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Panel reaffirms taxing expat remittances is constitutional

Health insurance for expats could reach KD 190 • MPs press for debate on fake degrees

By B Izzak and A Saleh

KUWAIT: The National Assembly's financial and economic affairs committee yesterday reaffirmed that imposing a five percent tax on money transfers by expatriates to their home countries does not violate the constitution, brushing aside opposition by the government and another Assembly panel. The committee bluntly said that there is nothing in the constitution which obliges achieving equality between Kuwaitis and expatriates and justice in imposing taxes.

The committee said that based on opinions by its constitutional experts, equality and justice stipulated in the constitution do not mean achieving absolute and complete justice amongst all, adding that articles 7 and 29 of the constitution call for legal equality and justice only. Article 7 states: "Justice, freedom and equality are the pillars of society; and cooperation and compassion are the firm link binding all citizens," while article 29 stipulates: "The people are peers in human dignity and have, in the eyes of the law, equal public rights and obligations. There shall be made no differentiation among them because of race, origin, language or religion".

Citing article 48 of the constitution, the panel insisted

that imposing taxes on remittances by expats does not violate justice and equality. Article 48 states: "Payment of taxes and contribution to public expenditure are a duty in conformity with the law. The law shall exempt small incomes from taxation in order to guarantee a minimum income for living." Ironically, the article the committee is citing to impose taxes on expatriates is the same that calls for exempting low-income people, a majority of whom are expatriates.

In January last year, the legal and legislative committee rejected a draft law submitted by MP Safa Al-Hashem to tax expat remittances, saying it is unconstitutional. The government also rejected the bill because it involves constitutional suspicions, while the Central Bank insisted it is against the national economy. The tax could force expatriates to not keep any deposits in Kuwaiti banks or make any investments here. The financial committee still went ahead and approved the draft law, but it has not reached the floor for debate. In 2017, authorities said KD 4 billion was remitted, but the share of Kuwaitis in the transfers is not clear.

In another development, informed health sources and reports said the government is planning to increase the compulsory health insurance for expatriates gradu-

ally every year, starting from next year. In the first two years - 2020 and 2021 - the cost will be KD 130 per person per year. It will go up to KD 150 for the next two years, then KD 170 and finally KD 190 in 2026-2027. The reports and the figures could not be immediately confirmed.

Meanwhile, five MPs - Mohammad Al-Dallal, Riyadh Al-Adasani, Adel Al-Damkhi, Rakan Al-Nisf and Osama Al-Shaheen - submitted a request to hold a two-hour special debate on the issue of fake university degrees, as the education ministry denied it had accepted degrees issued by an unrecognized university in Athens, where many Kuwaitis are believed to have obtained their degrees.

Dallal called for taking tough actions against those who used fake degrees to get government jobs, securing good salaries and top positions. "Involved people should be dealt with individually without threats to the entire community they belong to," he stressed, pointing out that mere demands that holders of such degrees should refund all sums they had unlawfully earned to escape legal accountability is unacceptable. "They must be prosecuted," Dallal demanded, noting that it took too long to bring this issue to the open.

Bouteflika to quit 'before mandate ends' on April 28

ALGIERS: Algeria's ailing President Abdelaziz Bouteflika will resign before his mandate expires on April 28, his office said yesterday, after a succession of loyalists deserted him in the face of massive protests. The 82-year-old, who has rarely been seen in public since a 2013 stroke, has been clinging to power as pressure mounted for weeks over attempts to prolong his 20-year rule. Bouteflika will



Bouteflika
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Erdogan's AKP suffers upset in two main cities

ANKARA: Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan's ruling party suffered a major upset yesterday after local election results showed it lost the capital Ankara and Istanbul after a decade and half in power. Losing the country's two major cities would be a stunning defeat for Erdogan, a former Istanbul mayor himself, whose ability to win at the ballot box has been unparalleled in Turkish history. Erdogan campaigned hard, portraying Sunday's vote for mayors and district councils as a fight for the nation's survival, but the election became a test for his Justice and Development Party (AKP) after Turkey slipped into a recession for the first time in a decade.

