has disrupted travel in the Netherlands, where the chill has

been labelled "the Siberian bear" and where a low of minus 17 C is expected on Thursday.

Heavy snow closed numerous motorways across Croatia, including those leading to the Adriatic coast, which experienced rare snowfall that also interrupted ferry services between the islands. Russia itself was not spared, with its meteorological service warning of "abnormally cold" temperatures of between minus 14 C during the day and minus 24 C overnight.

Surf's up in Munich

In Berlin, overcrowding was feared in homeless shelters after 95 percent were full overnight, local public radio RBB said, with temperatures seen dropping to minus 20 C in parts of Germany. And police reported a spike in accidents on icy roads, with around 100 crashes in the northern city of Luebeck alone yesterday morning and 75 in the port city of Hamburg. Undeterred by the icy conditions, surfers in thick wetsuits rode Munich's famous continuous wave of the Isar River's Eisbach channel on Sunday morning, ZDF television showed. — AFP

Corbyn piles pressure on May by pledging EU customs union

COVENTRY, England: Britain should stay in a customs union with the European Union even after it leaves the bloc, opposition leader Jeremy Corbyn said yesterday, setting up a possible parliamentary defeat for Prime Minister Theresa May. As May tries to strike a divorce deal with the European Union by October, she faces a rebellion by a small group of pro-Europeans inside her Conservative Party that Labour Party leader Corbyn hopes to use to undermine her authority.

May has ruled out any customs union with the EU after Brexit because it would prevent Britain from striking new trade deals with fast-growing economies including as China and India. Corbyn explicitly backed a customs

union in a speech on Monday, setting the stage for Labour lawmakers to join Conservative rebels in supporting the necessary amendments to trade legislation. "Labour would seek to negotiate a new comprehensive UK-EU customs union to ensure there are no tariffs with Europe and to help avoid any need whatsoever for a hard border in Northern Ireland," Corbyn said in the central English city of Coventry.

But the veteran left-winger disappointed some anti-Brexit politicians in his party by indicating he, like May, favours Britain leaving the EU's single market - the only way it would be able to prevent unlimited immigration from Europe. In a bid to win over rebels in May's party, Corbyn appealed to members of parliament of all parties and said Labour would not support any deal that would do lasting damage to jobs, rights and living standards. "I appeal to MPs of all parties to be prepared to put the people's interests before the ideological fantasies," he said.

May stuck to her position. "The government will not be joining a customs union. We want to have the freedom to sign our own trade deals



COVENTRY: Opposition Labour party leader Jeremy Corbyn poses for a selfie after giving a speech on Brexit at Coventry University yesterday. — AFP

and to reach out into the world," the spokesman said, adding that Britain would seek either a new "customs partnership" or a "highly streamlined customs arrangement" with the EU. The vote on the amendments could be tight: May holds a working majority of 13 seats and, while British media said between 10 and 15 of her party might rebel, a few pro-Brexit Labour lawmakers are expected to vote with the government. — Reuters

Venezuelans pour into Colombia

MAICAO/CUCUTA, Colombia: The desert wind whipping their faces, hundreds of Venezuelan migrants lugging heavy suitcases and overstuffed backpacks trudge along the road to the Colombian border town of Maicao beneath the blazing sun. The broken line snakes back 13 km to the border crossing at Paraguachon, where more than a hundred Venezuelans wait in the heat outside the migration office. Moneychangers sit at tables stacked with wads of Venezuelan currency, made nearly worthless by hyperinflation under President Nicolas Maduro's socialist government.

The remote outpost on the arid La Guajira peninsula on Colombia's Caribbean coast marks a frontline in Latin America's worst humanitarian crisis. The Venezuelans arrive hungry, thirsty and tired, often unsure where they will spend the night, but relieved to have escaped the calamitous situation in their homeland. They are among more than half a million Venezuelans who have fled to Colombia, many illegally, hoping to escape grinding poverty, rising violence and shortages of food and medicine in their once-prosperous, oil exporting nation.

"It's migrate and give it a try or die of hunger there. Those are the only two options," said Yeraldine Murillo, 27, who left her six-year-old son behind in the Venezuelan city of Maracaibo, some 90 km across the border. "There, people eat from the trash. Here, people are happy just to eat," said Murillo, who hopes to find work in Colombia's capital Bogota and send for her son.

The exodus from Venezuela - on a scale echoing the departure of Myanmar's Rohingya people to Bangladesh - is stirring alarm in Colombia. A weary migration official said as many as 2,000 Venezuelans enter Colombia legally through Paraguachon each day, up from around 1,200 late last year. Under pressure from overcrowded frontier towns such as Maicao, Colombian President Juan Manuel Santos announced a tightening of border controls this month, deploying 3,000 additional security personnel.

But the measures are unlikely to stem the flow of illegal migrants pouring across the 2,219 km frontier. At Paraguachon, where a lack of effective border controls has long allowed smuggling to thrive, officials estimate 4,000 people cross illegally daily. "We left houses, cars. We left everything; money in the bank," said former electronics salesman Rudy Ferrer, 51, who sleeps outside a warehouse in Maicao. He estimates there are 1,000 Venezuelans sleeping on the town's streets every night. — Reuters

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International

'Emperor Xi'? China gambles on return to indefinite rule

Beijing pushes back against criticism of plan

BEIJING: China's Communist Party has handed President Xi Jinping an open path to indefinite rule - a move analysts warn carries enormous risks by abandoning a succession model that brought stability after turbulent decades under Mao. Xi, who has concentrated power, accumulated titles and purged potential rivals since becoming head of state in 2013, could remain president for life after the party proposed abolishing a rule limiting the top leader to two five-year terms.

But giving all the levers of power to one man could further erode human rights, unsettle other nations and even set up traps for Xi's rule at home, analysts warn. "The two-term limit was supposed to increase stability. By ruling beyond the standard 10-year tenure, Xi will be subject to much closer scrutiny by Chinese citizens and the political elite," said Simone van Nieuwenhuizen, Sydney-based co-author of "China and the New Maoists".

The announcement made abruptly on Sunday further chips away at the era of "collective" leadership that was championed by reform leader Deng Xiaoping to prevent the return of another Mao-like cult figure. Xi's two predecessors, Jiang Zemin and Hu Jintao, both served two five-year terms, providing a smooth succession that accompanied China's rise to become the world's second-largest economy.

But Xi, 64, has adopted Mao's playbook, tightening his grip with a relentless crackdown on civil society and corruption, enshrining his name in the party constitution and

building his own personality cult. Remaining in power beyond 2023 gives Xi a chance to push through his vision of a rejuvenated China with global clout, a prosperous society, a revived Silk Road trade route and a powerful military. China's rubberstamp legislature is expected to give Xi his second term and remove the 10-year limit at its annual meeting opening on March 5. "Term limits were a crucial part of the institutionalization of the leadership transition, something that has plagued Communist parties leading to both tyrannical reigns and catastrophic party decline," said Jonathan Sullivan, director of the China Policy Institute at Nottingham University. The rule enabled smooth transitions and preserved party unity, he said. "The removal of term limits is a rejection of all this and it comes with real risks for stability in the long term."

Some social media posts say China becoming like North Korea



Great leap backwards?

Xi provided a major hint that he intended to stay in power when he announced he would be re-elected at the five-yearly party congress in October. The state-run Global Times tabloid said the Central Committee's proposed amendment to lift term limits would "improve" leadership. "From the anti-corruption campaign to comprehensively advancing the rule of law to profound economic restructuring, the CPC Central Committee with Xi at the core has sturdily opened a new era for a hopeful China," the daily said in an editorial.

Sam Crane, a Chinese history expert at Williams College



BEIJING: People walk past a poster of Chinese President Xi Jinping besides a street yesterday. —AFP

in the US, expressed skepticism about reforms. "I strongly doubt he will use his political power to force economic reform because that would require empowering non-party economic agents," Crane said. "His chief focus I suspect will be further repression of civil society, a continuation of his political orientation since 2012."

Susan Shirk, chairwoman of the 21st Century China

Center at the University of California in San Diego, said there are "acute" risks. "One is the risk of making bad decisions while surrounded by sycophants," Shirk said. "One of the bad decisions is to control information and to control civil society to an extreme extent that the Chinese talent and the middle class ultimately will find incompatible with their ambitions for their children." —AFP

PNG troops respond to major 7.5 quake as aftershocks feared

SYDNEY: Papua New Guinea sent troops and rescue workers after a powerful earthquake struck the Pacific nation's mountainous interior yesterday and damaged a gas plant and other buildings. Authorities warned of aftershocks and landslides. There was no official information on fatalities or injuries in the rugged region but one unconfirmed report of deaths. Assessment teams were heading to affected areas near the 7.5-magnitude quake's epicenter, which the US Geological Survey said was some 90 km south of Pongera in Enga province.

"It is advisable to stay out of multi-storey buildings, to be aware of the potential of landslides, and to be prepared to move to open ground in the event that an aftershock is felt," the chief secretary to the government, Isaac Lupari, said in a statement. The tremor hit at a depth of 35 km around 3:45 am (1745 GMT Sunday), US seismologists said, adding that there was no tsunami threat. A 6.0-magnitude aftershock was recorded by the USGS at 4:26 pm nearby.

The region is home to oil and gas production. ExxonMobil PNG said buildings at its Hides Gas Conditioning Plant were damaged but all its staff were "safe and accounted for", with non-essential employees to be evacuated. Australian resources company Oil Search said its operations in the area were being shut down as a precaution and for damage assessment, and there were no injuries reported among its staff so far.

Felix Taranu, a seismologist at the Geophysical Observatory in the capital Port Moresby, said social media posts reported blackouts and damage to buildings at Pongera, although he was not aware of any injuries. —AFP

US, N Korea should lower threshold for talks, says South

SEOUL: South Korean President Moon Jae-in said yesterday the United States and North Korea should both give ground so they can sit down to talks to try to resolve a nuclear standoff, a day after Pyongyang expressed willingness for dialogue. South Korea has engaged in a flurry of talks with North Korean officials since January, hoping to improve relations with the South's just concluded Winter Olympics as a catalyst for rapprochement.

North Korea is developing nuclear-tipped missiles capable of reaching the US mainland and US President Donald Trump and North Korean leader Kim Jong Un exchanged increasingly bellicose taunts before a sudden puncturing of tensions coinciding with the Games, with the North sending athletes and delegates. "Recently, North Korea has shown it is open to actively engaging the United States in talks and the United States is talking about the importance of dialogue," Moon said during a meeting in Seoul with Chinese Vice Premier Liu Yandong.

"There is a need for the United States to lower the threshold for talks with North Korea and North Korea should show it is willing to denuclearize. It's important the United States and North Korea sit down together quickly," he said, according to a statement from his office. In August, Trump threatened to go beyond sanctions by

bringing "fire and fury like the world has never seen", although his administration has repeatedly said it prefers a diplomatic solution.

North Korea has vowed never to give up its nuclear program, which it pursues in defiance of UN Security Council resolutions, calling it "powerful treasured sword for defending peace" against US aggression. The United States, which stations 28,500 troops in South Korea, says any talks with North Korea must lead to an end to its nuclear program. Washington on Friday announced its largest package of sanctions yet.

North Korea condemned the move, accusing the United States of trying to undermine the improvement in inter-Korean relations. A high-level delegation from North Korea has been visiting Seoul and meeting South Korean officials, including Moon, after attending the Olympics' closing ceremony in Pyeongchang on Sunday. The delegation told Moon during a meeting in Pyeongchang that North Korea was open to talks with Washington. The North Koreans attended a dinner hosted by Unification Minister Cho Myong-gyon, where participants agreed to keep working to boost inter-Korean ties, the ministry said. Ministry spokesman Baik Tae-hyun said he hoped constructive talks between North Korea and the United States could begin when "an appropriate opportunity" arises.

Protests go on

The North Korean delegation, led by former military intelligence chief Kim Yong Chol, met Chung Eui-yong, security adviser for the presidential Blue House, and other South Korean government officials for lunch yesterday. Kim Yong Chol was accused by the South of being behind the



PAJU, South Korea: North Korean cheerleaders arrive at the inter-Korea transit office near the Demilitarized Zone yesterday to leave for North Korea after attending the Pyeongchang 2018 Winter Olympic Games. —AFP

sinking of a South Korean warship in 2010 that killed 46 sailors and has been the subject of protests since his visit was announced. North Korea has denied the allegations.

"Both sides agreed to work together for permanent peace on the Korean peninsula, sustainable relations between North and South Korea and balanced cooperation with the international society," the South's presidential office said in a statement. Kim Yong Chol and his delegation will leave today, just as North and South Korean officials gather on the North's side of the Panmunjom truce village to discuss Pyongyang's attendance at the Pyeongchang Winter Paralympics.

Impoverished North Korea and the rich,

democratic South are technically still at war because their 1950-53 conflict ended in a truce, not a peace treaty. The North regards regular military drills between the South and its main ally, the United States, as preparations for war. Hundreds of right-wing protesters gathered in central Seoul on Monday to criticize Moon and his administration for hosting the North Koreans, Kim Yong Chol in particular.

His visit has enraged families of the sailors who were killed in the torpedo attack. The South Korean government said it had approved the delegation as it pursues peace on the peninsula. A total of 299 North Koreans who were in South Korea for the Winter Games, including a cheering squad, returned to the North yesterday. —Reuters

Maverick climber pauses in 'suicidal' solo K2 summit bid

ISLAMABAD: Russian-Polish climber Denis Urubko has paused in his attempt to summit K2 alone during winter, a spokesperson said yesterday, after a weekend drama saw him begin what another climber has called a suicide mission. Urubko, 44, was part of a team of Polish mountaineers attempting to be the first to scale the world's second highest peak in winter. But he broke away from the group on Saturday after a series of disagreements, sparking fears for his safety on one of the world's most dangerous climbs.

"Denis Urubko goes down. He is currently in C2" tweeted the spokesman for the Polish expedition of which Urubko was previously part, Michal Leksinski. Camp Two is one of four including base camp that come before the push for the summit. It is where Urubko made his abrupt decision on Saturday to climb the 8,611-m mountain - widely said to be more challenging than Mount Everest - without the aid of porters and in defiance of the rest of his team.

Leksinski gave no other details and it was not clear whether the return to Camp Two meant Urubko had abandoned his solo attempt. The Polish team arrived at the K2 base camp late last year, enduring sub-zero temperatures and gale-force winds.

'Completely suicidal'

Fellow mountaineers have expressed



Denis Urubko

concern at any solo attempt while also acknowledging Urubko's extraordinary abilities. "He is the most outstanding Himalayan climbers of today. You can rank him among the top five active legends of mountaineering," said Pakistan's most accomplished climber Nazir Sabir, who has summited both K2 and Everest. "To be honest, he has pushed human limits to a higher level."

Others said the lone attempt was the height of recklessness. "A solo attempt of K2 in winter is completely suicidal," said Pakistani climber Mirza Ali. Before launching his solo attempt, Urubko had become increasingly frustrated with the Polish team's pace after a series of delays, including the daring night-time rescue of French mountaineer Elisabeth Revol on another Pakistani mountain, Nanga Parbat, in January.

Urubko had volunteered to go to Nanga Parbat as part of that rescue team. But K2 expert Rehmat Ullah Baig said the mission would make a summit more difficult. "He was trying to persuade the team to push for the summit in February," a porter accompanying the group told AFP, adding Urubko argued that waiting until March would make a summit more difficult. "He has had a heated debate with the team leader and left for the summit without saying a word," the porter added on condition of anonymity. —AFP

Nepal victims despair despite new govt pledge over war crimes

KATHMANDU: It was shortly before lunch on a January afternoon when rebels stormed a village school in the mountains of central Nepal, dragged headmaster Muktnath Adhikari from the classroom, tied him to a tree trunk, and shot him in the head. Sixteen years on, the chilling photograph of the 45-year-old science teacher - slumped in front of the tree with his hands bound behind him - still haunts the Himalayan nation. Captured by a local journalist and republished widely since, it is a painful reminder that, despite the end of the civil war between Maoist fighters and the government in 2006, rights abusers remain free.

And even as a new coalition government - promising peace and prosperity - takes power, victims' families, like Adhikari's son, hold out little hope of justice. "The government has no good intentions and doesn't want to address the plight of the victims," said Suman Adhikari, founder of the Conflict Victims' Common Platform, a network of support groups for people affected by the violence. "They simply want this situation to linger and keep victims and their families hopeful."

Survivors, victims' families and rights groups say successive governments have hindered efforts to probe human rights violations committed during the war. But a senior official from one of the main parties in the new government said any delays were not deliberate, and cited other priorities such as adopting a new constitution and rebuilding the country after a huge earthquake in 2015. "All other conditions of the peace deal with the Maoists have been completed," Bishnu Rijal of the Unified Marxist Leninist (UML) party told the Thomson Reuters Foundation. "The new government will make required changes in the law to deliver justice to victims." —Reuters



**Announcement from Ministry of Commerce & Industry
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Washington Watch

The Iraq debate we should have had 15 years ago

By Dr James J Zogby

Fifteen years ago this week, while the Bush Administration was busy beating the drums for an invasion of Iraq, I submitted a resolution calling on the Democratic National Committee (DNC) to oppose this rush to war. The resolution, which was also endorsed by then Congressman Jesse Jackson Jr., who served with me on the DNC, warned that there were still too many unanswered questions that required examination before we should endorse sending troops to invade and occupy Iraq. I felt it was of critical importance that we have a full debate before, and not after, the war had started.

In short, my DNC resolution warned: that it would be a mistake to drain resources and attention away from the still unfinished effort in Afghanistan; that by violating international law and invading Iraq without the support of a UN Security Council resolution, we would be setting a dangerous precedent for other nations; that the Bush Administration had not defined the strategic objectives of this war, nor had they been honest with the American people about the cost, the terms of engagement, and the consequences of this war; that a destabilized Iraq would create regional tension; that the war would result in the spread of extremist anti-American sentiment; and that there was danger in making a long-term commitment to a war in a country about we knew too little.

The resolution concluded that the DNC should oppose this rush to war and instead urge President Bush "to continue to pursue diplomatic efforts to achieve disarmament of Iraq, to clearly define for the American people and Congress the objectives, costs, consequences, terms and length of commitment envisioned by any U.S. engagement or action in Iraq, and to continue to operate in the context of and seek the full support of the United Nations in any effort to resolve the current crisis in Iraq."

In formulating the resolution, I had in mind what had been called "The Powell Doctrine" - principles that had been formulated a decade earlier by then General Colin Powell, based on his experiences in Vietnam and several other disastrous U.S. military engagements that had followed that tragic war. In short, Powell argued that the US should not consider committing troops in any conflict unless: the military and political objectives were clearly delineated; there was a reasonable expectation that the Congress and the American people understood the costs of this commitment and would support it and would sustain their support; and that all possible peaceful means of resolving this conflict had been exhausted.

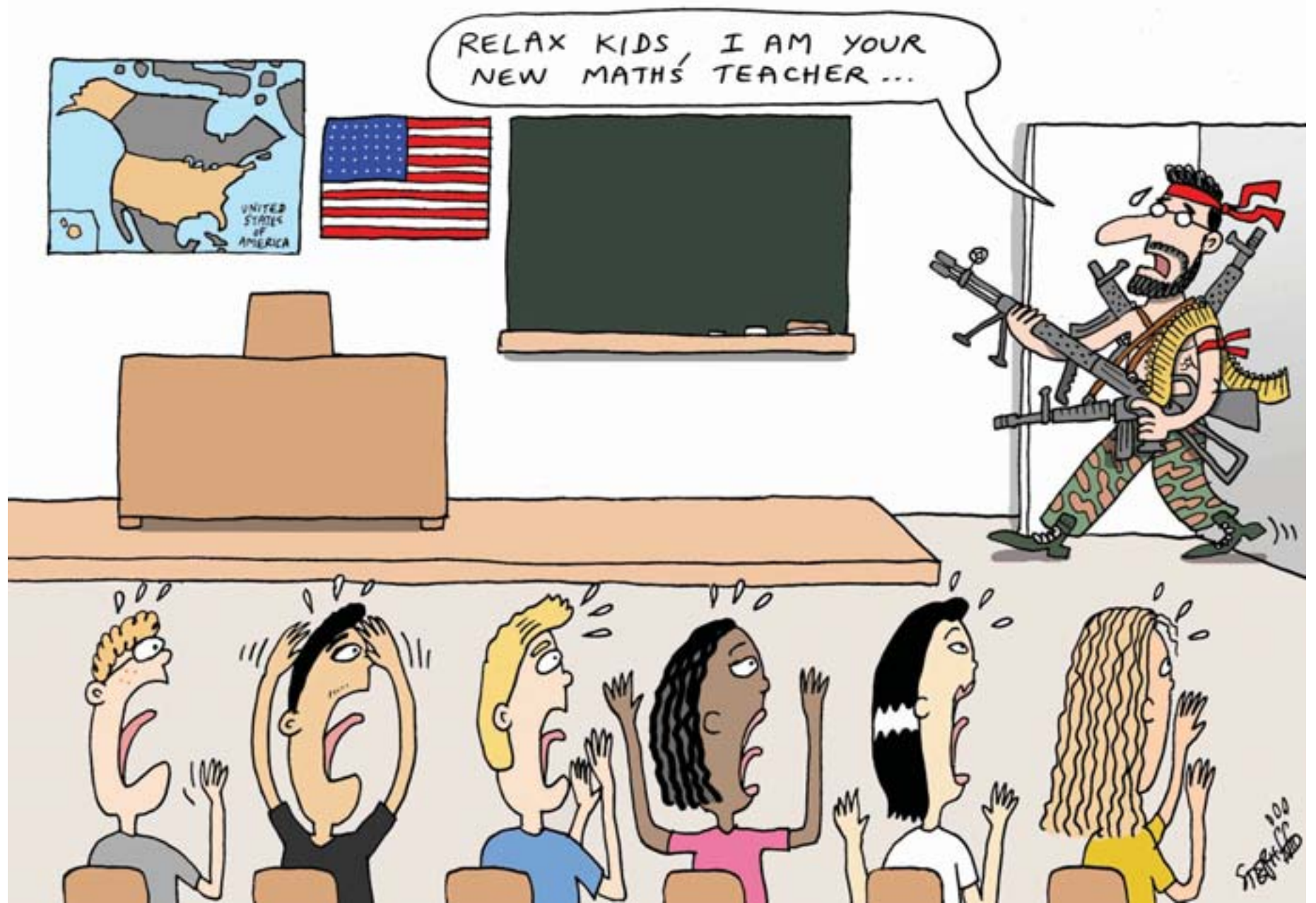
Reckless decision

Since the Bush Administration had met none of these conditions, I believed that it was reckless for the US to send our young men and women into harm's way. More than that, I was deeply concerned that we were about to engage in a conflict in a country whose history and culture we did not know and, therefore had no idea what might be the consequences of our invasion and occupation. For all these reasons, I believed that it was important for my party to be on record opposing what I felt "in my bones" was a disaster in the making. The problem I was to discover was that we were at the very start of the 2004 presidential contest and the Democratic Party's candidates were not of one mind on the merits of the war. Because some were for it, while others were opposed, the party's leaders didn't want to have the DNC take a position. I was urged not to introduce the resolution. I resisted, insisting that the war needed to be debated. In the end, I was allowed to introduce the measure and speak on its merits, but that neither a debate nor a vote would be permitted. That, I believed, was a mistake.

It was similar to the mistake Democrats had made in September of 2002 before that year's mid-term elections. Back then, the Bush Administration was pushing hard to get some sort of war-making authorization from Congress. In the face of the Republican's bullying tactics, the Senate Democrats folded. They incorrectly assumed (and the party's pollsters told them) that if they gave the president his resolution they could then focus the last two months before the election on what they called "their issues" - the economy, corporate corruption, and healthcare. At a DNC meeting a few weeks before the Senate debate, I had warned that this strategy was wrong. I said that the Bush Administration would not give us opportunity to pivot away from war.