The opposition CHP party candidate for

Istanbul mayor, Ekrem Imamoglu, was leading by nearly 28,000 votes with most ballot boxes counted, Supreme Election Board (YSK) chairman Sadi Guven said. Imamoglu won almost 4.16 million votes while the AKP candidate, former premier Binali Yildirim, won 4.13 million. Both claimed victory in the early hours following a tight race for the country's largest city after results showing them in a dead heat. "We want to start working as soon as possible to serve people," Imamoglu told reporters yesterday. "We want to cooperate with all institutions of Turkey to quickly meet the needs of Istanbul."

In Ankara, opposition mayoral candidate Mansur Yavas had 50.89 percent of votes ahead of the AKP's Mehmet Ozhasseki on 47.06 percent, Anadolu state agency reported, with 99 percent of ballot boxes counted. "Ankara has won. The loser in Ankara is Ozhasseki, dirty politics has lost," Yavas told supporters who were waving Turkish flags and setting off fireworks at a celebratory rally. But in a sign of possible turmoil ahead, AKP

officials said they would challenge the alleged invalidation of tens of thousands of votes in both cities.

AKP secretary general Fatoih Sahin said the party will appeal in Ankara, saying the gap between the candidates "will narrow down and I believe it will eventually turn into a positive result for us". Speaking to supporters in Ankara after Sunday's polls closed, Erdogan had said the election was a victory for the AKP, which along with its coalition partner, the rightwing Nationalist Movement Party, won more than 50 percent of votes overall.

Erdogan appeared to accept AKP defeat in Istanbul, although he maintained that most neighborhoods in the city were held by his party. "Even if our people gave away the mayorship, they gave the districts to the AK Party," he said. The party would appeal results wherever needed, he added. Erdogan pledged that Turkey would now focus on its troubled economy in the run-up to national elections in 2023.

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ISTANBUL: Supporters of the main opposition Republican People's Party (CHP) wave flags and light torches to celebrate election victories early yesterday. — AFP

Aramco world's most profitable company in 2018

DUBAI: Oil giant Saudi Aramco revealed yesterday it made the world's biggest corporate profit last year, opening its secretive accounts for the first time as it prepares to raise funds from investors. International ratings agencies Fitch and Moody's got rare access to Aramco's accounts which show the firm posting billions in profits. It comes as Aramco prepares to sell bonds on the international market to help finance the purchase of a 70-percent stake in Saudi petrochemical behemoth SABIC for \$69.1 billion, effectively merging the kingdom's two largest companies.

The huge deal gives Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman's ambitious reform program aimed at diversifying the economy a massive cash boost. Moody's Investors Service said Aramco posted a net profit of \$111.1 billion in 2018 - far higher than the combined net earnings of the five international oil majors - and generated \$359.9 billion in revenues. Last year US oil giants Chevron and Exxon Mobil, Britain's BP, Anglo-Dutch rival Royal Dutch Shell and France's Total together posted nearly \$80 billion.

Aramco also dethroned Apple as the world's most profitable firm. Last year the US tech giant posted nearly \$50 billion in net profits. Fitch Ratings, which also saw the accounts, said Aramco reported \$224 billion in earnings before tax and depreciation, while maintaining low debt levels. However, both Fitch and Moody's gave state-owned Aramco a credit rating of just A+ and A1 respectively, with a stable outlook, since the majority of its revenue is taken by the government to finance its ever-increasing spending.

Based on its finances, massive hydrocarbon reserves and low production cost, its stand-alone rating would have been a top AA+ on an equal footing with international oil companies, Fitch said.

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Reiwa: A new imperial era name for Japan

TOKYO: "Reiwa": Japan yesterday revealed the name of the era that will define the new emperor's reign when he ascends the Chrysanthemum Throne next month following the first abdication in around 200 years. The new imperial name consists of two characters: "Rei", which can mean "order" but also "auspicious" and "Wa", usually translated as "peace" or "harmony". After weeks of fevered speculation and top-secret discussions, the two "kanji" characters were unveiled to reveal a name that will last as long as new emperor Naruhito's rule.