Sure enough, with the war-making resolution in his hand, an emboldened Bush assumed the mantle of a "president at war" and the Republican's focus on fear and insecurity paved the way for their taking control of the Senate in Nov 2002. In Feb 2003, I was concerned that if Democrats did not stand against this war we would risk losing in the future. By then, the "writing was on the wall". With or without my resolution, the war was going to happen. In 2003, Democrats were in a minority in Congress and couldn't block Bush's war, even if they were unified in opposition. But the principle of having been opposed to a war we should have known wasn't going to turn out well would have put us in a stronger position in future elections.

NOTE: Dr James J Zogby is the President of the Arab American Institute



Plastic bags still suffocate India's cities

Half of India's states and union territories have introduced a blanket ban on plastic bags, and yet many shoppers remain wedded to the flimsy carrier bags while plastic waste still litters the streets of the South Asian nation. In mid-January, Indian-administered Jammu and Kashmir became the latest state to prohibit all polythene bags, in accordance with a ruling by its High Court. It joins 17 other states and territories governed by New Delhi that have imposed a complete ban on the sale and use of plastic bags, including Madhya Pradesh and Punjab.

Five other states - Goa, Gujarat, Kerala, Odisha and West Bengal - have partial bans on the use of plastic bags around sites of religious, historical or natural importance, or during the pilgrimage season, according to data provided to the Thomson Reuters Foundation by India's Central Pollution Control Board. Despite this, change is barely visible on the ground. In mountainous Jammu and Kashmir, for example, shopkeepers and vegetable sellers still pack goods in plastic carrier bags before handing them over to customers. "We have been hearing this for a long time - I don't think (the ban) is going to work," said Mohammad Yasin, who sells vegetables in Srinagar city's Zainakote area.

The government of Jammu and Kashmir had already banned bags made of polythene - a common form of plastic - with a thickness of less than 50 microns a year ago, but to little effect. "It is not only up to us - the customers share major responsibility. They should carry their own reusable bags. If they do so, the ban will work," Yasin said. More importantly, the country needs to stop making polythene, he added. Several other shopkeepers the Thomson Reuters Foundation spoke to agreed. "If the government is serious about stopping the use of polythene, it should ban its manufacturing. That will force people to carry their own bags," said Abdul Rashid, a shopkeeper in Srinagar's commercial hub, Lal Chowk (Red Square).

Old tensions clash with grand ambition in new Indian city

As big plans and intricate models were made for a new city in south India, officials struggled to communicate their vision to thousands of farmers who gave up land for the decades-long, multi-billion dollar project. So last November, they flew a group of them to Singapore to see the city that the new state capital is modelled after - a modern, high-tech hub with eco-friendly features that also offers economic opportunities.

Amaravati, which means "place of immortals", is being built in an area of 217 sq km (84 sq miles) - about the size of Seattle - along the banks of the Krishna River in the coastal state of Andhra Pradesh. It is the country's first greenfield capital in decades, and is being hailed as a viable option to the polluted, congested cities that are often seen as failures of urban planning.

"Our cities are becoming less efficient, less sustainable, less liveable, even as India grows in stature," said Sreedhar Cherukuri, commissioner of the Andhra Pradesh Capital Region Development Authority (CRDA), which is overseeing the project. "You rarely get a clean canvas to develop a city from scratch. We decided that rather than rejig a city, we would create one that is sustainable, meets global standards for liveability, and is a growth engine," he said in his office.

But while Amaravati is being hailed as an exciting new blueprint, officials are also being criticized for ignoring protests of farmers unwilling to give up land, and the ecological impact of building on farmland close to the river. It has also re-kindled the

debate on purpose-built cities, which have a mixed record, from ancient Constantinople to Myanmar's capital Naypyidaw inaugurated in 2005.

Particularly vulnerable

Andhra Pradesh lost its capital, Hyderabad, to neighboring Telangana when the latter state was created in 2014. Led by Chief Minister N Chandrababu Naidu - credited with transforming Hyderabad into a tech hub for global giants such as Microsoft and Amazon - officials in Andhra Pradesh moved quickly, picking a location for the new capital within months. A draft master plan by the Singaporean consultancy firm Surbana Jurong was approved in July 2015, and a final plan approved in Feb 2016.

Dubbed "the people's capital", Amaravati is being built in three phases, with the first phase scheduled to conclude in 2020, and the second phase running till 2035. The final phase ends 2050, when CRDA estimates the "blue-green" city - for the river and the planned green spaces - will house about 3.5 million people, up from 100,000 now. The project has drawn big global names including British architects Foster and Partners, and Dutch design and consultancy firm Arcadis.

But as countries from South America to the Middle East and Asia rush to build new cities that are "green, smart, and modern", there is little regard for marginalized communities, said Kris Hartley, a professor at the University of Melbourne. With more control ceded to developers and technology firms, public interest - including environmental protection, public space, and access to quality infrastructure and services - is at risk, he told the Thomson Reuters Foundation.

"Aside from some - debatable - progress in efficiency, energy reduction, or aesthetically attractive space, there is no reform of governance or effort to reverse the loss of power individuals have to shape their own communities," he said.

Weak enforcement

Srinagar Deputy Commissioner Syed Abid said the Jammu and Kashmir government was committed to stamping out plastic bags. "We have constituted special squads for enforcing the ban, and we are also seizing polythene



Plastics industry employs 4 million people, has 30,000 units

wherever we find it in use," he said in an interview. Some environmental experts say carrying plastic bags should be punishable by law. "As of now, only the traders or shopkeepers are penalized - which doesn't affect people who compel the shopkeepers to provide them with plastic bags," said Samiullah Bhat, assistant professor in the environmental science department at the University of Kashmir. Riyaz Ahmad Wani, the commissioner of Srinagar

Municipal Corporation, told the Thomson Reuters Foundation the authority may consider imposing fines on those who carry polythene bags under a new policy for solid waste management now being drafted. In March 2016, the Karnataka state government issued a circular stipulating that no one should use plastic products, including bags, banners, bunting, flags, plates, cups, spoons, cling film and table cloths. It also said those items should not be manufactured, supplied, stored, transported, sold or distributed.

Megha Shenoy, a fellow at the Bangalore-based Ashoka Trust for Research in Ecology and the Environment (ATREE), said the ban has had "some impact" there but enforcement is patchy. Civil servants in several departments are tasked with putting it into practice, but proof of their work needs to be collected and verified independently, said Shenoy. Without such a system, responsibility gets shunted between departments, "leading to dilution of enforcement", she said. Moreover, several political parties - including the ruling party - often use banners, bunting and other plastic products, as bureaucrats struggle to implement the rules, she added.

Humans, cows at risk

As far back as 2012, two Indian Supreme Court judges warned "the next generation will be threatened with something more serious than the atom bomb" in the absence of "a total ban on plastic". But progress towards that aspiration is slow. A 2015 report by the Central Pollution Control Board said Indian cities produced more than 15,000 tonnes of plastic waste every day. Of this, 9,000 tonnes were collected and processed, while the rest littered the streets and drains, or was dumped in landfill. About two-thirds of the plastic waste was a mix of polythene bags and food packaging, mainly from residential areas, it said. —Reuters

"Developing countries are particularly vulnerable," said Hartley, who is also a fellow at the Chicago Council on Global Affairs, a think tank.

Land pooling

All decisions related to Amaravati are made with the aim of improving people's lives, Cherukuri said. To hasten a process of acquiring land, which can often be delayed because of disagreements over compensation, officials opted to use land pooling, a strategy that had never been attempted on that scale in India before. Land pooling enables the quick consolidation of small land holdings. Owners get back a share of developed land, while the state keeps the remainder for its use.

For Amaravati, some 31,000 acres of land was pooled from about 26,000 farmers in just two months, Cherukuri said. The remainder of the land is being acquired. To



A 3-D model of Amaravati, the new capital of the south Indian state of Andhra Pradesh. —Reuters

Business

Samsung launches new S9 phone with augmented reality features

S9 features essentially the same design as last year's previous flagship

BARCELONA: Samsung unveiled its new flagship smartphone on Sunday with a focus on augmented reality features as it seeks to keep its title as the world's biggest smartphone maker. The South Korean firm showcased the Galaxy S9 on the eve of the official start of the Mobile World Congress in Barcelona, which comes after a year of flat smartphone sales. With no other major handset maker using the annual event, the world's largest phone show, to launch a new flagship device this year, Samsung had the opportunity to grab the spotlight.

The S9 features essentially the same design as last year's previous flagship, with the full screen and curved glass edge of the S8, which was followed by Apple's iPhone X and others.

But it includes louder sound, a faster processor and software that turns selfies into animated emojis, which will appeal to consumers who are increasingly preferring to use their phones to send text messages rather than talking.

Samsung also included a dual lens camera on the Galaxy S line for the first time, which will improve low-light capture and enhance slow motion video, which is popular on social media. A service powered by artificial intelligence (AI) allows users to point its camera to instantly translate a sign in a foreign language. It is also one of the few flagship phones left that still comes with a standard headphone jack.

"Despite these incremental innovations, Samsung will have to smartly leverage its brand and marketing machine to correctly position the new smartphones to a target audience," said Forrester analyst Thomas Husson. Global smartphone sales fell by 6.3 percent in the fourth quarter due to slower than expected

Christmas sales, according to research firm IDC. Overall global smartphone sales for 2017 were virtually flat-down 0.1 percent at 1.47 billion units-as phone makers struggled to come up with innovations that encourage customers to upgrade their devices.

Cost concerns

Samsung suffered a humiliating recall of its Galaxy Note 7 device in 2016 after several devices exploded, but its Galaxy 8 smartphone was a consumer and critical success. While it kept its lead over Apple as the world's biggest seller of smartphones in 2017 with a 21.6 percent market share, up from 21.1 percent in the previous year, Samsung faces stiffer competition from Chinese rivals like Huawei and Xiaomi that offer cheaper handsets with many high-end features. The S9 will sell for 859 euros (\$1,055), a price which analysts warned could turn off many consumers.

While the S9's camera is "markedly different" in quality from older smartphones that people already own "consumers may delay purchase because of rising flagship prices," IHS Markit said in a research note. "Samsung must work hard to market the benefits of these designs to counter negative pricing perception." Huawei unveiled a new laptop and tablet in Barcelona earlier on Sunday but will present its new flagship smartphone-the P20-on March 27 in Paris.

Thomas said this will allow it to "fine tune its marketing message based on how the new Samsung S9 devices are perceived by consumers".

Earlier on Sunday South Korea's LG unveiled the V30S-an updated version of its flagship V30 smartphone launched six months ago-which features higher memory



BARCELONA: A hostess holds two new Samsung Galaxy S9 mobilephones during the Samsung Galaxy S9 Unpacked event. —AFP

“ Will have to smartly leverage its brand ”

World's largest phone show opens under secession cloud

BARCELONA: The world's largest phone show opened in Barcelona yesterday with a visit by King Felipe VI as tensions run high just months after Catalonia's failed bid to break from Spain. The king, a divisive figure in the northeastern region since he made a stern speech in October denouncing the secession attempt by Catalan leaders, toured the Mobile World Congress (MWC) accompanied by Barcelona Mayor Ada Colau and other officials.

But on Sunday evening, small pro- and anti-monarchy protests hit the Mediterranean city during an inaugural ceremony for the MWC, an annual event of high importance for Spain both financially and for its image. During the ceremony, Colau and regional parliament speaker Roger Torrent, a separatist, refused to follow protocol and officially welcome the king.

On her Facebook page, Colau—who is not a separatist—said she did not welcome the king because of his October speech, which came just days after a banned independence referendum was marred by police violence. "The king didn't make even the smallest gesture of empathy towards people who suffered... and made a hardline speech endorsing the repressive line instead of trying to ease the conflict and bring serenity, as expected of a head of state," Colau wrote.



BARCELONA: A man takes pictures of Sony Xperia XZ2 at the Mobile World Congress (MWC), the world's biggest mobile fair. —AFP

'Take care' of image

The failed bid to break from Spain brought huge uncertainty to the northeastern region, with more than 3,000 companies moving their legal headquarters out of Catalonia. At the time, there had even been speculation that this year's MWC would be delayed with organisers

and artificial intelligence-based technologies that focus on photos and voice recognition. More than 100,000 people are expected to descend on Barcelona for the

annual show, which features driverless carmakers, social media giants and chip companies in addition to handset makers. —AFP

Abu Dhabi awards INPEX stake in oil concession

ABU DHABI: Abu Dhabi's state energy company ADNOC said yesterday it had awarded Japan's INPEX a 10 percent stake in an offshore oil concession, in a deal worth \$600 million. The new concession, at the offshore Lower Zakum oil field, is for a duration of 40 years, ADNOC said in a statement. The company also said it had extended INPEX's 40 percent stakes in Abu Dhabi's Satah and Umm Al-Dalkh concessions for another 25 years.

The move comes two weeks after ADNOC awarded a state-owned Indian consortium, led by ONGC Videsh, a similar stake in Lower Zakum, also worth \$600 million. ADNOC last week awarded Spanish Cepsa, wholly owned by Abu Dhabi's Mubadala Investment Company, a 20 percent share in a concession of two offshore oil fields for \$1.5 billion. All three concessions cover 40-year periods and aim to double output from the offshore oilfields to over 1.125 million barrels per day.

ADNOC Offshore, a subsidiary of ADNOC, will retain 60 percent in the three concessions while the remaining stakes will be awarded to different companies, ADNOC said in a statement. Abu Dhabi, where most of the oil reserves of the United Arab Emirates are located, has begun to award new oil concessions as the old ones have either expired or will run out early next month. —AFP

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Business

Crypto 'noobs' learn to cope with swings in digital coins

They are ordinary investors hopping onto the latest trend

NEW YORK: After researching digital currencies for work last year, personal finance writer JR Duren hopped on his own crypto-rollercoaster. Duren bought \$5 worth of Litecoin in November, and eventually purchased \$400 more, mostly with his credit card. In just a few months, he experienced a rally, a crash and a recovery, with the adrenaline highs and lows that come along. "At first, I was freaking out," Duren said about watching his portfolio plunge 40 percent at one point. "The precipitous drop came as a shock."

The 39-year-old Floridian is part of the new class of crypto-investors who do not necessarily think bitcoin will replace the US dollar, or that blockchain will revolutionize modern finance or that dentists should have their own currency. Dubbed by longtime crypto-investors as "the noobs" - online lingo for "newbies" - they are ordinary investors hopping onto the latest trend, often with little understanding of how cryptocurrencies work or why they exist.

"There has been a big shift in the type of investors we have seen in crypto over the past year," said Angela Walch, a fellow at the UCL Centre for Blockchain Technologies. "It's shifted from a small group of techies to average Joes. I overhear conversations about cryptocurrencies everywhere, in coffee shops and airports."

First forays

Walch and other experts cited parallels to the late-1990s, when retail investors jumped into stocks like Pets.com, a short-lived online seller of pet supplies, only to watch their wealth evaporate when the dot-com bubble burst. Bitcoin is the best-known virtual currency but there are now more than 1,500 to choose from, according to market data website CoinMarketCap, ranging from popular coins like ether and ripple to obscure

coins like dentacoin, the one intended for dentists. Exactly how many "noobs" bought into the craze last year is unclear because each transaction is pseudonymous, meaning it is linked to a unique digital address, and few exchanges collect or share detailed information about their users. A variety of consumer-friendly websites have made investing much easier, and online forums are now filled with posts from ordinary retail investors who were rarely spotted on the cryptocurrency pages of social news hub Reddit before. Reuters interviewed eight people who recently made their first foray into digital currency investing. Many were motivated by a fear of missing out on profits during what seemed like a never-ending rally last year.

One bitcoin was worth almost \$20,000 in December, up around 1,900 percent from the start of 2017. As of Friday afternoon it was worth about \$10,000 after having fallen as much as 70 percent from its peak. Other coins made even bigger gains and experienced equally dizzying drops over that time frame. "There was that two-month period last year where all the virtual currencies kept going and up and I had a couple of friends that had invested and they had made five-figure returns," said Michael Brown, a research analyst in New Jersey, who said he bought around \$1,000 worth of ether in December. "I got swept by the media frenzy," he said. "You never hear stories of people losing money." In the weeks after Brown invested, his holdings soared as much as 75 percent and tumbled as much as 59 percent.

Buy and 'hodl'

Investors who got into bitcoin before its 2013 crash like to refer to themselves as "OGs," short for "original gangsters." They tend to shrug off the recent downturn, arguing that cryptocurrencies will be worth much more in the future. "As crashes go, this is one of the biggest," said Xavier Levenfiche, who first invested in cryptocurrencies

“ At first, I was freaking out ”

How PNB says they fell victim to India's biggest loan fraud

MUMBAI: India's Punjab National Bank, the second-biggest state-run lender, stunned the country's financial sector this month when it announced it had discovered an alleged fraud worth \$1.8 billion at a single branch in Mumbai. The fraud, by far the biggest ever detected by an Indian bank, comes to light at a time when lenders - especially state-run banks - are hobbled by \$147 billion in soured loans on their books, a problem that has slowed lending and hurt the economy. The following is an explainer on the PNB fraud and its implications for other lenders and India's banking sector:

What is the fraud allegation about?

On Jan. 29, PNB filed a criminal complaint with India's federal investigative agency against three companies and four people, including billionaire jeweller Nirav Modi and his uncle Mehul Choksi, the managing director of Gitanjali Gems, saying they had defrauded PNB and caused a loss of 2.8 billion rupees (\$43 million).

In a regulatory filing on Feb. 14, the bank updated the sum involved in the fraud to 113.94 billion rupees (\$1.77 billion), which it said was determined after further investigation. The bank alleges that two junior employees at its Brady House branch in Mumbai colluded with companies belonging to Modi and Choksi, and issued fraudulent "letters of undertaking", or LoUs, without asking for any margin money as security, even though the firms did not have any pre-approved credit limit. The firms, PNB says, raised short-term credit from overseas branches of other Indian banks based on these LoUs, and in some instances fraudulent foreign letters of credit (FLCs) in favor of foreign suppliers.

How did the fraud come to light?

PNB said that on Jan. 16 a representative of one of the accused firms presented a set of import documents to the Mumbai branch and requested buyers' credit to pay overseas suppliers. Since they had no pre-arranged credit limit, the branch official asked the companies to put down the full amount as collateral so the bank could issue LoUs to authorize the credit. When the representative argued they had used such facilities in the past without keeping any money as collateral, PNB scanned its records and found no trace of any transactions, according to the bank's account.

It then found that two junior employees had issued LoUs over the SWIFT interbank messaging system without entering any of these transactions on the bank's own system. Such transactions went on for years without detection, PNB said. Bankers say in many Indian banks the SWIFT system, which is used for international transactions, and the core banking system work independently of each other. In PNB's case, it said the outstanding LoUs were not available on its core banking system run on Infosys's Finacle software, and so went undetected.

Who are the people and companies accused of involvement?

PNB accused three companies - Solar Exports, Stellar Diamonds and Diamond R US - it said belonged to Modi, a high-end jeweller who runs his eponymous Nirav Modi stores spread from New York to Beijing. Modi was worth \$1.7 billion last year, according to Forbes rankings. Modi's companies colluded with the bank staff, PNB said, adding that it suspected some officials at foreign branches of other Indian banks that extended credit were also involved. It also named



SILIGURI: This photo taken on February 22, 2018 shows an Indian security guard closing the entrance of a Shoppers' Stop outlet during a raid by Enforcement Directorate (ED) teams. — AFP

Gitanjali Gems, Gili India and Nakshatra - companies promoted by Choksi.

A lawyer for Modi has denied any wrongdoing by his client. Modi himself has not commented publicly, but wrote to PNB in a letter, a copy of which was seen by Reuters, that his firms owed "substantially less" than the total exposure reported by the bank. Gitanjali has also denied Choksi's involvement in the fraud. Choksi, in an open letter to employees on Friday, maintained his innocence and advised them to look for other jobs, as his assets had been seized and he was unable to pay salaries.

What are the authorities doing?

The Central Bureau of Investigation (CBI) has so far arrested 12 people - six from the bank and six from Modi and Choksi's companies. All have appeared in court and been held in custody for further questioning. The Enforcement Directorate, a government agency responsible for fighting financial crime, says it has seized diamonds and jewelry worth 56.74 billion rupees (\$875 million) after searching Nirav Modi's home and offices.

It has also seized nine of his luxury cars including a Rolls-Royce Ghost. The Reserve Bank of India this week wrote to banks asking them to ensure their SWIFT system was integrated with their main banking software by April 30. The Finance Ministry has also written to banks telling them to take effective steps to avoid any similar fraud. The government has said it will not spare wrongdoers in the PNB case.

Who assumes the liability?

PNB has said the transactions are "contingent" in nature and it is ready to honor "bona fide" commitments. Reacting to media reports, it said on Friday it had received no instruction from the RBI or the government to pay the other banks who gave loans based on the fraudulent guarantees. Several banks that extended loans based on the PNB guarantees and are at risk of losing money want PNB to pay up, according to banking sources. In a Feb 12 "caution notice" addressed to chief executives of 30 banks, PNB said the other banks also have a share in the blame as they "overlooked" certain Indian central bank rules. PNB has said it is following all "lawful avenues available" to recover its dues and it has asked Modi to respond with a "concrete and implementable" repayment plan. — Reuters



CARACAS: Venezuela's President Nicolas Maduro (C) delivers a speech next to Vice-President Tarek El Aissami (L) next to Venezuela's Minister of Science, Technology and University Education Hugbel Roa (R) during a press conference to launch the market a new oil-backed cryptocurrency called "Petro", at the Miraflores Presidential Palace. - AFP

in 2011. "But, in the grand scheme of things, it's a hiccup on the road to greatness."

Spooked by the sudden fall but not willing to book a loss, many investors are embracing a mantra known as "HODL." The term stems from a misspelled post on an online forum during the cryptocurrency crash in 2013, when a user wrote he was "hodling" his bitcoin, instead of "holding." Mike Gnietcki, for instance, bought one bitcoin at around \$18,000 in December and was sitting on a 43 percent decline as of Friday, waiting for a recovery. "I view it as having been a fun side investment similar to a gamble," said Gnietcki, a paramedic from Texas. "Clearly I lost some money on this particular gamble."

Duren, the personal finance writer, is also holding onto

his Litecoin for now, though he regrets having spent \$33 on credit card and exchange fees for a \$405 investment. Some retail investors who went big into cryptocurrencies for the first time during the rally last year remain positive. Didi Taihuttu announced in October that he and his family had sold everything they owned - including their business, home, cars and toys - to move to a "digital nomad" camp in Thailand. In an interview, Taihuttu said he has no regrets. The crypto-day-trader's portfolio is in the black, and he predicts one bitcoin will be worth between \$30,000 and \$50,000 by year-end. His backup plan is to write a book and perhaps make a movie about his family's experience. "We are not in it to become bitcoin millionaires," Taihuttu said. — Reuters

Corporate America is raising prices to cover transport costs

SEATTLE/BOCA RATON: The drive for cost cuts and higher margins at US trucking and railroad operators is pinching their biggest customers, forcing the likes of General Mills Inc and Hormel Foods Corp to spend more on deliveries and consider raising their own prices as a way to pass along the costs. Interviews with executives at 10 companies across the food, consumer goods and commodities sectors reveal that many are grappling with how to defend their profit margins as transportation costs climb at nearly double the inflation rate.

Two executives told Reuters their companies do plan to raise prices, though they would not divulge by how much. A third said it was discussing prospective price increases with retailers. The prospect of higher prices on chicken, cereal and snacks costs comes as inflation emerged as a more distinct threat in recent weeks. The US Labor Department reported earlier this month that underlying consumer prices in January posted their biggest gain in more than a year.

Keeping pace

As US economic growth has revved up, railroads and truck fleets have not expanded capacity to keep pace - a decision applauded by Wall Street. Shares of CSX Corp, Norfolk Southern, and Union Pacific Corp have risen an average 22 percent over the past year as they cut headcount, locomotives and rail cars, and lengthened trains to lower expenses and raise margins.

Quickening economic growth, a shortage of drivers and reduced capacity, and higher fuel prices have driven up transportation costs, prompting some companies to threaten to raise prices on goods ranging from chicken to cereal. Hormel Foods, the maker of Skippy peanut butter and SPAM, has been talking with retailers about raising prices, according to Chief Executive Jim Snee. "We don't believe we're going to recoup all of our freight cost increases for the balance of the year," Snee told Reuters in an interview, noting operating margin sank to 13.2 percent, from 15.6 percent due to higher costs - including freight - in the most recent quarter.

Confectionery and snack company Mondelez International Inc halted operations over a weekend late last month at its Toledo, Ohio wheat flour mill - the second-largest flour mill in the United States - because the plant could not get enough rail cars to carry flour to bakeries, a spokeswoman said. She declined to comment on whether Mondelez would raise prices to cover any higher costs.

A new government regulation for drivers and truck availability are pushing up freight costs at JM Smucker Co. "We anticipate inflationary pressures likely to cause upward price movements in a variety of categories," Chief Financial Officer Mark Belgia said last week at an analyst conference. To be sure, transportation costs are

just a sliver of the price consumers pay at the grocery store. The US Department of Agriculture estimates transportation represents just 3.3 cents of every dollar consumers spend.

But an increase in truck rates over the next 12 months implies a 15-to-18 basis point gross margin headwind for US food companies on average, according to Bernstein analyst Alexia Howard. "A lot of the consumer goods companies work on margin," said Joe Glauber, a former USDA Chief Economist and a senior research fellow at the International Food Policy Research Institute. "They are going to be pushing those costs along" to retailers. Ultimately "consumers end up shouldering more of the burden," he said. That would be a change for consumers who have seen years of low-to-negative food inflation, he noted.

Rising costs hit earnings

Prices of key commodity ingredients including corn, sugar and cocoa remain relatively low due to bumper harvests around the globe. But even as companies' freight costs increase, their packaging costs are also rising, industry analysts said. Global energy prices have risen sharply from 2016's lows, driving up prices for not only diesel but also packing material like plastics, which are byproducts of crude and natural gas.

Others companies have blamed freight hikes for lower earnings forecasts for 2018, including U.S. oilfield services company Halliburton Co. It shaved ten cents per share from its earnings forecast last week due to delays in deliveries of sand used in fracking. "They try to squeeze every dollar for profit rather than provide service," said Robert Murray, the chief executive of Murray Energy Corporation, the largest privately-owned US coal company which relies on CSX and Norfolk Southern to help transport its goods.

Murray said both CSX and Norfolk Southern have lacked rail cars and crew to haul 4 million tons of coal from mines in West Virginia and Ohio to the Port of Baltimore this year. CSX spokesman Christopher Smith said its service has improved steadily over recent months and it was working with customers to solve problems. Norfolk Southern declined to comment.

At an analyst conference Thursday, Norfolk Southern Chief Financial Officer Cynthia Earhart said that the railroad was looking to raise prices on consumer goods and other truck-competitive freight it hauls in 2018. But she said it had no plans to increase headcount or move equipment out of storage, despite worsening train speeds and rail car idle times in the first quarter. Earhart said the railroad was moving some employees to problem spots, like its terminal in Birmingham, Alabama, from other areas of its network.

Union Pacific has started pulling stored locomotives back into service and plans to bring back 600 employees in the first quarter 2018 to prevent rail cars from spending too much time in yards, said Union Pacific spokeswoman Raquel Espinoza. The time UP rail cars were sitting idle in terminals rose to 32.5 hours in the fourth quarter from 29 hours in the year-ago period, and its overall workforce dropped during the last two quarters, according to company data. Berkshire Hathaway's BNSF said winter weather has impacted velocity and fluidity on portions of its primary route between the Pacific Northwest and Midwest, but said it has not been cutting crews and rolling stock. — Reuters

Business

NBK Economic Update

Kuwait: Real estate sales were strong in January, boosted by investment sector

KUWAIT: Real estate sales were higher in January 2018 due to continued robustness in residential sales as well as the largest monthly sales figure in the investment sector in years. It was a strong start for the year as overall sales for the three sectors reached KD 226 million in January 2018, a 26% year-on-year (y/y) jump. Transactions, however, grew a mere 1.9% y/y to reach 375. Some of the strength was due to a base effect: the performance in January 2017 was subdued, as it followed very strong figures in December 2016.

Residential sector sales and transactions picked up as prices continued to make progress. Sales were up 11.7% y/y in January 2018 to KD 87.5 million though this was below the KD 96 million monthly average in 2017. Activity rose to 283 transactions, two thirds of which were residential home sales. The most active areas in terms of residential plot sales were Funaitees, Abu Futaira, and the Sabah Al-Ahmad Coastal area.

Residential home prices showed improvement in January 2018 while residential land prices eased after gains in the second half of 2017. The NBK Residential Home price index posted positive annual growth (1.1% y/y reaching 151.9) as sales activity in the sector improved in the second half of 2017 and into 2018. The NBK Residential Land index, however, showed easing prices (down 5.5% y/y to 171.3), but this comes after some decline in land prices in the second half of 2017.

Investment property sales took off in January, as several large deals in buildings and plots came through. Though the number of contracts witnessed a significant decline (24% down to 87), a number of large transactions offset this fall in activity. Sales totaled KD 122.2 million (83% y/y) and half of which came from building sales. The largest sale was for a building in Jabriya for over 4,400 square meters at KD 14 million. There

were several sales in key areas such as Salmiya, Hawalli, and Kuwait City. Sabah Al-Salem witnessed a significant pick up in investment plot sales, the largest of which was a 5,600 square meter plot that sold for KD 18.8



Table 1: Real estate sales

	Average		2017		Jan 2018		
	2016	2017	Nov	Dec	Jan	% m/m	% y/y
Sales (KD mn)	194.7	181.2	147.3	171.4	226.0	31.8	25.9
Residential property	78.7	96.2	83.0	82.3	87.5	6.4	11.7
Investment property	68.1	55.0	38.5	39.1	122.2	212.5	83.0
Commercial property	47.9	30.0	25.8	50.0	16.2	-67.6	-52.7
Number of transactions	354	377	301	323	375	16.1	1.9
Residential property	237	280	236	246	283	15.0	17.9
Investment property	108	91.3	60	76	87	14.5	-24.3
Commercial property	8	6	5	1	5	400.0	-61.5
Transaction size (KD th)	547	480	489	531	602.7	13.6	23.6
Residential property	332	340	352	335	309.3	-7.5	-5.3
Investment property	646	624.5	641	515	1,405	173.0	141.9
Commercial property	5,204	8,633	5,163	50,000	3,244	-93.5	23.0

Boursa Kuwait ends week with mixed performance

KUWAIT: Boursa Kuwait ended last week with mixed performance. The Price Index closed at 6,756.54 points, down by 0.11% from the week before closing. The Weighted Index decreased

by 0.13% after closing at 410.14 points, whereas the KXSX-15 Index closed at 948.62 points up by 0.23%. Furthermore, the week's average daily turnover increased by 11.49%, compared to the preceding week, reaching K.D 10.74 million, whereas trading volume average was 61.89 million shares, recording a decrease of 0.88%. For the annual performance, the Price Index ended last week recording 5.44% annual gain compared to its closing in 2017, while the Weighted Index increased by 2.17%, and the KXSX-15 recorded 3.69% growth.

Sectors' Indices

Eight of Boursa Kuwait's sectors ended last week in the red zone, four recorded increases. The Financial Services sector headed the losers list as its index declined by 2.69% to end the week's activity at 611.52 points. The Banks sector was second on the losers' list, which index declined by 1.37%, closing at 939.24 points, followed by the Basic Materials sector, as its index closed at 1,304.09 points at a loss of 0.99%. The Telecommunications sector was the least declining as its index closed at 543.11 points with a 0.01% decrease.

Global stocks firm before big week for central banks

LONDON: Global stocks notched further gains yesterday and the dollar stayed on the back foot, as investors bet the new head of the US Federal Reserve will steer a steady course on policy when he addresses lawmakers this week. MSCI's index of world stocks was up 0.3 percent, with the pan-European Stoxx 600 up 0.6 percent. Asian markets also rose, with Chinese stocks up 1.2 percent after the ruling Communist Party set the stage for President Xi Jinping to stay in office indefinitely.

Much of the market's focus during the coming week will be on monetary policy, with the heads of the European Central Bank and Bank of England set to give speeches. But they are likely to be overshadowed by Fed chair Jerome Powell. US stock markets calmed on Friday after the Fed said it saw steady economic growth continuing and no serious risks on the horizon, a trend that looks set to continue.

Dow Jones futures pointed to the index opening 0.6 percent higher, with S&P 500 futures up 0.4 percent. Investors also seem to be wagering that Powell will stick to that script at his first appearance before the House today, followed by testimony to the Senate on Thursday. "Given he's speaking on behalf of the committee it would be a big surprise to see much deviation from recent Fed commentary, but much will probably be made of how he handles the scrutiny," said Jim Reid, a macro strategist at Deutsche Bank.

Sterling, Euro gain

The expected lack of policy surprises from Powell saw yields on U.S. 10-year Treasuries back off to 2.86 percent and away from a four-year top of 2.957 percent, dragging down the dollar. The currency surrendered early gains to dip 0.2 percent against a basket of currencies to 89.68. That followed a 0.8 percent bounce last week. Sterling was up 0.5 percent yesterday after Bank of England deputy governor Dave Ramsden said the bank might need to raise interest rates somewhat sooner than he had expected if wage growth picked up early



NEW YORK: Traders work on the floor at the closing bell of the Dow Industrial Average at the New York Stock Exchange. —AFP

this year. The pound also benefited from hopes that Britain's exit from the European Union might be less disruptive than feared. After opposition leader Jeremy Corbyn gave a speech yesterday backing a new customs union with the bloc. The euro was 0.3 percent firmer on the back of dollar weakness, though investors largely held back from taking big positions ahead of a national election in Italy and the conclusion of coalition talks in Germany.

ECB President Mario Draghi is also set to appear before the European Parliament later in the day, while BoE governor Mark Carney speaks in Edinburgh on Friday. In commodities, oil prices steadied after hitting their highest level in nearly three weeks, supported by comments from top exporter Saudi Arabia that it would continue to curb shipments in line with the OPEC-led effort to cut global supplies.

European shares traded higher yesterday morning with gains across bourses and sectors as focus gradually shifts from the earnings season to monetary policy and politics with Italy's election on Sunday. At 0945 GMT, the pan-European STOXX benchmark index was up 0.54 percent at 383.20 points in lower

than usual volumes after Asian shares made guarded gains.

"There's a sense of a beaten up squeeze behind the rally this morning", a trader commented as a number of shares which investors have often bet against, enjoyed strong gains without any corporate announcement apparently justifying the rise. He mentioned Satellite firms SES, up 9.4 percent, German drugs packaging firm Gerresheimer's up 2.7 percent or France's pipe maker Vallourec up 4.5 percent.

Nordic telecom companies Nokia and Ericsson were up 4.1 percent and 3.8 percent respectively. Expectations for the next-generation 5G networks are on the rise after Nokia CEO said that major telecom operators were accelerating their timelines for adopting next-generation 5G networks by up to a year. Consumers staples, basic materials and health care added the sectors adding most points to the index.

Deutsche Bank rose 0.7 percent after it said it would float its asset management arm DWS on the Frankfurt stock exchange, as it fights to regain investor trust after years of scandals and restructuring. —Agencies

million. Investment sector prices appear to be stabilizing as the pace of decline eased. The index reached 177.9 in January 2018, down 1.1% m/m and 3.1% y/y.

The price index appears to be in line with 2017, showing a steadier performance and a slower pace of easing relative to 2016. Commercial sector sales slowed in January after an active December 2017. January saw sales of KD 16.2 million from five transactions, an improvement from just one transaction in December, and in line with the average monthly performance in 2017. Three commercial buildings were sold in Al-Mirqab at KD 3 million each.

National Bank of Kuwait
Financial Markets
Daily Report
At 02:00 PM Yesterday

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Global Stock Indices

Index	Previous Close	Last Price	Change	Daily Performance %	Yearly Performance %	
Dow Jones	24,962.48	25,309.99	347.51	▲	1.39	2.39
Nasdaq	7,210.09	7,337.39	127.31	▲	1.77	6.29
SP500	2,703.96	2,747.30	43.34	▲	1.60	2.76
Financial Times	7,244.41	7,269.61	25.20	▲	0.35	-5.44
DAX	12,483.79	12,536.57	52.78	▲	0.42	-2.95
CAC 40	5,317.37	5,347.67	30.30	▲	0.57	0.66
Swiss	8,948.19	8,973.16	24.97	▲	0.28	-4.36
Nikkei 225	21,892.78	22,153.63	260.85	▲	1.19	-2.69
Topix	1,760.53	1,774.81	14.28	▲	0.81	-2.35
Hang Seng	31,267.17	31,498.60	231.43	▲	0.74	5.20
Straits Times	3,533.22	3,555.85	22.63	▲	0.64	4.49

MENA Stock Indices

Index	Previous Close	Last Price	Change	Daily Performance %	Yearly Performance %	
Kuwait	6,701.31	6,756.54	55.23	▲	0.82	5.44
Saudi Arabia	7,493.63	7,485.60	-8.03	▼	-0.11	3.59
Dubai	3,306.57	3,306.53	-0.04	▼	0.00	-1.89
Abu Dhabi	4,582.01	4,593.30	11.29	▲	0.25	4.43
Bahrain	1,361.65	1,370.71	9.06	▲	0.67	2.93
Qatar	9,080.13	8,992.64	-87.49	▼	-0.96	5.51
Oman	4,958.21	4,985.28	27.07	▲	0.55	-2.24
Lebanon	1,173.39	1,172.82	-0.57	▼	-0.05	2.11
Jordan	2,260.52	2,240.15	-20.37	▼	-0.90	5.33
Egypt	15,467.77	15,500.44	32.67	▲	0.21	3.20
Morocco	10,762.41	10,783.67	21.26	▲	0.20	6.77
Tunisia	6,662.57	6,699.73	37.16	▲	0.56	6.65

Global Currencies Exchange Rate

Currency	Kuwaiti Dinar	Saudi Riyal	US Dollar	Euro	Sterling Pound	Swiss Franc	Japanese Yen	Australian Dollar
Kuwaiti Dinar		12.4395	3.3167	2.6865	2.3590	3.0942	353.50	4.2128
Saudi Riyal	0.08039		0.2665	0.2160	0.1896	0.2489	28.42	0.3387
US Dollar	0.30150	3.7305		0.7100	0.7112	0.9335	106.58	1.2702
Euro	0.37223	4.6304	1.2548		0.8781	1.1526	131.59	1.5682
Sterling Pound	0.42391	5.2732	1.4060	1.1388		1.3127	149.86	1.7860
Swiss Franc	0.32298	4.0177	1.0712	0.8676	0.7618		114.18	1.3606
Japanese Yen	0.00283	0.0352	0.0094	0.0076	0.0067	0.0088		0.0119
Australian Dollar	0.23737	2.9528	0.7873	0.6377	0.5599	0.7349	83.91	

MENA Currencies Exchange Rate

Currency	US Dollar	Kuwaiti Dollar	Saudi Riyal	Bahraini Dinar	Qatari Riyal	Omani Riyal	Emirates Dirham	Egyptian Pound
US Dollar		0.30150	3.7345	0.3740	3.6394	0.3836	3.6571	17.5651
Kuwaiti Dinar	3.3167		12.3864	1.2406	12.0710	1.2723	12.1297	58.2590
Saudi Riyal	0.2678	0.0807		0.1002	0.9745	0.1027	0.9793	4.7035
Bahraini Dinar	2.6736	0.8061	9.9845		9.7302	1.0256	9.7776	46.9617
Qatari Riyal	0.2748	0.0828	1.0261	0.1028		0.1054	1.0049	4.8264
Omani Riyal	2.6068	0.7860	9.7351	0.9750	9.4872		9.5334	45.7890
Emirates Dirham	0.2734	0.0824	1.0212	0.1023	0.9952	0.1049		4.8030
Egyptian Pound	0.0569	0.0172	0.2126	0.0213	0.2072	0.0218	0.2082	

Global Interest Rates

Currency	1-Week	1-Month	3-Month	6-Month	1-Year
Kuwaiti Dinar	0.00	1.69	1.88	2.13	2.38
US Dollar	1.47	1.63	1.95	2.18	2.45
Euro	-0.42	-0.40	-0.38	-0.32	-0.25
Sterling Pound	0.48	0.49	0.57	0.68	0.89
Swiss Franc	-0.80	-0.79	-0.74	-0.66	-0.53
Australian Dollar	2.78	2.86	2.95	3.05	3.33
Japanese Yen	-0.04	-0.04	-0.07	0.00	0.09

Global Bond Yields

Country	2-Year	5-Year	10-Year	30-Year	
United States	2.23	2.60	2.86	3.15	
Europe	-0.54	N/A	-0.02	1.25	
United Kingdom	0.79		-0.37	1.03	1.93

Commodities

Index	Previous Close	Last Price	Change	Daily Performance %	Yearly Performance %	
Kuwait Oil	61.93	63.01	1.08	▲	1.71	-0.48
Brent	67.31	67.28	-0.03	▼	-0.04	0.61
West Texas	63.55	63.57	0.02	▲	0.03	5.21
Gold	1,328.71	1,339.58	10.87	▲	0.82	2.82
Silver	16.53	16.72	0.19	▲	1.12	-1.30

Source: National Bank of Kuwait

Business

Italy's timid economic recovery hangs on upcoming vote result

Eurozone's third largest economy recorded growth of 1.4% last year

MILAN: The Italian economy is slowly making its way out of an economic crisis that has ravaged the country, but there are fears among the business community that the March 4 election could hobble what is a small and fragile recovery. Figures from the national statistics body Istat say the eurozone's third largest economy recorded growth of 1.4 percent last year, the fastest rate in seven years.

However overall economic output is still nearly six percent lower than before the financial crisis hit in 2008 and Italy is way behind the 2.5 percent growth recorded by the eurozone last year, according to Eurostat. Economists say this weakness is primarily due to Italian productivity being among the lowest in Europe, which in itself is due to factors like lack of credit, a mismatch between training and what companies need and a business environment that doesn't give entrepreneurs a helping hand.

"Since 1999, the productivity gap between Italy and the other major eurozone countries has widened significantly," says Nicola Nobile from Oxford Economics. Gross domestic product (a measure of total output in the economy) "per hour of work is 25 percent lower than that of Germany and France." If Made in Italy is a world leader in sectors like fashion and kitchen furnishings, it has nothing to do with the country's politicians, said Alessandro Iliprandi, chief executive of leather specialist Bonaudo. Italy accounts for 65 percent of European leather production.

Insecure employment

"The political situation has been unstable for decades and politicians do not make the lives of entrepreneurs eas-

ier-quite the opposite," he said. For Iliprandi the obstacles that hamper everyday life are "the bureaucracy, the slowness of the justice system and the high taxes. To get out of this situation we need radical decisions to be made".

Centre-left governments led by Matteo Renzi and Paolo Gentiloni have made efforts to ease the frustrations of Italy's business class, and with some success. Between 2012 and 2017, the country jumped from 87th to 46th in the World Bank's Ease of doing business index, but it remains behind the likes of Romania and Moldova.

The labor market has been made more flexible by the Jobs Act introduced by Renzi in 2014, which has made it easier to fire employees and created a new type of permanent contracts which increase protections for employees over the course of the contract. But while Renzi

says that he has created a million jobs, it's difficult to measure his real impact, and trade unions assert that the laws have actually contributed to creating more insecure, temporary employment.

But for Roberto Pirotti, a professor at Bocconi University in Milan, the Jobs Act, despite its shortcomings, is "a courageous and useful reform" in a country where the unemployment rate still stands at 10.8 percent, and 32.2 percent among 15-24-year-olds, well above the average in the eurozone.

Industry plan 4.0

The Italian government recently lowered the corporate income tax rate from 27.5 percent to 24 percent, but it remains above the United Kingdom's 19 percent and very far from the 12.5 percent of Ireland or nine percent of

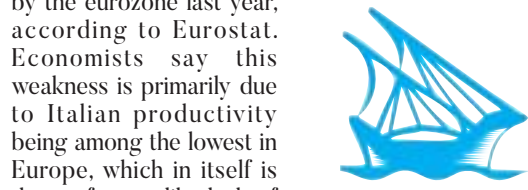


MILAN: Leader of Italian right-wing party Forza Italia (Go Italy) Silvio Berlusconi (2nd L) poses with a supporter at the end of a campaign rally in Milan on February 25, 2018, ahead of the Italian general elections of next week. — AFP

Hungary. Giovanni Lombardi, head of consulting company Tecno, which specializes in energy savings, welcomed the Industry plan 4.0 launched by the government in 2016, because "it encourages companies to invest in digitization and automation".

"The market is completely polarized: companies that have not invested in innovation and technology are out of the race, while those that have made leaps and bounds," he added. But Nobile at Oxford Economics fears that the post-election government will not press ahead with reforms like the simplification of bureaucracy.

Most political parties have prioritized promises of dramatic tax cuts that risk exploding the public deficit and debt, which at 131.6 percent of overall economic output is already the second highest in the eurozone. Nobile's worries could turn out to be correct given pre-election polling, which has largely predicted a hung parliament, meaning there will likely be long negotiations before the next government is formed. That will create a great deal of uncertainty about economic policy and risk a blow to investor confidence and financial markets just when Italy least needs it. — AFP



Situation has been unstable for decades

Geely's Li Shufu betting billions on global push

SHANGHAI: Li Shufu, chairman of Chinese carmaker Geely, is making waves in the global auto market after buying a \$9 billion stake in Germany's Daimler AG. Li, 54, the son of a farmer from China's eastern Zhejiang province, has led a major acquisition push globally since 2010, when he took over Swedish car brand Volvo from Ford Motor Co in a \$1.8 billion deal.

Over the last year, he has snapped up a \$3.3 billion stake in truck maker AB Volvo, a majority stake in sports car maker Lotus, a 49.9 percent stake in Malaysian automaker Proton and flying car start-up Terrafugia. He already owns LEVC, the maker of London's iconic black cabs. Li, sometimes compared to US auto icon Henry Ford, founded Zhejiang Geely Holding Group in 1986, which was at the time focused on refrigerators. He moved into motorbike manufacturing in the 1990s before switching to autos in 1997.

The Daimler deal is the biggest overseas purchase yet for the business leader, who is ranked 10th on the Forbes China Rich List with a fortune of \$16.5 billion. It is also a major gamble amid what Li calls a "a battle" against foreign companies shaking up the global automotive market, namely tech firms like Tesla, Google, Uber and China's own Baidu pushing into autonomous driving, electric vehicles and car sharing.

Key to survival

"No current car industry player will be able to win this battle against the invaders from outside independently," he said in a statement announcing his Daimler stake, which makes him the largest shareholder in the owner of Mercedes-Benz. The listed autos unit of his empire, Geely Automobile Holdings Ltd, saw its shares rise 6.5 percent on Monday after the investment was announced. The stake gives Li a potential boost in his bid to convince the German company to share technology with Geely - an area Li sees as key to survival - even if analysts said this would still be no easy task.