Prime Minister Shinzo Abe said the term "Reiwa" came from the

"Manyoshu", an anthology of Japanese poems dating back 1,200 years that "symbolizes our nation's profound public culture and long tradition". "Just like amazing plum flowers in full bloom that signal the arrival of spring after bitter cold, each and every Japanese person can hope for the future and make their own flowers blossom," added the prime minister. "It is the first time it comes from a Japanese text" rather than Chinese, noted Abe, often considered a nationalist.

Crowds gathered around Japan to watch live broadcasts of the announcement, many cheering as the chief cabinet secretary held up a board with the name inked in stylized black calligraphy. "It has a nice sound and you get a good feeling when you read it. It's a very good choice I think," said 24-year-old Shun Fujimoto as he joined a chaotic scrum for a special edition of the papers at Tokyo's busy Shimbashi station.

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TOKYO: Japan's Chief Cabinet Secretary Yoshihide Suga announces the new era name "Reiwa" during a press conference at the prime minister's office yesterday. — AFP

Indian rocket puts satellites in three orbits

NEW DELHI: An Indian rocket yesterday placed domestic and foreign satellites in three different orbits on a single flight, a first for the nation and a low-cost option that could burnish its reputation for pioneering affordable options in space. The launch of a domestic intelligence satellite and 28 foreign ones came less than a week after India used an anti-satellite missile to take down one of its own satellites, demonstrating a

capability only China, Russia and the United States had possessed previously.

The state-run Indian Space Research Organization (ISRO) said 24 satellites from the United States, two from Lithuania and one each from Spain and Switzerland were positioned in yesterday's launch, in addition to India's EMISAT satellite. "This particular mission is very special for ISRO," its chairman, K Sivan, said after the launch from India's southeastern state of Andhra Pradesh. "This is for the first time the PSLV is carrying out three orbital missions in a single flight," he said in a speech, referring to the Polar Satellite Launch Vehicle family of rockets.

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SRIHARIKOTTA, India: The ISRO PSLV-C45 launches India's EMISAT along with 28 other satellites at the Satish Dhawan Space Centre yesterday. — AFP

Local

MoE won't authenticate fake degree certificates: Azmi

Cabinet also discusses bankruptcy draft law



KUWAIT: Photos show ministers during the weekly cabinet meeting headed by HH the Prime Minister Sheikh Jaber Mubarak Al-Hamad Al-Sabah. — KUNA photos

KUWAIT: The Ministry of Higher Education did not authenticate any certificates issued by universities not recognized by the ministry due to their incompetence, Minister Dr Hamed Al-Azmi said yesterday. Al-Azmi briefed the cabinet about fake degree certificates and said all cases were referred to the public prosecution, Deputy Premier and Minister of State for Cabinet Affairs Anas Al-Saleh said in a statement following a cabinet meeting. HH the Prime Minister Sheikh Jaber Mubarak Al-Hamad Al-Sabah, who chaired the meeting, said there would be zero tolerance to any form of corruption namely fake degree certificates, said Al-Saleh.

Meanwhile, the cabinet members discussed a draft law over bankruptcy, which would improve Kuwait's status in World Bank index of businesses thus positively affecting the finance sector. The bill calls for legal settlements to take place outside the court house but should be ratified by the court, and places flexible rules for bankruptcy of small and medium size enterprises.

They also discussed a bill that would improve com-

petition and disqualify harmful practices in a way that would benefit the national economy, said Al-Saleh. The cabinet, he added, approved an agreement with Lebanon over land transport of passengers and goods. The government executives assigned government authorities to implement recommendations related to collection of arrears from state departments.

The government expressed best wishes for His Highness the Amir Sheikh Sabah Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah and His Highness the Crown Prince Sheikh Nawaf Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah on advent of Isra and Me'raj, due on April 4. HH the Prime Minister briefed the cabinet about HH the Amir's speech at the 30th Arab Summit that was held in Tunisia.