"A new stage of global scientific revolution and industrial transformation is already upon us," he wrote in a speech in December posted on his personal website. "Artificial intelligence, new energy sources and inter-connectivity are right in front of us." The investment could also affect Daimler's existing joint venture in China with BAIC Motor Corp. On Monday AB Volvo said it would drop a board member because Li's stake in Daimler created competition concerns.

Li also now plays an active political role in China and is a regular delegate to the Chinese People's Political Consultative Conference, a largely ceremonial political advisory body. But his political nous may have helped get the huge investment done smoothly, analysts and local media said, especially amid a fierce crackdown on overseas deals. An advance last year by Geely for a stake in Daimler was rebuffed.—Reuters



BRUSSELS: This file photo taken on June 2, 2017 shows Chinese carmaker Geely CEO Li Shufu during a meeting. — AFP

Qualcomm open to takeover if Broadcom boosts price

WASHINGTON: Qualcomm said yesterday it was open to further talks with computer chipmaking rival Broadcom if the Singapore-based firm is willing to raise the price of its hostile bid. The California-based mobile chip giant released a letter to Broadcom saying that a meeting earlier this month had addressed some of Qualcomm's concerns but that the two sides remained in disagreement on price.

Last week, Broadcom reduced its offer to \$79 a share, which would still be the largest-ever deal in the tech sector if completed at an estimated value of nearly \$117 billion. Broadcom said it cut its bid because Qualcomm had effectively agreed to "transfer" value by raising its takeover offer for Dutch-based tech firm NXP. Qualcomm chairman Paul Jacobs said the two companies should meet to consider a higher price.

"Having now addressed the regulatory and certainty issues in principle, we propose arranging a meeting-as soon as mutually convenient for both parties — focused on price, should Broadcom be willing to engage on the topic," Jacobs said in the letter to Broadcom chief executive Hock Tan. Jacobs said Qualcomm was willing to sign a non-disclosure agreement that would allow Broadcom to view confidential business information from its US rival, suggesting this would enable Broadcom to get a better picture of Qualcomm's true value.

"We appreciate that we have differences in our views on value and that ours is based upon signifi-



BARCELONA: President of Qualcomm Incorporated, Cristiano Amon, gives a press conference in Barcelona, on the first day of the Mobile World Congress.—AFP

cantly more information than the public data you now have at your disposal," Jacobs said. Any tie-up of the two giants could reshape the fast-evolving sector of chips for smartphones and connected devices. But it would have to pass regulatory muster in several countries. Qualcomm has cited "regulatory risk" as a factor in rebuffing the Broadcom bid but has also said the offer "undervalues" Qualcomm in view of its prospects in mobile technology.

The US firm could face pressure at its annual shareholder meeting March 6, where Broadcom is calling for new board members who would be amenable to a tie-up. Broadcom's original offer for Qualcomm came days after Tan visited the White House last November and told President Donald Trump the company would be moving back to the United States. — AFP

Work strikes shut Guinean capital

CONAKRY: Thousands of young people erected barricades and blocked traffic in the Guinean capital Conakry yesterday with markets and schools shut as mass strikes gripped the city. A general strike was called by the Guinea General Union of Workers (UGTG) in addition to an ongoing walkout by teachers and a complete shutdown of economic activity demanded by the opposition after disputed local elections.

Conakry's biggest market, Madina, failed to open its doors along with the vast majority of businesses, as youths overturned bins and set tires on fire, cutting off entire sections of the city to vehicles. Police made 15 arrests in the Kaloum district, where civil society groups were protesting against the two-week closure of schools. An on-off teachers' strike that has paralyzed the education system shows no signs of stopping despite a government offer at the weekend to increase pay.

Former Prime Minister Cellou Dalein Diallo's Union of Democratic Forces of Guinea (UFDG) saw a strong response to its call for a "ville morte" or "dead city" protest, demanding that all economic activity cease and people stay inside. The victory of President Alpha Conde's ruling Rally for the Guinean People (RPG) in the February 4 vote was marred by post-electoral violence involving supporters of the losing parties. The UFDG has condemned what it terms "massive fraud" during voting, leading to unrest and the deaths of at least 10 people. An

opposition figure told AFP yesterday they were "celebrating the success" of the protest movement, adding that "the next few days will be even harder for those in power, which already has a hot potato in its hands over the results".

Teachers ignore pay increase

The powerful UGTG union had joined the teachers and opposition figures by calling for workers to stay at home yesterday. It has cited mismanagement of the national social security system, poor regulation of subcontracted jobs and a perceived indifference to workplace accidents and arbitrary firings for the strike. The UGTG has called on public and private sector employees alike to boycott their workplaces. The triple challenge will add to the pressure on Conde to complete promised reforms and speed up negotiations with all parties concerned.

The government urged teachers who have held various walkouts since December to head back to class yesterday and end their most recent strike, a demand they have flatly refused despite the offer of a 10 percent pay increase over the weekend. Guinea's education ministry said "all measures have been taken to make schools secure so that classes can take place in the best possible conditions," following protests near some establishments by disgruntled students. Classes will be repeated and examinations potentially delayed to address the days lost by the strike, the ministry said. Teachers have requested that a pay rise of 40 percent agreed in October 2017 be implemented, with back pay. "For as long as the 40 percent (increase) with back pay is unpaid... we will not be going back to school," the teachers' unions said Saturday. — AFP

Britain's banks play catch up with fintech with new apps

LONDON: British retail banks are poised to introduce money management apps to compete with those already launched by financial technology start-ups, betting their trusted brands, broad client base and deep pockets will help them make up lost ground. HSBC, Lloyds Banking Group and the Royal Bank of Scotland are at various stages of producing cutting-edge apps that will allow customers to pull data from different accounts, even those at rival lenders, on their mobile devices and home computers.

They are playing a serious game of catch-up. Numerous fintech firms and digital banks like Monzo and Money Dashboard already offer the kinds of apps the banks are building, winning fans among the young and tech-savvy. The user base for Monzo's app, which analyses and categorises spending habits, sends budgeting nudges and allows users to freeze and unfreeze cards at the click of a button, soared by 300 percent to 450,000 in nine months last year.

After years spent rebuilding balance sheets and managing regulatory change after the 2008 financial crisis, technology is now at the top of the banks' agenda, said Edward Firth, managing director for UK banks at brokerage Keefe, Bruyette & Woods. "This is all they're talking about," he said. The drive has been turbo-charged by new "open banking" regulations requiring Britain's nine biggest banks to share data so that customers can access their financial information across providers in an aggregated format and make it easier to compare services as well as change banks.

Technology race

The rules were supposed to be implemented on Jan 13 but six of the banks, including Barclays and HSBC, have asked for more time to ensure the data is secure. The changes will now start for the majority of customers in March, although some banks have been allowed to delay until next year for certain segments of their customer bases. Jeremy Light, managing director of Accenture Payment Services for Europe, Africa and Latin America, said the changes will spark a competitive technology race in which aggregator apps will be the "bare minimum". "You will have to have them, because if you don't you're out of the game," Light said. "It's really all of the other services that you then start offering."

Monzo, Starling Bank and Revolut have already opened a "marketplace" within their apps where users can shop around for and sign up to other products and services from fintech firms, banks or even energy and insurance companies. HSBC is the only major lender to show an interest in this kind of service so far, teaming up with fintech firm Bud to trial a money management and marketplace app with users on its First Direct brand.

Money, brand and loyal clients

Big banks have the advantages of scale, name recognition and funding power, Accenture's Light said. Lloyds, which had 13.5 million users of its online and mobile offerings in 2017, plans to unveil a new app with "full open banking capability". Chief Executive Antonio Horta-Osorio said at the bank's annual results announcement on Feb 21. He did not give a date for the launch, but a source familiar with the matter had previously told Reuters it was expected sometime this year.—Reuters

Bollywood superstar **Sridevi** dies aged 54



This file photo taken on December 10, 2017 shows Indian Bollywood actress Sridevi Kapoor posing during a promotional event in Mumbai. — AFP photos



This file photo taken on December 1, 2012 shows (L to R) French actress Catherine Deneuve, Indian actor Amitabh Bachchan and actress Sridevi Kapoor posing during the tribute to Hindi cinema at the 12th Marrakech International Film Festival in Marrakech.



This file photo taken on July 6, 2013 shows Indian Bollywood actress Sridevi Kapoor performing at the 14th International Indian Film Academy (IIFA) Awards ceremony at the Venetian hotel in Macau.

Billions mourn death of **Sridevi**

Heartbroken fans yesterday awaited the arrival of the body of Bollywood superstar Sridevi Kapoor as tributes poured in for the actress who died in Dubai of a heart attack aged just 54. Hundreds gathered outside her Mumbai home hoping to catch a final glimpse of the star before she is cremated at a funeral service expected later yesterday.

Sridevi—one of the biggest names in Hindi cinema—died late on Saturday after suffering a cardiac arrest in Dubai, where she had been attending her nephew's wedding. Her body was due to be flown back to Mumbai yesterday on a charter flight after authorities in the emirate allowed it to be released following a post mortem. "We want to see her one last time," 48-year-old Laxmi Subbaramaiah told AFP outside Sridevi's house in the Andheri area of Mumbai—the heartland of the Bollywood film industry.

Bollywood superstar Sridevi Kapoor, one of the biggest names in Hindi cinema, has died aged 54 after suffering a heart attack in Dubai, her former manager said Sunday. The death of Sridevi, reportedly while attending her nephew's wedding in the emirate late Saturday, prompted an outpouring of grief from fans and fellow actors as well as condolences from Prime Minister Narendra Modi. "I have no words. Condolences to everyone who loved Sridevi. A dark day. RIP," tweeted actress Priyanka Chopra.

‘Sridevi appeared in around 300 films’

Sridevi, born Shree Amma Yanger Ayappan in the southern state of Tamil Nadu, made her acting debut at the age of four and her career spanned more than four decades. She worked in India's regional Tamil, Telugu and Malayalam-language films before making her Bollywood debut in 1979. "It is shocking and sad," her former manager Punkej Kharbanda told AFP. Her husband was with her at her death, he said.

Sridevi made a name for herself with a string of blockbuster films including "Chandni", "Mr India", "Mawali" ("Scoundrel") and "Tohfa" ("Gift"). Her first smash hit was the 1982 Tamil film "Moondram Pirai" and she played the same role in its Hindi remake, "Sadma" ("Trauma"). Her portrayal of a woman suffering from amnesia has been described by many critics as a milestone. Kamal Haasan, her co-star in "Sadma", paid tribute on Twitter. "Have witnessed Sridevi's life from an adolescent teenager to the magnificent lady she became. Her stardom was well deserved," Haasan tweeted.

"Many happy moments with her flash through my mind including the last time I met her. Sadma's lullaby haunts me now. We'll miss her," he added. Local police made arrangements to handle the swelling crowds gathered outside Sridevi's home in Mumbai's Lokhandwala neighborhood. Many were expected to wait till the family returns to Mumbai late Sunday evening with the body, for a cremation likely to be held on Monday.

"I came rushing here after reading news pertaining to Sridevi's death. She was our female Amitabh Bachchan (one of the biggest Bollywood stars) and I have watched all her movies," Vimal Khandaikade told AFP. "I have always been a big fan and loved her performances... I will wait till her body is brought back and want to bid her farewell." Shoumik Mahapatra, 16, said he had grown up

watching Sridevi's movies: "She was so colorful and bold and I was always impressed by her character. I am very shocked by the news."

'Continued grace'

In an interview with The New Indian Express in 2013, Sridevi spoke of missing out on a carefree childhood when she began working as an actor. "I lost out on going to school and college life but I got into the film industry and worked without a gap—from child actor I went straight to heroine. There was no time to think and I was grateful for it," she said. "In order to get something you have to lose something. You can't have everything in life. So I am happy with what I got."

Sridevi was awarded the Padma Shri, India's fourth highest civilian award, for her services to the film industry. She was especially admired for her ability to overcome language barriers and work in different regional film industries. Sridevi appeared in around 300 films and was set to see her older daughter Jhanvi make her Bollywood debut. Leading Bollywood actor Akshay Kumar expressed shock at her "untimely demise".

"A dream for many, had the good fortune of sharing screen space with her long ago and witnessed her continued grace over the years," Kumar tweeted. Madhuri Dixit, whose fame rivaled Sridevi's, said the world "has lost a very talented person who left behind a huge legacy in film". Prime Minister Modi said he was saddened by the news. "She was a veteran of the film industry, whose long career included diverse roles and memorable performances," Modi tweeted. "My thoughts are with her family and admirers in this hour of grief." Film critic Rajeev Masand said Sridevi "would be missed", noting the star's shy and introverted off-camera personality. "Never known anyone who was so painfully shy, so quiet off screen, who just transformed into a force of nature when cameras came on," Masand tweeted. "She was an interviewer's nightmare, but the movie-buff's dream... Thank you for the movies." Sridevi is survived by her husband, film producer Boney Kapoor, and their two daughters. — AFP



A picture of Bollywood actress Sridevi Kapoor is put up outside her residence in Mumbai.

"All of my family members are big fans and we cried when we heard the news. We will wait here until her body comes back," he said. Vishal More, 23, said he had travelled seven hours from Jalgaon district, around 400 kilometres away from Mumbai, to bid farewell to his favorite actress. "I've been waiting all morning to catch a last glimpse of Sridevi. I have watched all of her movies. She is such an inspiration," he said. Sridevi's death has prompted an outpouring of grief in India from fans and fellow actors as well as condolences from Prime Minister Narendra Modi.

Bollywood shock

"I have always been a huge fan of her work. Equally I have been an admirer of the grace and dignity with which she conducted herself," actor Aamir Khan wrote on Twitter. "I join all the millions of her fans in mourning her demise. Ma'am we will always remember you with love and respect," he added. Fellow actor Ranveer Singh tweeted that he was "shocked and saddened to hear about the untimely demise of one of Hindi cinema's greatest superstars".

Actress Alia Bhatt posted on Twitter: "Nothing makes sense. I have no words, just completely shocked. RIP Sri Devi. My icon forever. Love you." Sridevi, born Shree Amma Yanger Ayappan in the southern state of Tamil Nadu, appeared in around 300 films and was awarded the Padma Shri, India's fourth highest civilian award, for services to the movie industry. She made her acting debut at the age of four and her career spanned more than four decades. Sridevi worked in India's regional Tamil, Telugu and Malayalam-language films before making her Bollywood debut in 1979. She became a national icon with a string of blockbuster films including "Chandni", "Mr India", "Mawali" ("Scoundrel") and "Tohfa" ("Gift"). — AFP



This file photo taken on April 5, 2013 shows then-Indian President Pranab Mukherjee (R) presenting the Padma Shree award to Indian film actress Sridevi (L) during the presentation of the "Padma Awards 2013" at the Presidential Palace in New Delhi.

LuLu Hypermarket launches Hala February at Al-Qurain branch

LuLu Hypermarket, the regional leader in retailing, launched its Hala February 2018 promotion at their Qurain outlet on 22 February. The event was inaugurated by Former Kuwait National Football Team Captain Bader Ahmed Al-Mutawa, in the presence of the top management of LuLu Hypermarket in Kuwait, a large gathering of shoppers and well-wishers. The colorful opening event witnessed several cultural activities including a traditional Arab Sword dance, as well as a carnival for kids featuring various competitions and activities aimed at children.

In line with Kuwait's month-long celebration marking Hala February, the Al-Qurain branch will be promoting Kuwaiti products from well-known local companies at special prices. A special attraction at the event is a Kuwait street-

food stall serving favorite local delicacies. Large cut-outs of prominent landmarks in Kuwait add to the celebratory atmosphere of Hala February, as well as for the upcoming National and Liberation Days.

LuLu Hypermarket's regular customer-centric promotions are eagerly awaited by shoppers throughout Kuwait, as they often provide exceptional products at very exclusive prices. The Hala February 2018 promotion at Al Qurain branch once again reinforces the hypermarket's commitment to offering customers the widest variety and range of quality products at highly competitive prices, with the added benefit of special rewards and prizes to mark the occasion.



'A Wrinkle in Time': A girls' movie boys may want to see

If "Black Panther" demonstrated that women can dominate a highly-lucrative action movie, then "A Wrinkle in Time" takes the lesson further—showing the boys how to be gracious followers. The sci-fi fantasy is aiming to dislodge its Disney stablemate from atop the box office when it hits US theaters on March 9, with its young female protagonist leading two boys in the adventure. "It's nice for a young boy, young man even, to see that it is OK to have a sensitive side of you," Zach Galifianakis, one of the movie's few white male actors, told a news conference in Hollywood on Sunday. "I come from a very masculine upbringing, a lot of people do, and I love the way I was raised. But looking back, we need balance."

Striking that balance, Ava DuVernay's movie is the first in history to entrust a budget of more than \$100 million to a female African-American director. Galifianakis, becoming emotional, told reporters he felt "real proud" to be part of the project alongside many non-white, mainly female, actors including Oprah Winfrey, Mindy Kaling, Storm Reid and Gugu Mbatha-Raw.



A view of the atmosphere during the press conference for Disney's 'A Wrinkle in Time' in Hollywood.

Much of the movie's messaging about gender comes in the shape of Calvin, Meg's classmate and travel companion, a teenage boy perfectly at ease following, and instinctively trusting in, a young girl. The character is played by Australian Levi Miller who, at the tender age of 15, called out the culture of "toxic masculinity" which he said was "rampant in society," in one of the news conference's more surreal moments.

Timeless classic

Based on Madeleine L'Engle's timeless 1962 classic of

‘ Takes audiences across dimensions of time and space ,

the same name, "Wrinkle" takes audiences across dimensions of time and space, examining the nature of darkness versus light and the redeeming power of love. Through one girl's transformative journey led by three planet-hopping guides, the movie posits that strength comes from embracing one's individuality and that the best way to triumph over fear is to travel "by one's own light." Fresh off heavy projects like the civil rights drama "Selma" and prisons expose "13th," DuVernay directed from a screenplay by Jennifer Lee, one of the few women in Hollywood whose filmmaking achievements eclipse her own.

Lee, who won an Academy Award for "Frozen," is the first female director of a Disney animated feature and the first woman to steer a feature to more than \$1 billion at the box office. "There's love in every frame of this movie. There's love in every frame of everything I do. I don't have children and I won't have children, by choice," said DuVernay. "These films are my children, they have my name on them, my blood in them."

DuVernay plucked 14-year-old Reid from thousands of hopefuls to play Meg Murry, the daughter of two world-renowned physicists who struggles with her self-image and just wants to fit in at her Los Angeles middle school. Her father's mysterious disappearance four years earlier has left Meg devastated and her mother (Gugu Mbatha-Raw) broken-hearted. Her preternaturally intelligent younger brother Charles Wallace (Deric McCabe) introduces Meg and Calvin to three magical beings—Mrs Which, Mrs Whatsit and Mrs Who—who have descended to Earth to help in the search for Mr Murry.

'We're looking for warriors'

Traveling via a wrinkle of time and space known as "tesseracting," they are transported to worlds beyond their imagination where they must confront a powerful evil force. A rare original project in a Disney slate featuring mainly remakes and sequels over the next four years, "A Wrinkle in Time" stars Winfrey, Kaling and Reese



In this file photo taken on February 24, 2018 (L-R) actors Levi Miller, Rowan Blanchard, Deric McCabe, Zach Galifianakis, Mindy Kaling, Reese Witherspoon, Oprah Winfrey, Director Ava DuVernay, actors Storm Reid, Chris Pine, Gugu Mbatha-Raw, Screenwriter Jennifer Lee and moderator Tanika Ray participate in the press conference for Disney's 'A Wrinkle in Time' in Hollywood. — AFP

Witherspoon as the celestial trio.

Kaling, who wrote, produced and starred in sit-com "The Mindy Project," loved science fiction growing up, but said it was a genre "that largely did not love me back." "I never saw representation of a dark-skinned Indian woman, Indian girls, in anything I saw and it's a pretty peculiar thing when you grow up loving something that doesn't love you back," she said. "It's such a pure love, because you're not getting anything from it. To be part of this movie... is so fun because I finally feel welcomed with open arms in something that has ignored me completely."

Winfrey is in many ways the woman of the hour, after a rousing Golden Globes speech against sexual misconduct led to a viral social media campaign calling on her to run

for president in 2020. The daytime TV queen, who has denied ambitions for office on several occasions, was asked if there was room for hope in an America reeling from recent mass shootings and polarized by politics. "It just takes a little bit of light, just a little bit of light, that's what we're hoping for," she said. "If everybody can get that message, that's how we have hope in the world. We're looking for warriors who can bring hope back." — AFP



This file photo taken on February 18, 2017 shows Colombian actress Daniela Vega posing at a press conference after "A Fantastic Woman" won the award for best screenplay at the Award Ceremony of the 67th Berlinale Film Festival in Berlin on February 18, 2017. — AFP photos



This file photo taken on February 05, 2018 shows actress Daniela Vega (L) and director Sebastian Lelio posing for portraits during the Academy Awards annual nominees luncheon for the 90th Oscars at the Beverly Hilton.

Hair to stay: Australia mullet heads celebrate style revival

"Back" was the mantra for the crowd of Australians sporting a mullet haircut at an inaugural festival celebrating the vintage style on Saturday. More than 150 people showcasing the hairstyle popular in the 1970s and 80s flocked to a small town north of Sydney for the event, swishing their locks and parading their chops to cheering fans. The mullet has remained a staple hairstyle in Kurri Kurri, some 150 kilometers from Sydney, according to Laura Johnson, a local publican who organized the festival.

"There's a school of thought from our locals at our table of knowledge here at the Chelly (Chelmsford) Hotel that they have had the mullets for the longest," she told AFP at Kurri Kurri Saturday. "We've got folks here that have been sporting their mullet haircut for over 60 years." For Lloyd Martin, a flamboyant mullet-contest participant passionate about the style, the cut is timeless and also intrinsically Australian.

"It's... one of the most Australian cultural haircuts you can have. You've got to grow a mullet at least once in your lifetime. It's not a hairstyle, it's a lifestyle," he told AFP. The winner of the junior division, 12-year-old Alex Keavy, said he was not fazed by the style's old-fashioned reputation. "It's out of its time but I still like it and all my friends keep telling me that they want one but I don't think a lot of people can wear it properly," he told AFP. "I just love it because I like its style and I like long hair." Laurie Manurele, who drove 12 hours from the neighboring state of Victoria to take part in the contest, has tended his mullet for 46 years. He told AFP he was impressed at the competition he faced. "The quality of mullets here today is absolutely unbelievable," he said. "It's amazing what's out there and Australia is the capital of the world for mullets." —AFP



A man shows off his mullet haircut at Mulletfest 2018.



A man shows off his mullet haircut at Mulletfest 2018 in the town of Kurri Kurri.



A contestant shows off his mullet haircut at Mulletfest 2018. — AFP photos

Transgender artists make history at the Oscars

Transgender representation in entertainment has made baby steps forward in recent years, but 2018 has seen a history-making giant leap, with two movies involving trans artists in the Oscars race. Chilean actress Daniela Vega has won acclaim for her turn as Marina, a young waitress and aspiring singer who falls prey to the prejudices of society, in "A Fantastic Woman," the overwhelming favorite in the best foreign language film category.

Yance Ford is also shattering glass ceilings for his intensely personal documentary "Strong Island" as the first openly transgender director or trans man in any category-vying for a statuette. Ford is only the third-ever openly transgender nominee, after Anohni-formerly Antony Hegarty of experimental US band Antony and the Johnsons—lost out for best original song in 2016, and composer Angela Morley, known as Wally Stott before a sex change, was nominated twice in the same category in the mid-1970s.

"It's a pattern happening in the last few years, since 'Transparent' or Laverne Cox in 'Orange is the New Black'... and now the Oscars," said Larry Gross, a social media and communications professor at the University of Southern California. The history of transgender representation at the Oscars is predictably threadbare-but not completely nonexistent.

"The Crying Game" (1992) examined race, gender and sexuality against the backdrop of sectarian violence in Northern Ireland, while Oscar-winner Hilary Swank starred as an American trans man who falls victim to a brutal crime in "Boys Don't Cry" (1999). More recently, Jared Leto won an Academy Award for his acclaimed performance as an AIDS-stricken transgender woman in "Dallas Buyers Club" (2013), while Eddie Redmayne was a losing

nominee as a pioneer of the transsexual movement in "The Danish Girl" (2015).

'Seismic moment'

On television, "Transparent," starring Jeffrey Tambor as a Californian homemaker, has been an outlier in the movement for greater representation of transgender characters in entertainment. But that conversation quickly developed into a call for more actors who are transgender in real life to be hired for these roles, traditionally given to the "cisgendered"—people whose sense of gender corresponds with their birth sex.

"I hope I'm the last cisgender man playing a transgender woman," Tambor said when he won his second Emmy for the hit Amazon show in 2016. When the Academy Awards take place on March 4, that breakthrough will truly be felt. "It's incredibly meaningful, especially to share this with Daniela Vega. Our work hopefully transcends the fact that we're transgender," Ford said in an interview with AFP.

"It is a seismic moment, a tiny earthquake, and hopefully it will begin to change the field overall, and the ability of trans actors and actresses and artists of all backgrounds to have recognition." "Strong Island" chronicles the arc of Ford's African American family from the racial segregation of the Jim Crow era to the promise of a better life in New York, shattered by the unexpected, violent death of Ford's brother.

William Ford Jr, a 24-year-old teacher, was fatally shot in 1992 during a trivial argument with a mechanic on New York's Long Island. A grand jury decided his killer had a "reasonable" fear for his life and shouldn't be tried after Ford bizarrely became "the prime suspect of his own murder," his character scrutinized for signs that

he actually got what was coming to him.

Caricature

In Sebastian Lelio's "A Fantastic Woman"—"a love story that happens to a transgender woman," according to the Chilean director's own synopsis—Vega embodies a woman almost like any other, with feminine wiles but also strength and dignity. "Marina and I share being trans, loving to sing opera and handsome men," says Vega. "But that's it."

The actress described her character as "more elegant than me, more patient... a very peaceful woman" whereas Vega herself is "more explosive, more Latin." For Ford, Vega's performance and the attention it has garnered are important because she was playing an ordinary woman. For a long time, trans characters have been portrayed as disturbed, marginal, depressive and on edge—one clumsy remark away from committing mass murder.

"There were a lot of psychopathic killers, like in 'The Silence of the Lambs,'" said USC professor Gross, contrasting Jonathan Demme's 1991 thriller with "Transparent" and "A Fantastic Woman," and their more authentic characters. "The media industry loves it when they know a new twist becomes possible. Often the stories are about the challenges of being different," Gross told AFP. "This movie 'A Fantastic Woman' is an example of that. They've done it before with gay people, people of color, Jews—the old wine of your narrative in a new bottle... The big challenge always, is that the difference is good, rather than threatening." — AFP

Lifestyle | Features

Something borrowed: Grooms and guests for hire in Vietnam

Kha's wedding day looked perfect from the outside but she was hiding a dark secret: the 27-year-old was three months pregnant and her husband was fake, hired for a staged wedding to avoid the social stigma of becoming a single mother. Breaking from tradition in socially conservative Vietnam can come at a high price for the whole family.



Nguyen Xuan Thien, company founder of Vinamost, one of a handful of companies offering hired wedding guests and services, during an interview with AFP in Hanoi.

part in front of her friends and relatives. "I felt like I was about to drown but I grabbed a life jacket," said a smiling Kha, whose name has been changed to protect her identity. Her parents were in on the secret but Kha plans to tell the rest of her family that her 'husband' left her—preferring to be a divorced single mother than having a baby out of wedlock.

Generation gap

Relationship norms are changing fast among youth in Vietnam, where more than half of the 93 million population is under 30. More couples opting to live together before marriage or shunning the family home afterwards and renting their own apartments.

Abortions are on the rise too, with as many as 300,000 officially documented last year, but the stigma remains high. But when it comes to wedding ceremonies, many still feel immense family or social pressure to hew to tradition, especially from ultraconservative

elders. "People don't have the courage to live true to their hearts, they face traditional habits and customs, cultures and views," said psychology researcher Nguyen Duy Cuong.

"We should put ourselves in the shoes of those who have no way out," he said, offering sympathy for those who pay for the actors to avoid causing a family rift. That's what led Huong and her boyfriend Quan to stage a fake ceremony. His family shunned her because she came from a poor province, but Huong's parents insisted she marry during the year of the rooster on the advice of a fortuneteller.

So the couple hosted a fake wedding in her home province of Nghe An, though they refused to say exactly how much they spent. Her wedding guests were real, but his—father, mother, uncles, aunts, friends—were all hired. Despite the charade, Quan says their commitment is genuine. "It was both fake and real," he told AFP after the traditional ceremony last month, though is circumspect on how he will handle his parents' expectations for his future.

The day almost went off without a hitch until a hired uncle got Quan's childhood neighborhood wrong in his wedding speech to hundreds of guests. Still, Quan was relieved when it was all over, though he must still keep the wedding a secret from his real parents. "It's good to spend a bit of money and make everyone happy. We settled the headaches in peace," Quan explained.

"Treating an illness"

Quan and Huong are among hundreds of couples who hired wedding guests from Vinamost, one of a handful of Hanoi companies offering such services for as much as \$4,400 for a full package. Company founder Nguyen Xuan Thien says they've staged thousands of weddings over the years, though there are no statistics on how many fake weddings are held annually across Vietnam.



In this picture taken on January 23, 2018, Huong (L) gives wedding flowers to her husband inside the wedding hall in Hanoi. — AFP photos



Huong (L) and Quan (R) enter the hall for their wedding party.

Thien said business has steadily grown with more than 400 guests for hire today from less than a dozen about a decade ago. But even he has mixed feelings about social pressures that have carved out a market for his business. "The message to society is that we are very worried. Like a hospital treating illnesses, we are helping brides and their families but we don't want this to grow" Thien told AFP, adding that he considers his work a kind of community service and doesn't make much a profit. Kha, who is due around April, says her fake marriage finally freed her from her lie. She said: "Hiding my pregnancy was so exhausting, but now I feel very confident about the present and the future." — AFP

6 Fake weddings help Vietnamese avoid social stigmas

"My parents would have been the first to be filled with shame if I was pregnant and without a husband," Kha, barely showing, told AFP a month after the \$1,500 fake marriage, which was quietly paid for by her baby's father who is married to another woman. The wedding-guests-for-hire business is growing in Vietnam—where some 70 percent of people over 15 are married—and not just among pregnant women like Kha looking for stand-in husbands.

Young couples are shelling out thousands of dollars to rent parents, aunts, uncles, godparents and friends to appease familial pressure to tie the knot or avoid clashes between in-laws who disapprove of the union. Kha and her fake husband were never legally married—a formality often overshadowed by lavish wedding parties in Vietnam—but she is forever grateful to him for playing the

In China's eSport schools, students learn it pays to play

Most teachers would not be impressed to discover a student playing video games in their class. But at a school in eastern China it is mandatory, part of a drive to train eSport champions and tap into the booming industry. "Dammit, I'm dead!" exclaims one student at the Lanxiang Technical School in eastern Jinan province as dozens of his classmates who are still in the game continue to furiously bash their keyboards.

Once associated with teenagers stuck in their bedrooms, eSports—where players square off in lucrative video game tournaments—are growing fast. Chinese internet research company iResearch estimates 260 million people are already playing eSport games or watching competitions in the country, with the biggest bouts playing out to thousands of spectators in stadiums and many more online.

The growth shows no signs of slowing. Market research firm Newzoo estimates that the eSport industry will be worth \$906 million in global revenues in 2018, a 38.2 percent increase from last year. China alone will account for 18 percent. Gaming has become a team sport at 910 universities across the Asian country, but there is also an increase in educational establishments, such as Lanxiang Technical, actively teaching the skills needed for eSports success.

Around 50 students signed up for its inaugural eSports course, which launched in September. "At first, many parents thought it was just about playing video games," school director Rong Lanxiang, told AFP. "In fact, it's not the case, eSport is developing to a very high degree and it's become an economic growth driver."

League of Legends

At the school in Jinan, students focus on improving their skills in some of the most popular eSport games. League of Legends, one of the world's most played games, is a strategy driven bout where players fight each other in a digital arena. First person shooters like Overwatch, Counter Strike and the hugely popular newcomer PlayerUnknown's Battlegrounds, are also key parts of this unusual syllabus.

"This was a hobby for me, I was really into playing video games, and it's a new industry, I think there are good prospects in it," says Teng Xin, who says he racks up at least 20 hours game time a week. At 22, the student fears he may be too old to be a professional eSportsman, but feels he could be a coach. His eSports course lasts a full three years. During the first year, the classes are 50 percent gaming and 50 percent theory lessons on succeeding within the industry.

After the first year, the students are divided up. The best gamers focus on becoming professional players while the others are taught accompanying skills including event organization, promotion, or coaching. Song Jinze, a shy 16-year-old, says he wants to become a presenter. Big tour-

naments attract huge online audiences and, just like any boxing or football match, a good presenter is a key part of the experience.

It's not a career path his parents were happy with but he was able to persuade them of his prospects. He says: "When I showed how much I love this and that I would persist with it, my dad agreed to let me come here to learn." The annual school tuition fees are around 13,000 yuan (\$2,050), a fairly reasonable price for tuition in China. The most talented players who become part of the school team are exempt from paying. Lanxiang Technical has its sights set on tutoring up to 1,000 eSport students.

Olympic status?

It is all a far cry from the situation less than a decade ago when the government was so concerned about youths spending excessive time on the internet it listed web addiction as a clinical disorder and drafted legislation to limit online time. Today, China is a key eSport market. In November more than 40,000 fans flocked to Beijing's Bird's Nest Olympic stadium to watch the final of the world championships for League of Legends.

eSports are to be included as a medal sport for the first time at the 2022 Asian Games in Hangzhou and proponents are pushing for Olympic status. The eSports industry already employs some 50,000 people in China, according to local data firm CNG, but they estimate the demand is there to employ a further 260,000 across the country.

Alongside Lanxiang Technical, at least two other universities have opened up eSport courses. Overseas, Britain's Staffordshire University plans to launch a three year course next September. Universities in Finland and Moscow already offer such courses, while there is an eSport Academy in Nantes, France. "In the future, eSports will be present in every family and it'll be more popular than basketball and football," predicts Teng Xin. He adds: "To practice traditional sports, you have to go outside and have space. But you just need a computer to practice eSports at home." — AFP



Students practicing computer games in an eSports class at the Lanxiang technical school in Jinan.



SWING TIME: THAIS GO DANCING IN THE STREETS

Dressed in top hats, vintage outfits and shiny shoes, hundreds of Thais grooved to swing music in a town more famous for its ancient Buddhist stupa. More than 300 enthusiasts, including foreign dancers, came out for the shindig on a street in Nakhon Pathom, about an hour from Bangkok. Thailand's swing dance community has grown in recent years and Sunday's street party was organized by a group called "Bangkok Swing," founded in 2011.

They have held three such parties in Nakhon Pathom and hope to make it an annual event. The group's co-founder Chayapong Naviroj, 29, said he discovered swing dancing while attending university in the US. "I wanted to dance and it's a happy dance with swing music," he said. "Humans like to dance. Humans like to touch. Humans like music. It can go on forever." Nakhon Pathom is home to Phra Pathom Chedi, one of Thailand's most revered Buddhist structures, which loomed in the distance as the dancers stomped to music by bands The Shirt Tail Stompers from the UK and the US-based Casey Macgill & Friends.

"It's just meeting people, beautiful people... Having really beautiful music and it's just great fun actually," said Kris Asvanon, a 61-year-old creative consultant based in Bangkok. Nan Kitnichee, a 33-year-old art director also from Bangkok, said she enjoyed the event's throwback theme. "We dress up just to pay respect to the culture and how people in the old days dressed up very nicely and went social dancing," she said. — AFP



People swing dancing in front of Phra Pathom Chedi temple in the central Thai province of Nakhon Pathom. — AFP photos



Lifestyle | Gossip



Dua Lipa's songs inspired by exes

Dua Lipa's songs have been inspired by her terrible former boyfriends. The 22-year-old singer admitted she has a number of exes she can turn to when she needs inspiration for her music, ranging from "emotionally manipulative" to "terrible". She told Rolling Stone: "[Some were] emotionally manipulative. And then I dated this guy who literally would never eat a single vegetable. I was like, 'This is terrible. You eat like a five-year-old. I'm out.'" However, her breakout hit 'Hotter Than Hell' drew some inspiration from Tumblr as although it was inspired by an ex, it was only when she saw the words 'Hotter Than Hell' on the blogging site that the song came together. She explained: "I was going through a tough breakup. Someone who made me feel like I wasn't good enough. But when I wrote this song, I wanted it to seem like he couldn't get enough of me. The song was good, but the chorus wasn't quite there. We were like, 'Let's scrap it.' And I was scrolling through Tumblr, and I see the words 'Hotter than Hell' in red on a black background. And I go, 'That's cool! What if he

thought I was hotter than hell, and I just didn't want him?" Meanwhile, Dua has been working with famed producer Max Martin on her upcoming second album. She said: "I want it to still be pop, but lean more toward. My voice kind of lends itself to that genre. I spent a week with Max, and it was the first time where I felt like there was a lot more method to the things I was writing about. First with him you lay down the melodies, listen to them over and over again, and say, 'Maybe we should change this note.' [For the lyrics], you couldn't use the same words too often, next to each other. And not everything can start on the one, because it doesn't keep it as interesting. I played him some of the stuff I recorded in Jamaica, and he'd say, 'You could totally simplify this. Just repeat that twice. Make it easier for the listener.' He has, like, a lot of rules and theories."



M.I.A bemoans 'corporate' music industry

M.I.A thinks the music industry has become "narrow and corporate". The 42-year rapper has hit out at the current landscape of the music business, suggesting that there is a lack of room for creativity and individuality. She explained: "Music has become so narrow and corporate. To be a famous singer, you can go to Brit School, you can go on 'X-Factor', or maybe you are born into it. "It's not like bands often meet at school now and have a community spirit. I think music has become catalogue fodder, a corporate thing that when we bring Artificial Intelligence into it, for example, using holograms for tours, the human aspect is going to disappear even further." The musician - who is of Sri Lankan Tamil origin - revealed that she simply followed the advice of other people as she pursued her career within the entertainment industry. Speaking to the BBC, M.I.A - who previously dated American DJ Diplo - recalled: "When I came as a refugee to England everyone said 'become a pop star, that's the best thing you can do, that's 'it', so I did that. Then they said, 'move to Beverly Hills and marry a prince and be Cinderella' and I did that too. "I have been constantly trying to find what 'it' is in my life and I think now it's just making work. I just like working. That's always what I've done. "All the consequences of that - all the flak I've taken over the years - they've taught me about society and that feeds into the work I make."

Chas and Dave announce first album in over 30 years



Chas & Dave have announced their first album in over 30 years. The 'Rabbit' rock 'n' roll legends will release 'A Little Bit of Us' on April 20 and it will feature a song addressing Chas Hodges' battle with cancer. The 74-year-old singer - who was diagnosed with oesophagus cancer last year - overcame the disease, and wrote the track 'Sling Your Hook' as a response to his battle. Speaking about the upcoming record, he said: "This is our first Chas & Dave-produced album for over thirty years. Tell you what, though, we ain't waiting another 30 years before we do the next one. The older you get, it seems time goes quicker. Yet as soon as we got in the studio it seemed like yesterday that we were producing our last album. My mum used to say the same thing in 1960: '30 years ago I was 17 and it seems like yesterday.' 'How can 30 years ago seem like yesterday?' says I, slightly mockingly. 'Well it bloody well does', says mum, getting the

deserved last word, and that's that." Chas and his musical partner Dave Peacock, 72, will also be reunited with an old friend for the LP. Chas explained: "The bloke who owns the studio where we recorded much of this album is Brian Juniper. He introduced me to Dave back in 1963 - Dave was at Junior School with him. I was at Senior School with him when, as 13 year olds, we started a Skiffle group over 60 years ago." Last summer, the duo made a triumphant live return after Chas had an operation to remove his tumour and completed his chemotherapy and radiotherapy sessions. And the 'Ain't No Pleasing You' singer revealed that he was determined to get a new LP out and he had lots of songs to pick from. Speaking to BANG Showbiz last year, Chas said: "I've got plenty of stuff that I've been writing over the years, so we've got lots of material to record. We have never rushed into an album, and we won't do it this time."

Dave Stewart wants Eurythmics reunion

Dave Stewart wants to perform on stage with Eurythmics again. The 65-year-old musician would love to reunite with chart-topping singer Annie Lennox to form the new wave band once again, but he says that he'd much rather head out on a tour to perform "big live shows", rather than get into a studio to record a new album. He said: "If I have anything to do with it we should be definitely playing live. I've never officially broken up Eurythmics ... What people don't realize is that we were a live band, we toured and did big live shows." The 'Sweet Dreams (Are Made of This)' hitmaker then went on to praise 63-year-old Annie's unique voice, which he claimed is distinctive and "soulful". Speaking on UK radio station BBC Radio 2, Dave said: "The thing with Annie's voice is that there is a tambour to it, there are loads of singers out there and millions

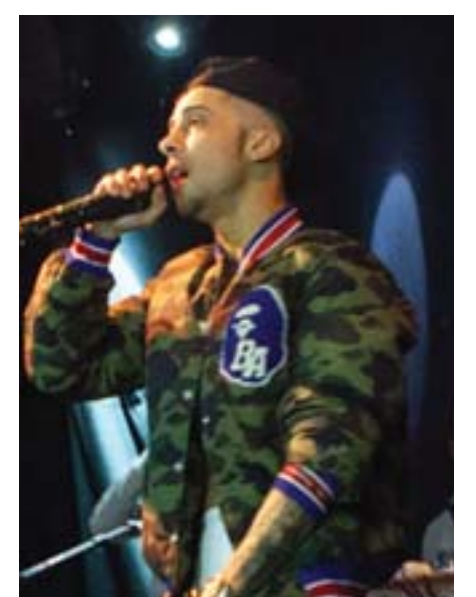
of singing competitions but there are only a few singers who have a voice that has a tambour to it, and you go, 'That's Annie Lennox singing.' It's not just the voice, there's a soul to it." Eurythmics - who were most popular during the 80s and 90s - haven't released an album since 1999, when they put out their ninth studio album 'Peace', but it looks like they won't be in a rush to put out their 10th any time soon. The duo also haven't been out on a tour together since 1999's 'Peace' tour, which was their fifth tour as a band. In February 2014, Annie and Dave reunited for a special performance at the 'The Night That Changed America: A Grammy Salute to The Beatles' show, which marked the 50th anniversary of The Beatles' first performance on 'The Ed Sullivan Show'. During the performance, they played a rendition of Beatles track 'The Fool on the Hill'.



Dappy lost his voice during London gig

Dappy was overcome with emotion on Thursday night when his fans helped him finish his London gig after he lost his voice. The 'No Regrets' hitmaker was told to axe his Levels Tour gig at Camden's Electric Ballroom last night after he was struck down with a throat infection, but he refused to pull the plug on the concert because he didn't want to "let down" his hometown and was blown away when his fans began belting out the lyrics to his songs so that they could all continue the party together. Addressing the audience at the beginning of his set, he said: "My manager told me to cancel this gig tonight because I lost my voice in it but wow that, it's my hometown!" The 30-year-old singer kicked off his show by combining 'Tarzan Pt. 1', 'Tarzan Pt. 2' and 'Tarzan Pt. 3' before jumping straight into 'Hip Hip Hooray' - but unfortunately his voice began to break and he had to rely on the audience to carry the lyrics for him. He said afterwards: "I've lost my voice. I'm so sorry for my voice. Oi mum, are you seeing this?" In a bid to show how grateful he was, Dappy jumped down into the standing area to dance with his fans before he hopped back on stage and accidentally fell over the speaker. He quipped: "Don't worry, I styled it out." Before getting stuck into 'Spaceship', the rapper assured his fans: "Trust me, they thought I was dead and buried but trust me, my journey is just beginning!" He then attempted 'Yin Yang' and 'Good Intentions' but he was left frustrated when his voice cut out, which resulted in him throwing his head into his hands, turning his back to the audience and shouting "Go sake." He explained: "I need you just as much as you need me. We're one big family." He then broke out into 'IOU' and 'Spotlight' but it was clear that all the singing he had been doing throughout the evening was starting to shatter his voice

box and he walked off stage. However, although many thought the show was over, fans were in for a treat as just moments later the lights came up in the centre of the room and he was seen standing on a speaker. He said: "I've got a surprise for you," as N Dubz's 'Playing With Fire' started blasting through the speakers and he jumped down into the pit and was carried through the crowd back to the stage. And - just when fans thought the gig couldn't get any better - Dappy's band mate Fazer emerged from the wings to help him perform 'Feel So Alive' and 'Girls'. Dappy said: "Thank you so much to every single one of you ... How can you have a good show when your voice is gone? This is what matters, we're one big family!" The songwriter - whose real name is Costadinos Contostavlos - wrapped up his set with 'No Regrets' and 'Trill' before thanking the fans for supporting him through the tough times. He said: "Thank you very much ladies and gentlemen. I love every single one of you."



Anne-Marie will release her debut LP Speak Your Mind this April

Anne-Marie's new album 'Speak Your Mind' will be released on April 27. The 26-year-old pop beauty has kept her fans waiting a long time for her debut record, but she has finally confirmed the release date for the CD, which features hit song 'Heavy' and her recent collaboration with anonymous DJ Marshmello, 'FRIENDS'. Sharing a pre-order link on Twitter, the 'Alarm' hitmaker wrote: "OMG my album SPEAK YOUR MIND is officially up for pre order on iTunes RIGHT NOW click the link <http://ad.gt/speaky-ourmind> (sic)" Anne-Marie will

embark on a sold out UK headline tour next month, which will include a date at London's Roundhouse on March 22. And she will be joining Ed Sheeran on his UK & Ireland + European stadium tour this year as his main support, which will include four nights at Wembley Stadium. Speaking about how inspiring the 'Shape of You' hitmaker was on their last jaunt together last year, she exclusively told BANG Showbiz: "Him just as a person brings everyone a bit better in their day. "He's just very inspiring. "I knew he was a great songwriter and performer, but when you actually spend time with him in the studio, it's a bit like, woah, you are actually brilliant and great to be around." Ed's cheeky sense of humor helped to reduce her nerves before she faced the 80,000 people waiting in the audience each night. She added: "It's quite daunting when you think of the numbers. But Ed's so chill, he's everywhere before and after the gig. He's not like wrapped away somewhere not conversing with people. I see him before gigs, we have a chat and we hang out afterwards." Meanwhile, Anne-Marie will be able to bond with Ed's fiancée Cherry Seaborn during her upcoming shows with the 'Perfect' singer. Ed said recently: "It's actually really easy for Cherry to come. She works and can't give up her job. But it's gonna be easy because it's weekends and two months of it is in Europe so she can just pop out."