HH the Amir called on Arab countries to join hands to confront crises and challenges, and noted the dangerous ramifications of US President Donald Trump's recognition of Israel's sovereignty over Syrian Golan Heights. HH the Amir commended the Arab countries' support of the Palestinian cause. On the other hand, the cabinet



assigned the Public Authority for Agricultural Affairs and Fish Resources to distribute fish and shrimp plantation lots with the objective of preserving livestock.

It assigned the Public Authority for Roads and Land Transport (PART) to implement the regional road and railway projects in north and south of the country. The government instructed the Finance Ministry to settle

legal conditions of contracts in the Free Trade Zone in Shuwaikh Area. The government, said Al-Saleh, congratulated Minister of Commerce and Industry, Minister of State for Services Khaled Al-Roudhan for winning confidence of the parliament in the wake of his interpellation. HH the Prime Minister praised the solidarity the ministers have shown for Al-Roudhan. — KUNA

Kuwaiti FM attends UN Security Council meetings

NEW YORK: Kuwait's Deputy Prime Minister and Foreign Minister Sheikh Sabah Khaled Al-Hamad Al-Sabah arrived in New York late Sunday. Sheikh Sabah Al-Khaled will head the delegation participating in UN Security Council's meetings, within the framework of Kuwait's non-permanent seat at the Council. The delegation includes Deputy Prime Minister and Foreign Minister's Office Director Ambassador Sheikh Dr Ahmad Nasser Al-Mohammad Al-Sabah, Permanent Representative to the UN Ambassador Mansour Al-Otaibi, Assistant Foreign Minister for International Organizations Ambassador Nasser Al-Hain, and several foreign ministry officials.—KUNA



NEW YORK: Kuwait's Deputy Prime Minister and Foreign Minister Sheikh Sabah Khaled Al-Hamad Al-Sabah arrives in New York. — KUNA



KUWAIT: The National Guard recently signed a protocol of cooperation with the Ministry of Health to utilize its medical staff services in providing proper health care for National Guard personnel. The protocol was signed by the National Guard undersecretary, Lt General Hashem Al-Refa'e and MOH undersecretary, Dr Mustafa Redha at the National Guard headquarters.

Youth's role vital in sustainable development



KUWAIT: Amiri Diwan Undersecretary for the Ruling Family Affairs, Sheikh Sabah Nasser Sabah Al-Ahmad Al-Sabah addresses the 2nd Gulf Arab youth forum. — KUNA



KUWAIT: Amiri Diwan Undersecretary for the Ruling Family Affairs, Sheikh Sabah Nasser Sabah Al-Ahmad Al-Sabah tours the accompanying exhibition of the 2nd Gulf Arab youth forum.

KUWAIT: Amiri Diwan Undersecretary for the Ruling Family Affairs, Sheikh Sabah Nasser Sabah Al-Ahmad Al-Sabah underlined the role of youth in the country's national development. Kuwait is focusing on investing in the talents of youth to create sustainable development, Sheikh Sabah, also hon-

orary chairman of Kuwait Water Association (KWA) said in the opening speech at the 2nd Gulf Arab youth forum in Kuwait yesterday. On his part, Director General of the Arab Planning Institute Bader Malallah said that the forum, which lasts until next Wednesday, aims to discover new talents and initia-

tives of youth to meet the sustainable development goals. Meanwhile, head of KWA Saleh Al-Mazeeni noted that waste of water is posing a big challenge and impacts many life aspects. Al-Mazeeni added that young people will present their views during the event on tackling this issue.— KUNA



RIYADH: Kuwait's Minister of Commerce and Industry and Minister of State for Services Khaled Al-Roudhan at the Global Aviation Summit 2019. — KUNA

Global Aviation Summit 2019 kicks off in Riyadh

RIYADH: The Global Aviation Summit 2019 kicked off in Riyadh yesterday, under the patronage of Saudi King Salman bin Abdulaziz Al Saud and organized by the Saudi General Authority of Civil Aviation (GACA). Kuwait's Minister of Commerce and Industry and Minister of State for Services Khaled Al-Roudhan took part in this summit, in addition to 15 ministers of transport and 140 chairmen and directors general of civil aviation authorities, high level government representatives, and experts in international and regional organizations.