KYLIE MINOGUE ANNOUNCES GOLDEN UK AND IRELAND TOUR

Kylie Minogue has announced a UK and Ireland arena tour. The 'Dancing' hitmaker will bring her 'Golden' tour to Newcastle's Metro Radio Arena on September 19, before stopping off at London's The O2 arena for two nights on September 26 and September 27, and wrapping up the extensive run at Belfast's The SSE Arena on October 8. It follows the announcement that the

Australian pop megastar will perform at London's 700-capacity Cafe De Paris on March 13, before hitting Manchester, Barcelona, Paris and Berlin. Speaking about the forthcoming club concerts, Kylie said: "I'm so excited to perform songs from my new album 'Golden' in these iconic European clubs. "Each of these venues is very special and - just as I found making the new album in Nashville to be so energizing - these shows will be new, intimate and fun. "I just can't wait to bring these new songs to life and of course, throw in a few surprises for my fans." The shows come ahead of the singer's new album 'Golden' on April 6. The 49-year-old singer wrote her long-awaited record in the home city of country music, Nashville, and admitted it was the perfect environment in which to pen new material. She shared: "I hadn't been there. I said to a few people, 'I'm going to Nashville. Have you been there?' They spoke with such excitement and love for the city, literally. "They were giving me advice on which bar to go to and where to eat and blah blah blah ..." Kylie ended her relationship with British actor Joshua Sasse at the turn of 2017, and the Australian star admitted the songwriting process proved to be cathartic for her. She explained: "Songwriting can be a bit like therapy; you have to feel comfortable to talk about personal things." Tickets for the arena shows go on sale on March 2.



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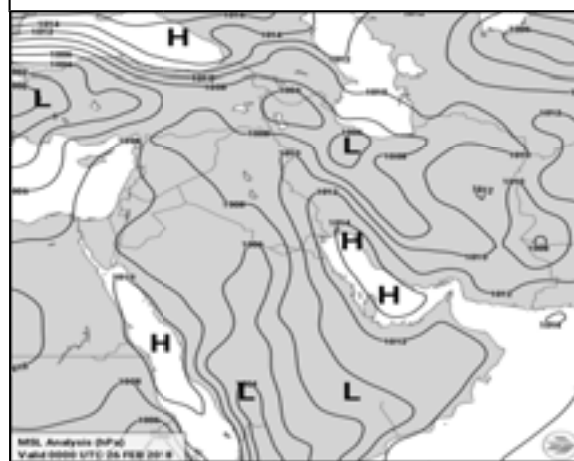
BY DAY: Partly cloudy with light variable wind to light to moderate freshening at times south easterly wind, with speed of 08 - 40 km/h with a chance for rain that might be thundery later on.

BY NIGHT: Partly cloudy to cloudy with light to moderate freshening at times south easterly wind, with speed of 20 - 45 km/h causing rising dust with a chance for rain that might be thundery at times.

WEATHER WARNING	No Current Warnings
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STATION	MAX. EXP.	MIN. REC.
KUWAIT CITY	24 °C	16 °C
KUWAIT AIRPORT	24 °C	12 °C
ABDALY	23 °C	12 °C
BUBYAN	22 °C	-- °C
JAHRA	25 °C	14 °C
FAILAKA ISLAND	21 °C	15 °C
SALMIYAH	23 °C	16 °C
AHMADI	21 °C	16 °C
NUWASIB	23 °C	14 °C
WAFRA	26 °C	13 °C
SALMY	23 °C	12 °C

SFC. CHART 26/02/2018 0000 UTC



4 DAYS FORECAST						
DAY	DATE	WEATHER	Temperatures		Wind Direction	Wind Speed
			MAX.	MIN.		
Tuesday	02/27	Partly cloudy and Warm causing rising dust with a chance for rain that might be thundery at times	24 °C	13 °C	SE	20 - 45 km/h
Wednesday	02/28	Warm and Clouds will decrease gradually	25 °C	13 °C	VRB-NW	08 - 30 km/h
Thursday	03/01	Warm and Mostly Sunny	25 °C	14 °C	NE-VRB	08 - 30 km/h
Friday	03/02	Warm and Mostly Sunny	27 °C	12 °C	VRB	08 - 20 km/h

PRAYER TIMES	
Fajr	04:58
Sunrise	06:17
Zuhr	12:01
Asr	15:18
Sunset	17:45
Isha	19:02

RECORDED YESTERDAY AT KUWAIT AIRPORT	
MAX. Temp.	22 °C
MIN. Temp.	14 °C
MAX. RH	98 %
MIN. RH	48 %
MAX. Wind	N 39 km/h
TOTAL RAINFALL IN 24 HR.	0 mm

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

ACCOMMODATION CHANGE OF NAME

Sharing accommodation For Filipino ONLY Farwaniya block 1, near gulfmart. Available already, Contact 94418396 or 69972330 22-2-2018

I, Chundu Reddaiahnaidu holder of Indian Passport NO. G8267663 resided at Sunduvaripally (VI) Mittamidapalli, Rajampet, Kadapa, AP. Now I want to change my name Chundu Reddaiahnaidu to Chundu Bala Reddaiah. (C 5382) 20-2-2018

Automated enquiry about the Civil ID card is **1889988**

EMERGENCY
 112

Airline

American Airlines	22087425
	22087426
Kuwait Airways	171
Jazeera Airways	177
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
Indian Airlines	22456700
Oman Air	22958787
Turkish Airlines	22453820/1
Aeroflot	22404838/9

Directorate General of Civil Aviation Home Page (www.kuwait-airport.com.kw) DIAL161 FOR AIRPORT INFORMATION

Arrival Flights on Monday 27/2/2018					Departure Flights on Monday 27/2/2018				
Airlines	Flt	Route	Time		Airlines	Flt	Route	Time	
JAI	572	Mumbai	00:05	KAC 774	Riyadh	13:40			
JZR	607	Kochi	00:10	QTR 8511	Doha	13:55			
MEA	406	Beirut	00:20	PAL 668	Manila	14:00			
FDB	8063	Dubai	00:40	KAC 618	Doha	14:15			
JZR	539	Cairo	00:50	KAC 516	Tehran	14:20			
PGT	858	Istanbul	00:55	QTR 1078	Doha	14:20			
THY	772	Istanbul	00:55	FDB 059	Dubai	14:20			
QTR	8202	Amsterdam	01:00	KAC 672	Dubai	14:25			
KAC	102	London	01:20	GFA 221	Bahrain	14:40			
DLH	625	Bahrain	01:45	SVA 500	Jeddah	14:45			
UAE	853	Dubai	01:45	KNE 529	Jeddah	14:55			
THY	764	Istanbul	01:50	KAC 304	Mumbai	15:10			
AXB	395	Kozhikode	02:00	KAC 788	Jeddah	15:10			
JZR	267	Beirut	02:10	ETD 303	Abu Dhabi	15:15			
ETH	620	Addis Ababa	02:15	KAC 562	Amman	15:30			
QTR	1086	Doha	02:20	KAC 502	Beirut	15:30			
GFA	211	Bahrain	02:30	OMA 645	Muscat	15:35			
KLM	446	Bahrain	02:30	UAE 857	Dubai	15:45			
OMA	643	Muscat	02:55	QTR 1072	Doha	15:55			
KKK	1268	Istanbul	02:55	FDK 801	Damascus	16:00			
KAC	414	Bangkok	03:05	ABY 127	Sharjah	16:00			
RJA	644	Amman	03:05	KAC 118	New York	16:00			
MSR	606	Luxor	03:05	JZR 779	Jeddah	16:25			
ETD	305	Abu Dhabi	03:10	FDB 051	Dubai	16:40			
MSR	612	Cairo	03:15	RJA 640	Amman	16:55			
QTR	1076	Doha	03:50	SYR 341	Damascus	17:00			
LMU	5510	Cairo	04:00	KAC 542	Cairo	17:05			
KAC	382	Delhi	04:15	SVA 510	Riyadh	17:15			
KAC	418	Manila	04:25	GFA 215	Bahrain	17:30			
KAC	1544	Cairo	04:25	JZR 125	Bahrain	17:35			
UAE	873	Dubai	04:25	JZR 777	Jeddah	17:40			
KAC	784	Jeddah	04:35	WAN 984	Tbilisi	17:50			
KAC	284	Dhaka	04:50	JZR 325	Al Najaf	17:50			
FDB	069	Dubai	04:55	UAE 875	Dubai	18:00			
THY	6376	Istanbul	05:10	FDB 063	Dubai	18:10			
JZR	609	Hyderabad	05:10	JZR 177	Dubai	18:15			
DHX	170	Bahrain	05:20	MSR 620	Cairo	18:30			
JZR	143	Doha	05:25	QTR 1080	Doha	18:50			
THY	770	Istanbul	05:25	KAC 744	Dammam	19:10			
KAC	346	Ahmedabad	05:30	KAC 776	Riyadh	19:20			
KAC	332	Trivandrum	05:40	ABY 123	Sharjah	19:25			
KAC	302	Mumbai	06:10	KAC 555	Alexandria	19:25			
KAC	678	Dubai	06:30	KAC 662	Abu Dhabi	19:25			
WAN	338	Alexandria	06:40	GFA 217	Bahrain	19:30			
KAC	206	Islamabad	06:50	KAC 156	Istanbul	19:30			
JZR	529	Asyut	06:50	WAN 356	Luxor	19:35			
BAW	157	London	07:15	KAC 161	Cairo	19:40			
KAC	354	Bengaluru	07:35	KAC 674	Dubai	19:45			
FDB	053	Dubai	07:35	FDB 057	Dubai	19:50			
KAC	358	Kochi	07:40	KAC 616	Bahrain	19:55			
FDB	8061	Dubai	07:50	KAC 166	Rome	20:10			
ETD	995	Abu Dhabi/Bahrain	07:50	KAC 620	Doha	20:15			
KAC	384	Delhi	08:00	OMA 647	Muscat	20:20			
UAE	855	Dubai	08:35	QTR 1088	Doha	20:45			
ETD	301	Abu Dhabi	09:05	DLH 624	Frankfurt	20:45			
ABY	125	Sharjah	09:05	ETD 307	Abu Dhabi	21:20			
QTR	1070	Doha	09:10	MEA 402	Beirut	21:20			
FDB	055	Dubai	09:40	KAC 229	Colombo	21:20			
SVA	512	Riyadh	10:00	KAC 168	Paris	21:20			
IRA	675	Lar	10:40	KAC 786	Jeddah	21:25			
GFA	213	Bahrain	10:40	KAC 172	Frankfurt	21:30			
WAN	114	Bahrain	11:00	UAE 859	Dubai	21:35			
MSC	403	Asyut	11:15	GFA 219	Bahrain	21:45			
QTR	1074	Doha	11:20	KLM 445	Amsterdam	21:50			
JZR	165	Dubai	11:30	WAN 116	Bahrain	21:50			
WAN	134	Doha	11:55	KAC 564	Amman	22:00			
MEA	404	Beirut	11:55	QTR 1082	Doha	22:05			
KAC	614	Bahrain	12:10	ETD 309	Abu Dhabi	22:15			
SAW	701	Damascus	12:30	AIC 987	Chennai/Hyderabad	22:25			
KAC	286	Dhaka	12:35	PIA 239	Sialkot	22:35			
JZR	561	Sohag	12:45	JZR 241	Amman	22:40			
UAE	871	Dubai	12:50	JZR 185	Dubai	23:10			
MSR	610	Cairo	13:00	JAI 574	Mumbai	23:15			
AXB	393	Kozhikode	13:15	MSC 405	Sohag	23:30			
				BBC 043	Dhaka	23:30			
				FDB 071	Dubai	23:45			



JERUSALEM: Christians stand outside the main entrance of the closed Church of the Holy Sepulchre in the Old City of Jerusalem yesterday. —AFP

Pilgrims locked out as holy Jerusalem site remains shut

Closure in protest against Israeli tax measures, proposed law

JERUSALEM: The Jerusalem church built at what many consider the holiest site in Christianity remained closed for a second day yesterday to protest Israeli tax measures and a proposed law, leaving hundreds of disappointed and perplexed pilgrims locked outside. Christian leaders took the rare step of closing the Church of the Holy Sepulchre on Sunday at noon in a bid to pressure Israeli authorities into abandoning the measures. They said the church, a major pilgrimage site where thousands visit daily, would be closed until further notice.

Church officials said yesterday it was not clear when it would reopen, depending on discussions with Christian leaders and Israeli authorities. The church is built where Christians believe Jesus (PBUH) was crucified, buried and resurrected. Custody of it is shared by the Greek Orthodox, Armenian and Roman Catholic denominations. Disappointed tourists gathered yesterday in front of its large wooden doors in Jerusalem's Old City hoping they would have the chance to visit, some having difficulty understanding why it was closed.

Some held an improvised prayer around a wooden cross. "We were told it's political. It is disheartening - it is such a

holy place," said Aleana Doughty, a 35-year-old dental hygienist visiting with a group from the United States. Michael Katten and his wife Vanagakshi, visiting from India, were also locked out. Vanagakshi said she had promised to bring her mother something from the church and say a prayer. "It is silly that they cannot solve this," Michael Katten said.

Christian leaders are angry over attempts by Israeli authorities in Jerusalem to enforce tax collection on church property they consider commercial, saying exemptions only apply to places of worship or religious teaching. They also say legislation being considered by Israel's government would allow church property to be expropriated. EU foreign policy chief Federica Mogherini told reporters in Brussels "we hope that a solution can be found quickly". "Jerusalem is a holy city to the three monotheistic religions. The special status and character of the city must be maintained and respected by all." The Lutheran Church of the Redeemer, located near the Holy Sepulchre, was also closed in protest yesterday.

Jerusalem Mayor Nir Barkat says the city is due 650 million shekels (\$186 million) in uncollected taxes on church

properties. He stresses the Church of the Holy Sepulchre and all other churches are exempt, with the changes only affecting establishments like "hotels, halls and businesses" owned by the churches. Christian leaders say the measure jeopardizes their ability to conduct their work, which also includes social services to those in need.

A separate bill seeks to allay the fears of Israelis who live in homes on lands previously held by the Greek Orthodox Church and which were sold to private developers, according to the lawmaker proposing the legislation. Recent land sales by the Greek Orthodox Church - a major landowner in Jerusalem - to unknown buyers have drawn fire from both Israelis and Palestinians. Palestinians fear the sales will favor Israeli settlement construction in east Jerusalem, while Israelis are concerned over private developers' intentions for the land.

The bill would allow certain lands sold by the Greek Orthodox Church to be handed over to the state, which would then compensate those who bought it from the church. "This reminds us all of laws of a similar nature which were enacted against the Jews during a dark period in Europe," Christian

leaders said in a statement on Sunday. They also said recent Israeli measures seemed to be "an attempt to weaken the Christian presence in Jerusalem".

Rare move

The decision to close the church was extremely rare. In 1990, Christian sites including the Holy Sepulchre were closed for a day to protest the installation of Jewish settlers near the church, located in Israeli-annexed east Jerusalem. Christian sites were shut for two days in 1999 to protest the planned construction of a mosque near Nazareth's Church of the Annunciation.

Visits are expected to increase for Easter, which falls on April 1 for Western Christians and April 8 for the Orthodox. "A lot of people spent a lot of money to come see the most pivotal place of their faith," said Father Kevin Peek, a 47-year-old visiting with a group of 27 people from the United States. "So of course they are disappointed. But we looked it up on the Internet, we read the statement of the churches and we completely understand." —AFP

Kuwaiti aid reaches Ghouta...

Continued from Page 1

February 27 - tomorrow - from 9:00 to 14:00 there will be a humanitarian pause," Defense Minister Sergei Shoigu said. According to a statement sent to AFP, he said there should be similar pauses in the southern Al-Tanf border region and Rukban, near the Jordanian border. Shoigu said "humanitarian corridors" would be opened to allow civilians to leave, adding that their locations would soon be divulged.

UN chief Antonio Guterres had expressed frustration with the lack of results the resolution yielded and stressed yesterday in Geneva: "Eastern Ghouta cannot wait. It is high time to stop this hell on earth." The intensity of the bombardment on Eastern Ghouta had eased somewhat over the weekend but deadly strikes and shelling never stopped. Among the latest victims were nine members of the same family killed when their home in Douma, the main town in the enclave, collapsed on their heads yesterday.

"Nine civilians from the same family were killed in regime air strikes in Douma, after midnight," said Rami Abdel Rahman, the head of the Britain-based Syrian Observatory for Human Rights monitoring organization. "Some of the bodies are still stuck in the rubble," he said. An AFP correspondent in Douma said the bombardment had been very heavy overnight and impeded rescuers in their work. A total of 22 civilians, including seven children, were killed yesterday, the Observatory said.

Meanwhile, Kuwait has begun delivering urgently needed aid to besieged civilians in Eastern Ghouta amid bombardment that resumed a day after the United Nations Security Council adopted a resolution calling for a 30-day truce in Syria. The vanguard Kuwaiti initiative will hopefully encourage international relief organizations to follow suit and implement the UNSC Resolution 2401 designed to secure delivery of humanitarian supplies to the needy in Syria along with halting fighting for 30 days.

Despite reports indicating that the warring parties have not muzzled their guns and the superpowers have not worked out a mechanism on ceasing fire, Kuwait on Sunday decided to proceed with distributing relief supplies to the besieged civilians in Eastern Ghouta for 15 days.

Kuwaiti Red Crescent Society (KRCS), in coordination with the Turkish Relief Association, has been delivering the humanitarian supplies to the populace in Eastern Ghouta, thus depicting Kuwait's unique role as the UN-acclaimed humanitarian center. KRCS Chairperson Dr Hilal Al-Sayer, in a statement to KUNA, affirmed that the Kuwaiti people will spare no effort for securing humanitarian necessities for the afflicted Syrian people, particularly under the current hard conditions. The 15-day humanitarian project for Eastern Ghouta aims at relieving the encircled civilians, estimated at 126,700, the bulk of whom cannot secure food including milk for babies.

The latest initiative is part of ongoing efforts by Kuwait, under the leadership of HH the Amir Sheikh Sabah Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah - crowned with the UN designation as a humanitarian leader - to alleviate the Syrian people's suffering since the flare-up of the Syrian crisis in March 2011. As part of this approach, Kuwait has hosted three international conferences pledging aid for the Syrian people and took part in a fourth convention hosted by London. Kuwait, along with other key donors, have pledged to donate millions of dollars in aid to Syria.

The Syrian regime intensified its air campaign against Eastern Ghouta, which has been outside government control since 2012, at the beginning of the month. On Feb 18, the Syrian government further turned up the heat on the territory controlled by Islamist groups. More than 550 civilians, almost a quarter of them children, have since been killed and extensive destruction wrought on the enclave's towns. The hospitals and clinics that were not destroyed by strikes have struggled to process the more than 2,000 people wounded over the same period.

The UN said in a statement yesterday that a staggering 76 percent of private housing in Eastern Ghouta was damaged. Residents trapped in the wreckage of their own homes have bled to death as rescuers were targeted even as they tried to save lives. Much of the nearly 400,000-strong population of Eastern Ghouta has moved underground, with families pitching tents in basements and venturing out only to assess damage to their property and buy food.

Another flashpoint in Syria has been the northern region of Afrin, where Kurdish forces have come under attack from neighboring Turkey since Jan 20. Turkey has warned it did not consider that the UN ceasefire resolution, which is not limited to Eastern Ghouta but whose wording excludes operations against terror groups, should affect its offensive on Afrin. Macron yesterday called Turkish warplanes had struck a village near Jandaris in the southwest of Afrin, killing five civilians. A YPG-led alliance said its forces had responded in self-defense to Turkish attacks, and that fighting raged on multiple fronts around Afrin. Five Turkish soldiers were killed in the space of 24 hours, the Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF) said.

The Observatory said Turkish troops now held a continuous strip on the edge of Afrin. The advance opens a corridor that links territory in Aleppo province under the control of rebels backed by Turkey with the insurgent stronghold of Idlib province. — Agencies

Supreme Court rejects Trump over 'Dreamers'

WASHINGTON: The US Supreme Court yesterday dealt a setback to President Donald Trump, requiring his administration to maintain protections he has sought to end for hundreds of thousands of immigrants brought illegally into the United States as children. The justices refused to hear the administration's appeal of a federal judge's Jan 9 nationwide injunction that halted Trump's move to rescind a program that benefits immigrants known as "Dreamers" implemented in 2012 by his Democratic predecessor, Barack Obama.

The protections were due to start phasing out beginning in March under the Republican president's action, announced in September. Under the Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA) program, roughly 700,000 young adult, mostly Hispanics, are protected from deportation and given work permits for two-year periods, after which they must re-apply. Congress so far has failed to pass legislation to address the fate of the "Dreamers," including a potential path to citizenship.

San Francisco-based US District Judge William Alsup ruled last month that DACA must remain in place while litigation over the legality of Trump's action is resolved, prompting the administration's unusual appeal bypassing a federal appeals court and going directly to the Supreme Court.

"The DACA program - which provides work permits and myriad government benefits to illegal immigrants en masse - is clearly unlawful. The district judge's decision to unilaterally re-impose a program that Congress had explicitly and repeatedly rejected is a usurpation of legislative authority," White House spokesman Raj Shah said. "We look forward to having this case expeditiously heard by the appeals court

and, if necessary, the Supreme Court, where we fully expect to prevail," Shah added.

The administration argued that Obama exceeded his powers under the constitution when he bypassed Congress and created DACA. Alsup ruled that the challengers, including the states of California, Maine, Maryland and Minnesota and Obama's former homeland security secretary Janet Napolitano, were likely to succeed in arguing that the administration's decision to end DACA was arbitrary.

In a brief order, the Supreme Court justices did not explain their reasoning, but said the appeal was "denied without prejudice," indicating they will maintain an open mind on the underlying legal issue still being considered by a lower court, the San Francisco-based 9th US Circuit Court of Appeals. The high court also said it expects the lower court to "proceed expeditiously to decide this case."

California Attorney General Xavier Becerra, a Democrat, called the administration's bid to bypass the 9th Circuit, which has ruled against Trump on other matters, "unusual and unnecessary". "We look forward to explaining to the Ninth Circuit court that DACA is fully legal. For the sake of the Dreamers who help make our economy and our state strong, the rescission of DACA should not be allowed to stand," Becerra said in a statement. The DACA dispute is the latest major case brought to the Supreme Court for its consideration arising from Trump's immigration policies. The justices are due to hear arguments in April on the legality of his latest travel ban order barring entry to people from several Muslim-majority nations.

Greisa Martinez, a DACA recipient who works in Washington with the immigrants' rights group United We Dream, said she was grateful the Supreme Court's action gave people already enrolled in the program more time, but said most young immigrants who are eligible for the protections have not signed up. "We need a permanent solution now," Martinez told reporters. "This back and forth on DACA and the legislative process has created a crisis in our community." — Reuters

Saudi Arabia to auction detained...

Continued from Page 1

companies to run, or foreign assets owned by Sanea or Saad. The auction is set to take place a few weeks after the government wound down the anti-corruption crackdown that involved the detention of scores of senior Saudi officials, including princes, in Riyadh's luxurious Ritz-Carlton Hotel. The government has said the process raised more than \$100 billion, mostly in the form of land, stakes in businesses and other illiquid assets rather than cash.

The proceeds from Etqaan's auction will be distributed to creditors via a legal process overseen by a three-judge

tribunal set up in 2016 to handle claims against Saad and Ahmad Hamad Al-Gosaibi & Bros Co, another big local conglomerate that defaulted on debt in 2009. Creditors have pursued legal battles over the debt around the world for almost a decade, while the two groups have squabbled over which of them is to blame for the meltdown.

In an effort to stave off the liquidation process, Saad late last year launched its own process to engage with creditors. It hired a financial consultancy, Reemas Group, to offer a proposed settlement covering \$4 bln in debt. Reemas did not immediately respond to a Reuters request for comment. Saad Group has been told by the court that it needs to obtain the agreement of creditors to its plan as soon as possible and then the court will consider the proposal, according to the sources. In an email sent by Reemas last year, it told creditors its intention was to secure preliminary consent from the majority of lenders to its proposal to put the auction process at a halt. — Reuters

Sports

Alonso does six laps before a wheel comes off at F1 testing

Ricciardo sets early pace for Red Bull

BARCELONA: Fernando Alonso did six laps of the Barcelona circuit before crashing into the gravel after a wheel came off his McLaren at the start of Formula One's pre-season testing yesterday. The former world champion, who is starting a new engine partnership with Renault after three troubled years with Honda, played down the incident.

"We had a wheel-nut issue, we're fine," executive director Zak Brown told reporters at the Circuit de Catalunya, with Alonso going back out again before the lunch break for a further four laps. "All the teams will have a variety of issues throughout testing, that's exactly what it's for," added the American. "We're going to lose very little time, no big deal at all."

The right rear wheel came off Alonso's car during the first 40 minutes of a chilly morning in Spain as teams took part in their first official test since November. The double world champion, who gave the new papaya orange and blue car a trouble-free shakedown at the Navarra circuit in northern Spain on Friday, stepped out of the stranded car as marshals waved red flags to halt the session.

The Spaniard inspected the damage closely before the car was loaded on to a truck and taken back to the

pits for repairs. The track action then re-started, with Red Bull's Australian Daniel Ricciardo top of the morning timesheets with 60 laps and a fastest of one minute 20.179 seconds.

Valtteri Bottas was second for champions Mercedes, and completed 58 laps with a best time two tenths off Ricciardo's, while Renault's Nico Hulkenberg did the most distance with 73 laps.

"There is no drama in the garage. Everyone is quite relaxed, getting on with it and it is quite an easy fix," said Brown, who had said last week that he expected all eyes to be on McLaren this season. "This team is used to public pressure and having eyes on us," he added.

"We enjoy that and we like to step up to the plate and thrive on the opportunity so we are not feeling any added pressure that we don't already put on ourselves." Yesterday's test comes a year after a nightmare start for McLaren, with Alonso managing only one lap before lunch after multiple engine failures. That set the tone for a dismal season that ended with the sport's second most successful team languishing in ninth place overall. The season starts in Australia on March 25, with McLaren seeking their first win since 2012. — Reuters



MONTMELO: McLaren's Spanish driver Fernando Alonso drives at the Circuit de Catalunya yesterday in Montmelo on the outskirts of Barcelona during the first day of the first week of tests for the Formula One Grand Prix season. — AFP

“We had a wheel-nut issue, we’re fine”

British boxer dies hours after winning fight

LONDON: The death of heavyweight Scott Westgarth was described as a disaster by British Boxing chief Robert Smith yesterday although he said it was impossible to make the sport 100 percent safe.

Westgarth, 31, won his fight against Dec Spelman in Doncaster on Saturday but looked uncomfortable as he was interviewed ringside after his points victory. He was taken to Royal Hallamshire Hospital but his condition deteriorated shortly before arrival and his death was confirmed by his promoter Stefy Bull yesterday.

It was the first death in professional boxing since Canada's Tim Hague died two days after a fight last June. A year earlier Scotland's Mike Towell died from a brain injury following a bout.

Smith, a former boxer and now the British Boxing Board of Control's general secretary, reacted with shock to the latest death in a sport often criticised for its brutal nature. "It's terrible for the sport and terrible for the family and we send our condolences to Scott's family," Smith told Reuters.

Smith said the sport had made huge advances in safety since the 1980s and that Britain had an enviable record. "We are one of the most forward-thinking commissions in the world regarding medical aspects," he said. "Some people don't like us because they say we are too strict."

"This is a tough tough sport and we try to make it as safe as possible but you can't make it 100 percent



Scott Westgarth after winning the fight against Dec Spelman.

safe," he added. "But that doesn't take away from the fact that this is a disaster, but more importantly it's a disaster for his family and that's the most important thing." Events such as Westgarth's death inevitably lead to soul-searching by those in the sport and fuel the

debate about the sport's ethics. "We all do this for a reason. But that doesn't take away the feeling I have today of 'why am I doing this?'," Smith said. "We will continue. If it's not me it will be someone else. But it makes you question why you are bothering." — Reuters

Thomas wins Honda Classic in playoff

MIAMI: American Justin Thomas rolled in a birdie on the first hole of a playoff to out-duel third round leader Luke List and win the PGA Tour's Honda Classic on Sunday. The 24-year-old Thomas posted his eighth win on the USPGA Tour and his seventh victory in his last 31 tournaments.

"It was another level of difficulty, not only the amount of people I was trying to beat, but this golf course," said Thomas. "I am so proud of myself and how I played. When you get out of position you have to try to salvage par and that's what I did."

"I just stayed patient. I know what to expect, how tough it can be, and it feels good to come out on top." Thomas closed with a two-under 68 to catch 54-hole leader List, who had a one-under 69. They both finished with an eight-under 272 total at the PGA National course.

Sweden's Alex Noren shot a three-under 67 to finish alone in third, just one stroke back of the leaders. England's Tommy Fleetwood placed fourth after shooting a 69 to reach six-under 274 total, two shots adrift of Thomas and List. Tiger Woods fired an even-par 70 in the fourth round for an even-par 280 total to land in 12th place.

Thomas hit a beautiful approach shot on the only hole of the playoff as his ball sailed over a bunker and landed on the green giving him a long downhill putt for birdie. His first putt stopped four feet (1.2 meters) short but he made

no mistake on the second putt for the victory that will move him into number three in the world rankings.

American List got into trouble off the tee as his drive on 18 went right and landed in the middle of a small cluster of trees. His next shot sailed way left over the gallery and into the grandstand fence. He two-putted for a par.

'STING A LITTLE BIT'

"It is going to sting a little bit," said List. "In a playoff, you can't give Justin a par because he is going to hit birdies." Thomas' final round was not without controversy. He tried to have a spectator removed on the 16th tee for heckling him and then had to apologize after the tournament for using a four-letter word on the green at 18 when he made the winning putt live on television.

"I feel pretty terrible and uncomfortable. Everybody heard that," Thomas said. Woods followed his 69 in the third round with a 70 on Sunday to finish eight shots back of the top spot on the difficult Florida golf course. Saturday's 69 was the first score in the 60s in nine rounds this year for the 14-time major winner, who returned to US PGA Tour competition late January at Torrey Pines after back problems.

"I made a big leap this week. I really hit it well," said Woods, the former world number one. Woods finished with four birdies, two bogeys and one double bogey on Sunday. He says his game and his problematic back are starting to feel good again and the key is to maintain his rigorous fitness routine. "I played well this week," he said. "Overall I am very pleased with the progress I have made."

"My body feels good. I need to keep it feeling good. I need to get back in the gym and keep it strong." Earlier this month, Woods told a Los Angeles television station that the extended time off, due to injuries, has given him a



PALM BEACH GARDENS: Justin Thomas with the winner's trophy after winning a playoff during the final round of the Honda Classic at PGA National Resort and Spa on Sunday in Palm Beach Gardens, Florida. — AFP

new appreciation for golf fans. "I have been home a lot. I haven't been able to move much the last three months. So many people have just wished me well," he said. "I have been away from the game for a long enough time that I saw a side of the public I didn't know." — AFP

Toro Rosso expect trouble-free year with Honda

BARCELONA: Toro Rosso began their new Formula One partnership with Honda in optimistic fashion yesterday, with team principal Franz Tost looking forward

to proving the doom-mongers wrong. Honda's engine has been the least reliable and slowest on the starting grid for the past three seasons, with the Japanese company's reputation badly damaged by the failed relationship with McLaren.

McLaren have now switched to what should be a more competitive Renault power unit, with Red Bull-owned Toro Rosso leaving the French manufacturer to become Honda's sole partner.

"We won't have any troubles," Tost told reporters after presentation of the team's new STR13 car in the Barcelona pit lane ahead of pre-season testing. "The power unit is working quite well. I am convinced that

Honda has the capacity and the know-how to develop the engine and that we will be where we all expect to be." The Austrian added that Honda had made great progress in terms of reliability and performance. "we are all looking forward to the season," he said. A limited-mileage filming day at Misano in eastern Italy last week went smoothly and the team reported that the engine fired up first time without a glitch.

Toro Rosso have New Zealander Brendon Hartley and Frenchman Pierre Gasly as their driver line-up, both starting their first full seasons. Hartley was the first on track on Monday, queuing at the pit lane exit to get the session started ahead of all the rest.

Force India name change likely by Australia

BARCELONA: Force India unveiled their new Formula One car yesterday but kept everyone guessing about what name they will race under this season. The Silverstone-based team, who have finished fourth overall for the last two years, have been considering dropping the India from their name for some time to make themselves more attractive to potential sponsors.

Otmar Szafnauer, the chief operating officer, told Reuters on the first day of testing with the VJM11 car at Barcelona's Circuit de Catalunya that they had a new name in mind but gave no details.

He said it was "more than likely" to be changed before the first race of the season in Australia on March 25. The team had previously said such a change could happen before the start of testing.

"We're talking to some people that are thinking of perhaps sponsoring the team and they are keen for a name change, but that's not for 2018, That's for 2019," Szafnauer added. "So it could very well be that it goes until '19 but, you know, why wait? That's why I say it's probably more likely than not that it will happen."

Any change of team name has to be approved by Formula One, with a majority of the teams also voting in favour. Szafnauer said Force India had yet to make the formal request. Force India, who have Mexican driver Sergio Perez again partnering Frenchman Esteban Ocon this season, announced new sponsors in Mexican oil company Pemex and lubricants company Ravenol.

The team are co-owned by tycoon Vijay Mallya and Sahara Group founder Subrata Roy, who have both had well-documented legal problems. Mallya, who is also team principal, is fighting a request to extradite him from Britain to face fraud charges in India related to the collapse of his Kingfisher Airlines.

Roy's embattled Sahara conglomerate has been involved in its own long-running dispute after being ordered to repay billions of dollars to investors in bonds that were ruled to have been mis-sold.

Russian development driver Nikita Mazepin gave the pink liveried car its track debut, with Perez and Ocon testing on Tuesday and Wednesday. Thursday's plans remained uncertain after Canadian reserve Nicholas Latifi withdrew for health reasons. "A serious infection put me in hospital last week and I'm now recovering at home," the 22-year-old said on Twitter. "Aiming to be back on track in the next four weeks." — Reuters

Honda's Toyoharu Tanabe, a Formula One veteran, told reporters that the company had suffered a hard time since returning to the sport but had learned a lot from the tough McLaren experience.

"We have used that knowledge for this year on reliability and performance as well," he said, adding that the engine concept remained unchanged. Toro Rosso were seventh overall in 2017. But with a manufacturer fully devoted to them for the first time, they hope to move higher in a 21-race championship that starts in Australia on March 25. "The target for Toro Rosso has to be in the front part of the midfield, around fifth place," Tost said. — Reuters

Sports

Record Japan Olympic haul is a boost for 2020: Tokyo boss

Japanese athletes have done splendidly

PYEONGCHANG: Japan's record medal haul at the Pyeongchang Winter Olympics will give the country a lift as it prepares to host the 2020 Games, Tokyo's top organiser told AFP.

Japanese athletes collected 13 medals, four of them gold, in their best-ever Winter Games performance, Tokyo 2020's chief executive officer noted, providing a welcome fillip as the city pushes ahead with preparations. Fans came out in large numbers at the airport in Narita, east of Tokyo, waving placards and banners saying "Thank you for gold medal" and "Fly High Yuzu", in reference to figure skater Yuzuru Hanyu.

"I took the bullet train from Kobe (western Japan) to see them. It was worth a trip," said a middle-aged woman. The showing was a welcome boost for Japan, with Tokyo hosting the Summer Games in 2020.

"Japanese athletes have done splendidly, winning more winter medals than ever before," Toshiro Muto said in an interview in Pyeongchang.

"Breaking that record will give the Tokyo Olympics a boost," he added. "At Tokyo 2020 we expect to win even more medals hopefully so it will be important in the time left to work hard in the development of top athletes." As the Olympic torch passes from Pyeongchang to Tokyo, Japanese organisers will be under increased pressure to complete venues and meet budgetary targets following a series of public relations disasters. Muto insisted 2020 organisers had learnt much from the Winter Games, not least in how Pyeongchang dealt with an outbreak of norovirus that struck more than 200 people—mostly security staff.

"In terms of Games management this was our last chance to observe on site," he said. "The cases of norovirus were a surprise to us, and I'm sure to South Koreans, but it was a valuable lesson for us in how to deal with unexpected emergencies."

"The Korean organisers moved quickly and worked with the country's government to arrange quarantine measures," he added. "Tokyo will also need to be able to act swiftly and flexibly."

HOT TOPIC

Muto also noted that South Korean volunteers, many of whom reportedly quit in the build-up to the Olympics over the cold and low standard accommodation, "weren't exactly burning with energy".

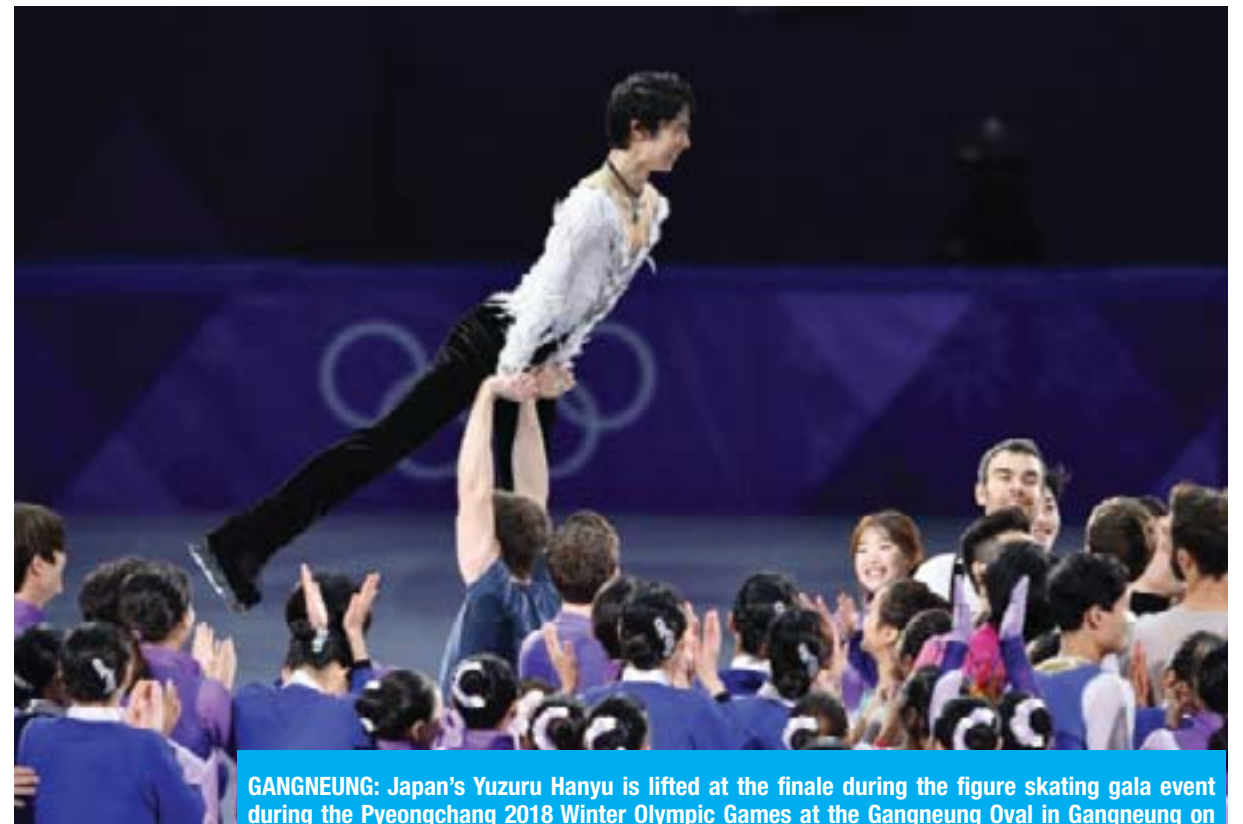
Tokyo organisers have faced criticism in their Games build-up, most notably after a disastrous rollout of plans for the 2020 Olympic stadium.

They remain prickly, however, on the subject of Tokyo's summer heat.

"The athletes have said Pyeongchang was far colder than they had expected," said Muto. "A bit like dealing with the cold here, coping with the heat is an important issue for us in Tokyo. We are mindful that athletes, volunteers, staff and fans all need to be cared for."

Muto declined to discuss details, claiming "athletes are used to competing in hot weather" before denying that Tokyo's summers were actually all that hot—despite temperatures in the capital regularly topping 35c (95F).

Japanese Olympic officials were embarrassed, meanwhile, after short track speed skater Kei Saito failed a



GANGNEUNG: Japan's Yuzuru Hanyu is lifted at the finale during the figure skating gala event during the Pyeongchang 2018 Winter Olympic Games at the Gangneung Oval in Gangneung on Sunday. — AFP

drugs test in Pyeongchang, dealing a blow to the country's squeaky clean image.

Having pledged a doping-free Games, Tokyo organisers were also left squirming. "Doping is absolutely wrong," said Muto. "Japan is viewed as an extremely

clean country in terms of doping so if (Saito) is found to have doped, then it is extremely regrettable. "Dealing correctly with doping is important and we must make efforts to ensure that Japanese athletes and the Tokyo Olympics as a whole are clean." — Agencies

Jersey fails in bid to join UEFA

BRATISLAVA: The Channel island of Jersey failed in its bid to join UEFA yesterday when its application was rejected by the annual Congress of European soccer's governing body. Jersey FA president Phil Austin told the Congress that football on the island of about 100,000 people was in danger of declining without international competition but members rejected the application after being told it would violate UEFA statutes.

There was confusion as only 50 votes were counted off the coast of Normandy in France, is a British Crown Dependency which sits outside the United Kingdom and the European Union.

Members were told that Article 5 of the UEFA statutes limits membership to EAs which are based in a country "recognised as an independent state by the majority of members of the United Nations".

Austin argued that Jersey has its own government and parliament, makes its own laws and sets its own taxes. "Jersey competes internationally in a number of other sports on a regular basis," he said. "Why should football take a different view?"

Austin said Jersey had lost opponents over the last few years, including Faroe Islands and Gibraltar who have become UEFA members. "We've reached a critical stage in the progress of our game where without regular international competition, football will decline...indeed it's started to happen."

Austin told Reuters he was disappointed but not surprised. "The fact that it wasn't unanimous was positive...certainly, three or four associations told us they were going to vote for us," he said. — Reuters

Morkel to quit internationals

CAPE TOWN: South Africa fast bowler Morne Morkel will retire from all formats of international cricket after the four-match home test series against Australia starting this week, he said yesterday. Morkel, 33, cited family pressures following local media reports that he was set to take up a Kolpak contract to play in England.

"It was an extremely tough decision but I feel the time is right to start a new chapter. I have a young family and a foreign wife, and the current demanding international schedule has put a lot of strain us," Morkel said in a Cricket South Africa news release yesterday.

"I still feel there is a lot of cricket left in me and I am excited for what lies ahead. For now, all of my energy and focus is on helping the Proteas win the upcoming series against Australia."

Morkel will now be free to play in Twenty20 leagues around the world, although he went unsold in the recent auction for this year's Indian Premier League. He played the first of his 83 tests against India in 2006 and has taken 294 wickets at an average of 28.08.

The tall seamer has also featured in 117 one-day internationals and 44 Twenty20 Internationals, taking 529 wickets across the three formats of the game. — Reuters

McDavid scores to give Oilers a wild 6-5 victory over Ducks

NEW YORK: Connor McDavid scored in the third round of a shootout to give the Edmonton Oilers a wild 6-5 victory over the host Anaheim Ducks on Sunday. Anaheim's Rickard Rakell scored a hat trick, including two goals in the final 21 seconds to send the game into overtime. Ryan Strome scored two goals, McDavid had three assists and Draisaitl had a goal and an assist to Edmonton, which won its third straight game and swept its back-to-back weekend trip to Los Angeles and Anaheim. Anton Slepyshev and Iiro Pakarinen also scored goals for the Oilers. Ryan Getzlaf had a goal and three assists, and Adam Henrique also scored for Anaheim, which lost for just the second time in its past 13 home games (10-2-1) against the Oilers. Corey Perry logged three assists.

WILD 3, SHARKS 2 (OT)

Jared Spurgeon scored the game-winner with 12 seconds left in overtime as Minnesota produced three unanswered goals to beat visiting San Jose. The goal was Spurgeon's eighth of the season and accounted for the 200th point of his NHL career. Spurgeon notched his 55th career goal—a number that ties him with Brent Burns for the most by a Minnesota defenseman in franchise history. Matt Cullen and Eric Staal also scored for Minnesota, while Joakim Ryan and Chris Tierney had goals for the Sharks.

RED WINGS 3, RANGERS 2 (OT)

Trevor Daley tipped in a Frans Nielsen shot with six seconds remaining in overtime, giving Detroit a victory at New York. Daley's seventh goal of the season was the only shot on net during the overtime session. Andreas Athanasiou and Darren Helm had the regulation goals for the Red Wings, who won for the second time in as many nights. Detroit goalie Jimmy Howard turned aside 36 shots. J.T. Miller and Jesper Fast scored for the Rangers, who have lost seven straight for the first time since 2006. New York goaltender Henrik Lundqvist made 31 saves.

SABRES 4, BRUINS 1

After the Rangers traded Rick Nash to the Bruins on Sunday morning, the left winger was stymied by goalie Chad Johnson as host Buffalo earned an easy victory against Boston. Johnson made 34 saves and the Sabres got goals from Benoit Pouliot, Kyle Okposo, Evan Rodrigues and Marco Scandella. Charlie McAvoy scored the lone goal for Boston, which dropped its second straight to finish its road trip at 2-3-0.

PREDATORS 4, BLUES 0

Colton Sissons scored the only goal Nashville would need five minutes into the game, and Pekka Rinne turned



NEW YORK: Dylan Larkin #71 of the Detroit Red Wings tries to pass the puck as he collides with teammate Luke Glendening #41 of the Detroit Red Wings in the third period against the New York Rangers on Sunday. — AFP

NHL results/standings

Nashville 4, St. Louis 0; Buffalo 4, Boston 1; Detroit 3, NY Rangers 2 (OT); Edmonton 6, Anaheim 5 (SO); Minnesota 3, San Jose 2 (OT); Vancouver 3, Arizona 1.

Eastern Conference							Western Conference							
Atlantic Division							Central Division							
W	L	OTL	GF	GA	PTS									
Tampa Bay	42	17	3	223	167	87	Nashville	38	14	9	196	155	85	
Toronto	39	20	5	213	178	83	Winnipeg	37	16	9	208	164	83	
Boston	37	15	8	195	150	82	Minnesota	35	20	7	188	174	77	
Florida	28	25	6	175	193	62	Dallas	35	23	4	184	164	74	
Detroit	26	26	10	165	183	62	St. Louis	34	25	4	173	164	72	
Montreal	23	29	9	157	193	55	Colorado	32	24	5	187	185	69	
Ottawa	21	30	10	166	216	52	Chicago	27	28	8	178	179	62	
Buffalo	19	33	11	151	206	49	Pacific Division							
							Las Vegas	41	16	4	215	166	86	
							San Jose	33	21	9	182	176	75	
							Anaheim	31	21	12	176	178	74	
							Calgary	32	22	9	182	185	73	
							Los Angeles	33	24	5	177	155	71	
							Edmonton	27	31	4	177	204	58	
							Vancouver	24	31	7	167	201	55	
							Arizona	18	34	10	148	205	46	
							Carolina	27	25	10	164	189	64	
							NY Rangers	27	30	6	177	201	60	

Note: Overtime losses (OTL) are worth one point in the standings and are not included in the loss column (L)

away 27 shots while shutting out visiting St. Louis. Nashville won its fourth straight game, improved to 9-2-2 in its past 13 contests. Rinne recorded his sixth shutout of the season and 49th of his 11-year NHL career, and Kevin

Fiala, Scott Hartnell and Austin Watson added goals for the Predators. The loss was the season-worst sixth straight for the Blues, who have scored two goals or fewer in eight of their past 11 games. — Reuters

Bangladesh name Walsh coach for Sri Lanka tournament

DHAKA: Bangladesh yesterday named West Indies fast bowling great Courtney Walsh as interim coach for next month's tri-nation Twenty20 series in Sri Lanka.

Walsh has been Bangladesh's fast bowling coach since early 2016 but had never been called on to take charge of the entire squad. Bangladesh have been without a head

coach since October when Chandika Hathurusingha, a former Sri Lankan batsman, quit after three years at the helm to join his struggling home team.

Former skipper Khaled Mahmud filled the void as team director recently, when Bangladesh lost a Test and Twenty20 home series against Sri Lanka.

"Walsh has vast experience and everyone respects him as well," Bangladesh Cricket Board president Nazmul Hassan told reporters. Bangladesh named a 16-man squad for the tri-nation Twenty20 against Sri Lanka starting March 6. India is the other team in the tournament.

All-rounder Shakib Al Hasan has been included despite a niggling finger injury that forced him out of the recent Sri Lanka series. Off-spinner Mehedi Hasan will fill in as back-up.

Hassan said Shakib could bowl but not bat so they

would rest him in the lead-up to the tournament. "His finger was swollen. So we can't take any risk with Shakib," he said. Fast bowler Mashrafe Mortaza turned down requests from the board to emerge from Twenty20 retirement to feature in the tournament.

There are five changes to the Twenty20 squad against Sri Lanka. Opener Imrul Kayes, pacesman Taskin Ahmed and wicketkeeper-batsman Nurul Hasan have returned along with Mehedi and regular skipper Shakib. Mohammad Saifuddin, Mahedi Hasan, Zakir Hasan, Afif Hossain and Mohammad Mithun were dropped.

Squad: Shakib Al Hasan (captain), Mahmudullah Riyad (vice captain), Tamim Iqbal, Soumya Sarkar, Imrul Kayes, Mushfiqur Rahim, Sabbir Rahman, Mustafizur Rahman, Rubel Hossain, Taskin Ahmed, Abu Hider, Abu Jayed, Ariful Haque, Nazmul Islam, Nurul Hasan, Mehedi Hasan. — AFP

Sports

PSG ease to 3-0 victory over arch-rivals Marseille

Lyon held 1-1 at home after late St Etienne goal

PARIS: Paris Saint Germain continued their stroll towards the French title with a 3-0 home win against bitter rivals Olympique de Marseille on Sunday but forward Neymar left the field on a stretcher late in the game as they extended their Ligue 1 lead to 14 points.

Kylian Mbappe, a Rolando own goal and Edinson Cavani put the capital side on 71 points from 27 games after a clinical performance at the Parc des Princes in an ill-tempered game in which the hosts got six yellow cards and the visitors five.

PSG finished with 10 men after Neymar was carried off with a suspected ankle injury eight minutes from time after coach Unai Emery had already made his three replacements. "We showed that it's a very special match for us and we got an excellent result," Emery said. "The injury to Neymar was the only negative. We hope it's nothing serious, but we have to wait for further medical exams."

The coach said initial tests showed it was a twisted ankle but he added further exams on Monday would reveal if there was more serious damage. The Paris club will now sweat over his availability for the March 6 Champions League game with Real Madrid.

PSG lost the first leg of the last 16 tie 3-1 in Spain on Feb 14 but Emery was optimistic his world-record signing would be fit for the return leg. "We must be patient but if I had to say something today then I would say yes, he will play."



Neymar carried off with suspected ankle injury

LEAGUE POSITIONS
Sunday's result left Marseille in third on 55 points, two behind second-placed Monaco who were held to a 3-3 draw at Toulouse on Saturday. Olympique Lyonnais were denied their first Ligue 1 win in over a month when St Etienne's Mathieu Debuchy scored a last-gasp goal to secure a 1-1 away draw in France's hottest derby. In Paris, Mbappe scored his first league goal since last month when he dribbled past Rolando and found the back of the net with a low cross-shot in the 10th minute. Rolando had more trouble in the 28th as he deflected Neymar's attempt into his own goal.

NEYMAR ASSISTS
Marseille failed to threaten and PSG's Ligue 1 top scorer Cavani added a third for his 24th goal of the season with a shot on the turn from Neymar's cross 11 minutes into the second half. It was the 13th time Neymar had set up a goal in Ligue 1 this season, beating his previous best of 12 assists in a league season with Barcelona in 2015-16.

OM have not won in Ligue 1 at the Parc des Princes since Qatar Sports Investments took charge of the Paris club in 2011. In Lyon, French international Debuchy struck one minute into stoppage time to cancel out Mariano Diaz's first-half opener.

The win left Lyon, who are now on a five-match winless streak, in fourth place with 50 points with St Etienne 12th on 34 points. Lyon scored after 20 minutes



PARIS: Paris Saint-Germain's Brazilian forward Neymar Jr (C) vies with Marseille's French midfielder Morgan Sanson (L) and Marseille's Japanese defender Hiroki Sakai during the French L1 football match between Paris Saint-Germain (PSG) and Marseille (OM) at the Parc des Princes in Paris on Sunday. — AFP

when Diaz volleyed home from close range but they ran out of steam and St Etienne, without a shot on target in the first half, came back into the game.

Debuchy found the back of the net when he latched onto Remi Cabella's cross to secure a point for the visitors. — Reuters

Iraq, Saudi face off in bout of football diplomacy

BAGHDAD: Iraq is hosting a football international against Saudi Arabia tomorrow for the first time in almost four decades, in a friendly encounter with high diplomatic and political stakes. With its match in the southern city of Basra against the Saudis who have qualified for the 2018 World Cup finals in Russia, Iraq aims to strengthen its case for FIFA to lift its ban on home competitive internationals.

The country has not played full internationals on home turf ever since its 1990 invasion of Kuwait that sparked an international embargo. The ban, covering all but local matches, stayed in place after the US-led invasion of 2003 that toppled dictator Saddam Hussein. It was briefly lifted in 2012, but a power outage during an Iraq-Jordan match in the Iraqi Kurdish capital Arbil led world football's governing body promptly to reinstate it. Iraq in December declared victory over the Islamic State jihadist group following a three-year battle, and FIFA finally relaxed the ban, allowing international friendlies at stadiums in Arbil, Basra and the shrine city of Karbala. For Saudi Arabia, the match is part of a slow process of boosting diplomatic and economic ties with post-Saddam Iraq, while at the same time countering the influence in the country of its regional rival Iran.

POLITICAL FOOTBALL

"Politics is present in every domain, and Saudi Arabia has major political weight," Sports and Youth Minister Abdulhussein Abttan told AFP in an interview. "I hope that this match will inspire other national teams to visit Iraq, which will help support our case for a total lifting of FIFA's ban on matches in our stadiums," he said, ahead of a decision the sport's governing body is expected to take in March.

Iraq is also hosting a four-country tournament in March in Karbala, although Kuwait has pulled out. In another case of political football, Qatar which is locked in a diplomatic standoff with Saudi Arabia and its allies sent a high-profile delegation to Iraq to sign a series of sports accords. "So now we're helping Iraq?! Iraq has become important, impressive..." an apparently miffed Saudi official quipped on Twitter under a photo of the Qatari federation head.

INFANTINO INVITED

On the FIFA front, Iraq has invited its president, Gianni Infantino, to visit the country, a spokesman for the federation told AFP, but no decision has yet been taken on whether the trip will go ahead. A visit by Infantino "would be important, only for symbolic reasons," said James Dorsey, a specialist in Middle East football and politics. "The key is does FIFA lift the ban or not, because the world soccer body by lifting the ban says Iraq is a safe place to go."

"It's clearly very important for the Iraqis, post territorial defeat of IS, to be projected as a country where there is security," said the senior fellow at Singapore's S. Rajaratnam School of International Studies. — AFP

Can Arsenal save season after League Cup final defeat?

LONDON: Arsenal's season is in danger of imploding after a chastening League Cup final demolition at the hands Premier League leaders Manchester City raised fresh questions about the future of manager Arsene Wenger. The Gunners, who lost 3-0 to Pep Guardiola's high-flying team, now find themselves 10 points adrift of their north London rivals Tottenham Hotspur, who occupy the coveted fourth spot in the Premier League table. Already out of the FA Cup, the Europa League could offer salvation-and a Champions League spot-but Italian giants AC Milan stand between Wenger's team and a place in the quarter-finals. The Arsenal boss, who signed a new two-year contract extension last year, said he would have to prioritise the next game-against Manchester City in the league on Thursday-before he could focus on the Europa League.

"We will of course to take the Europa League very seriously," he said. "But we have as well to win big games because if you want to go far in the Europa League you have to win big games."

Former Arsenal striker Thierry Henry said the manner of Arsenal's capitulation at Wembley was shocking. "You can lose games, you can lose finals," he said on Sky Sports on Monday "I lost finals but it's how you lose them. When you look at the two first goals yesterday, they were goals that you can avoid. It wasn't that difficult to avoid."

"Man City were not that great on the day but Arsenal still couldn't do anything about it and so it's a very difficult one," he added. "Arsene never won this one before. I'm sure the team and him went there with massive expectations of winning it. "The league is not going so well. It would have been amazing to win the Carabao (League) Cup and then hopefully backing that up with winning the Europa League. That's what I would have called a great season. That's what Man United did last year."

Former Manchester United and England defender Gary Neville was stinging in his criticism of the Arsenal players, labelling them "spineless" in commentary on Sky Sports on Sunday. "I played in cup finals in Cardiff where we got beat by Liverpool, where we didn't play well. It was a hor-

Salah shows why he is the top African in Europe

PARIS: Egyptian Mohamed Salah demonstrated again why is the top African performer in the major European leagues this season by scoring in a sixth consecutive match for Liverpool at the weekend. The 2017 African Footballer of the Year struck the second goal during a 4-1 Premier League thrashing of West Ham, taking his season tally to 31 in all competitions since arriving at Anfield from Roma. Moroccan Youssef en-Nesyri had an eventful match for bottom La Liga club Malaga as he scored, had a penalty saved and was red-carded after two cautions.

ENGLAND
MOHAMED SALAH/SADIO MANE (Liverpool)
CHEIKHOU KOUYATE (West Ham)

By scoring, Salah equalled Luis Suarez's best return in a campaign for Liverpool. He steered home into the far corner on his trusted left foot before Mane got in the act by slotting home Andrew Robertson's low cross for his 13th goal of the season. West Ham's solitary response came from Mane's Senegalese international teammate Kouyate intercepting a Liverpool attack and freeing Michail Antonio to score from a narrow angle.



WEMBLEY: Manchester City's Belgian defender Vincent Kompany lifts the trophy as Manchester City players celebrate their victory in the English League Cup final football match between Manchester City and Arsenal at Wembley stadium in north London on Sunday. — AFP

rible feeling," he wrote on Skysports.com.

"But I saw things out on that pitch from Arsenal. I actually called it in the lead up to the third goal, where they were walking back, and walking up, and walking towards the ball. You do not walk on a football pitch, that's the one thing you don't do."

"I'm finding it difficult to take because it's a wonderful football club with a great history and tradition, but at the moment they're in decline in terms of their performance levels and their standards," he added.

The problems are mounting for Arsenal at a time when the famously parsimonious club have finally loosened the purse strings, breaking their transfer record twice in recent months to sign forwards Pierre-Emerick Aubameyang and Alexandre Lacazette.

RIYAD MAHREZ (Leicester)

Mahrez was denied his first goal since ending a self-imposed exile at Leicester by a fantastic save from Stoke City goalkeeper Jack Butland as the Foxes were forced to settle for a 1-1 draw. The Algerian was starting his first Premier League game since missing 10 days training after Leicester rejected Manchester City's advances in the final days of the January transfer window. And he nearly made a match-winning contribution with a trademark left-foot strike from outside the box, but Butland made amends for his earlier own-goal with a spectacular stop.

SPAIN
YOUSSEF EN- NESYRI (Malaga)

The 20-year-old Morocco striker enjoyed a great start to the game at Athletic Bilbao before it ended in disappointment and disgrace. En-Nesyri put rock-bottom Malaga ahead in the 13th minute but then missed a penalty on the hour after his spot-kick was saved by Bilbao keeper Kepa Arrizabalaga. He was then red-carded six minutes from time after picking up two yellow cards. Bottom club Malaga lost 2-1.

ITALY
MBAYE NIANG (Torino)

Senegalese international Niang equalised for Torino four minutes after the break, but hosts Verona sealed a 2-1 win 13 minutes from time. It was the 23-year-old Niang's fourth goal since joining the Turin club in the middle of last year from AC Milan after a loan spell at Watford. FRANCK KESSIE (AC Milan) Ivorian Kessie is feeling more at home at AC Milan under new coach Genaro Gattuso than predecessor Vincenzo Montella.

Mesut Ozil was also handed the most lucrative contract in the club's history to prevent the German World Cup winner following Alexis Sanchez out of the club in January. Things are also changing behind the scenes, with a new chief scout arriving from Dortmund, Sven Mislintat, and Raul Sanllehi appointed head of football relations, suggesting Wenger's grip on power may be weakening.

Daily Telegraph chief football writer Henry Winter suggested time is up for Wenger. "Arsenal are on the road to nowhere under Arsene Wenger, a situation that has been sadly apparent for four to five seasons but now all but the overly sentimental can see it," he wrote. Unless something changes dramatically, the hand of the Arsenal board may be forced at the end of the season to take the drastic action they have resisted for so long. — AFP

"Gattuso is making us work harder, especially on tactics," said Kessie, 21, after a 2-0 win at Roma. "With Montella we did very little work in training, but it's different with Gattuso and you can see the results on the pitch." Kessie has made 25 appearances since his loan move from Atalanta.

GERMANY
ISHAK BELFODIL (Werder Bremen)

The Algeria striker played a key role in Rick van Dronghen's own goal as Werder Bremen climbed out of the relegation places with a 1-0 win against Hamburg in a bad-tempered north German derby. Bremen claimed the 86th-minute winner when Van Dronghen nudged the ball over the line as he tried to stop Belfodil getting his foot to it in a goalmouth scramble.

NABIL BENTALEB (Schalke 04)

Algeria's former Tottenham Hotspur midfielder marked his Schalke comeback with a late penalty in a 2-0 win at 10-man Bayer Leverkusen. Having been dropped from the squad a fortnight ago and told to sort out his attitude, Bentaleb came off the bench midway through the second half and drilled home a late spot-kick which lifted Schalke to third.

FRANCE
WAHBI KHAZRI (Rennes)

Tunisian Khazri scored a 47th-minute penalty to send Rennes on their way to a 2-0 victory over Troyes. Senegalese forward Ismaila Sarr earned the spot-kick when he was fouled by Jimmy Giraudon. On-loan Sunderland midfielder Khazri then sent goalkeeper Erwin Zelazny the wrong way from 12 yards. — AFP



Matches on TV (Local Timings)

SPANISH LEAGUE

Espanyol v Real Madrid	22:00
beIN SPORTS HD 3	
Girona v Celta de Vigo	23:30
beIN SPORTS	

21 British boxer dies hours after winning fight



22 McDavid scores to give Oilers a wild 6-5 victory over Ducks



23 Can Arsenal save season after League Cup final defeat?



CLEVELAND: Jordan Clarkson #8 of the Cleveland Cavaliers handles the ball against the San Antonio Spurs on Sunday at Quicken Loans Arena in Cleveland, Ohio. — AFP

Green helps Spurs to win over Cavs

Pelicans win fifth consecutive game

LOS ANGELES: LaMarcus Aldridge scored 27 points and Danny Green added 22 as San Antonio did everything right in the final 12 minutes while rolling to a win at Cleveland. San Antonio opened the fourth quarter with an 11-0 run that produced an 87-74 advantage with 9:22 to play. Cleveland never got within eight points the rest of the way in an anticlimactic finish to what was a close game for three quarters. The Spurs snapped a four-game losing streak and finished their road trip 2-4. LeBron James led all scorers with 33 points and collected 13 rebounds for the Cavaliers, who have lost two of their past three games after winning four straight.



Harden scores a game-high 41 points

DENVER 114, HOUSTON 119

James Harden scored a game-high 41 points and helped close out the Houston Rockets' 12th consecutive victory, a 119-114 win over the host Denver Nuggets on Sunday at Pepsi Center. After the Nuggets cut what was a 100-83 deficit earlier in the fourth quarter to four points, Harden sank a pair of free throws before drilling a step-back jumper over Jamal Murray. Harden shot 11 of 20 from the field, including 6 of 10 on 3-point attempts, while adding eight rebounds and seven assists. Chris Paul chipped in 23 points and six assists while Trevor

Ariza scored 14 for the Rockets. Will Barton paced Denver with 25 points while Nikola Jokic had his streak of games with a triple-double snapped at three, posting 21 points, 14 rebounds and eight assists. Murray scored 19 for the Nuggets, who had their five-game home winning streak snapped.

PELICANS 123, BUCKS 121 (OT)

Jrue Holiday scored 15 points in the third quarter and finished with 36 as visiting New Orleans held off Milwaukee in overtime. The Pelicans won their fifth consecutive game, their longest winning streak in three years. They won their sixth straight overtime game and second in three days. Anthony Davis

added 27 points and 13 rebounds, and Rajon Rondo had 16 points and 12 assists for the Pelicans. Chris Middleton led the Bucks with 25, while Giannis Antetokounmpo and Eric Bledsoe scored 20 each.

WIZARDS 109, 76ERS 94

Bradley Beal scored 24 points and Otto Porter Jr. added 23 as Washington defeated visiting Philadelphia. The result ended a seven-game Philadelphia winning streak, which was the longest active run in the Eastern

NBA results/standings

Washington 109, Philadelphia 94; Denver 114, Houston 119; Cleveland 94, San Antonio 110; Milwaukee 121, New Orleans 123 (OT); Charlotte 114, Detroit 98.

Eastern Conference				Western Conference					
W	L	PCT	GB						
Toronto	41	17	70.7		Houston	46	13	78.0	-
Boston	42	19	68.9	1.5	Golden State	46	14	76.7	0.5
Cleveland	35	24	59.3	6.5	San Antonio	36	25	59.0	11
Washington	35	25	58.3	7	Minnesota	37	26	58.7	11
Indiana	34	25	57.6	7.5	Portland	34	26	56.7	12.5
Milwaukee	33	26	55.9	8.5	New Orleans	33	26	55.9	13
Philadelphia	32	26	55.2	9	Oklahoma City	34	27	55.7	13
Miami	31	29	51.7	11	Denver	33	27	55.0	13.5
Detroit	28	31	47.5	13.5	LA Clippers	31	27	53.4	14.5
Charlotte	27	33	45.0	15	Utah	31	29	51.7	15.5
New York	24	37	39.3	18.5	LA Lakers	25	34	42.4	21
Chicago	20	39	33.9	21.5	Memphis	18	40	31.0	27.5
Brooklyn	19	41	31.7	23	Sacramento	18	41	30.5	28
Orlando	18	41	30.5	23.5	Dallas	18	42	30.0	28.5
Atlanta	18	42	30.0	24	Phoenix	18	43	29.5	29

Conference. Kelly Oubre Jr. (19 points) and Marcin Gortat (13 points and 10 rebounds) both pitched in for the Wizards. Joel Embiid led the Sixers with 25 points and 10 rebounds, while Ben Simmons had 16 points.

HORNETS 114, PISTONS 98

Dwight Howard and Kemba Walker each scored 17 points as host Charlotte produced its first four-game

winning streak of the season, blasting Detroit. Nic Batum, who made a game-high four 3-point baskets, tallied 15 points and delivered nine assists for the Hornets. Howard grabbed a team-high 12 rebounds. Blake Griffin scored 20 points for the Pistons, who have lost five of their past six games. Reggie Bullock and Andre Drummond each added 14 points, with Drummond pulling down 14 rebounds. — Reuters

Buffon back for England, Argentina friendlies

FLORENCE: Italy legend Gianluigi Buffon looks set for a return to international action in friendlies against England and Argentina in March, interim national coach Luigi Di Biagio said yesterday. "I spoke to him, he will probably be part of the group in March, a player like him cannot stop after Sweden," said Di Biagio. Buffon was inconsolable as he announced his retirement after Italy's disastrous 1-0 aggregate play-off defeat to Sweden in the San Siro last November, as the Azzurri failed to reach the World Cup for the first time since

1958. The 40-year-old Juventus goalkeeper had represented the Azzurri for 20 years, winning the 2006 World Cup title, and earning a record 175 caps in a brilliant career. He had been bidding for a record sixth World Cup appearance. "It's not fair that his last game was the one against Sweden, so I proposed that he come back for one, two or possibly three games. Gigi (Buffon) will probably be there in March," continued Di Biagio of friendlies against Argentina and England, in Manchester and London on March 23 and 27.

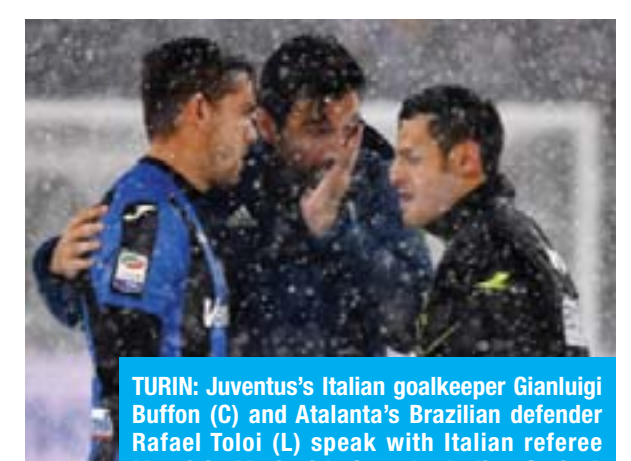
"Gianluigi Donnarumma and Alex Meret? We're doing well with goalkeepers for the next 20 years. (Mattia) Perin is there too, and when Gigi unfortunately stops we'll be well covered.

"We're solid from that point of view, but Gigi's story doesn't have to end with that Sweden game."

Di Biagio said he had also been in contact with other members of Italy's golden generation of World Cup winners. "I've met with some of the veterans, because I

understood that some of them wanted to quit. I talked to Buffon to see if he wanted to continue. "As for the other players, without going into details I've spoken to a lot of them. (Andrea) Barzagli and (Daniele) De Rossi won't be there. (Giorgio) Chiellini yes. We want to relaunch the team with enthusiasm." Under-21 boss Di Biagio has been promoted to the senior role for the friendlies and is holding a training camp at Coverciano outside Florence on Monday and Tuesday.

"It's normal to think about what I'll have to do in the next few months, I'll decide when the time comes to make the call-ups," he continued of his squad, adding he had not yet decided whether to recall in-form Nice striker Mario Balotelli. "I'm not saying now if Balotelli will come or not, I follow him like everyone else, and no doors are closed," said Di Biagio. "At this moment Italian football is in great difficulty and there isn't much choice, but we need to create the right enthusiasm after the disappointment of the World Cup." — AFP



TURIN: Juventus' Italian goalkeeper Gianluigi Buffon (C) and Atalanta's Brazilian defender Rafael Tolo (L) speak with Italian referee Maurizio Mariani before the Italian Serie A football match Juventus versus Atalanta on Sunday in Turin. — AFP