Saudi Minister of Transport and Chairman of the Board of Directors of General Authority for Civil Aviation, Dr Nabil Al-Amoudi said in a speech that the patronage of this conference came together in belief of the importance of the air transport industry at the global level, and in confidence of Saudi leadership. The success of this industry can be achieved only through close cooperation between world countries and air transport industry bodies, primarily the International Civil Aviation Organization (ICAO).

The aviation sector in the Kingdom is an important economic resource, he said, where the sector contributed about SR 126 billion (USD 33.6 billion) annually to the national revenues through direct and indirect revenues, in addition to providing 527,000 jobs in the sector, contributing about 4.6 percent of the Gross domestic product (GDP), he said.

For his part, President of the International Council Aviation Organization (ICAO) Olumuyiwa Benard Aliu expressed thanks and appreciation to the Saudi king for his patronage of this conference, and to the Kingdom of Saudi



Dr Nabil Al-Amoudi

Arabia for hosting Regional Safety Oversight Organization for the Middle East and North Africa (MENA-RSOO). This cooperation will contribute to assisting member states to achieve their objectives in the light of the safety of global aviation and the Global Aviation Safety Plan (GASP), he said.

Speaking to KUNA on the sidelines of the summit, Director-General of the Directorate General of Civil Aviation (DGCA) Youssef Al-Fawzan said Kuwait's participation mainly aimed at the sharing of knowledge and involvement in the aviation and air transport realm. It is also intended to get better familiar with available investment openings, air transport, security and safety, Al-Fawzan added.

Meanwhile, three agreements in aviation services were signed during this event between the governments of Saudi Arabia, Cyprus, Chad and Georgia. The two-day summit is an opportunity to share insights, exchange knowledge and discuss market policies, regulations, safety, security, in civil aviation around the world.— KUNA

Awqaf orders reformation of the central committee

By A Saleh

KUWAIT: Minister of Awqaf and Islamic Affairs Fahd Al-Shola yesterday ordered the reformation of the central committee for assignments to be headed by assistant undersecretary for Quran affairs and Islamic studies Dr Waleed Al-Shuaib and regulate the panel, on which many remarks had been made by state auditors in recent years. Official ministry sources said the accumulating remarks were behind the minister's decision.

Booklet of conditions

The large number of local and interna-

tional companies seeking to purchase the booklet of conditions and specifications for smart power meters made the ministry of electricity and water to postpone the closing date until April 14. Informed sources said 38 companies bought the tender's book of conditions and expect the number of companies to increase until the closing date. Sources said the project will be relied on in planning the demand for power and water in the future. By getting accurate information about patterns of consumption, the ministry can make plans that will manage the ministry's resources with high efficiency.

Local

After bird flu scare, pet market back in business

'In our shop, my loss is more than KD 10,000'



By Ben Garcia

KUWAIT: It's business as usual at the bird market in Rai after a recent bird flu scare resulted in authorities closing down the market and culling all the birds displayed for sale. "We were permitted to sell birds again after over a month of cleaning and sterilizing the market. So far, we are selling just like before," said a shop owner at the pet market. Asked if the government compensated them for the lost revenue, he said despite promises, they haven't received any

damages yet. "In our shop, my loss is more than KD 10,000. Shop owners who sell larger birds have told me their losses are almost KD 20,000," the owner told Kuwait Times.

On Feb 5, the Municipality, with the help of the health ministry and the Public Authority for Agricultural Affairs and Fish Resources (PAAAFR), forcibly closed all shops at the pet market and destroyed scores of birds to prevent the potential spread of bird flu. The birds were culled en masse and taken to an undisclosed location to be incinerated.

During the operation, customers were turned away and municipal trucks and police cars were on standby.

Avian influenza (H5N1), informally known as bird flu, is a viral infection that can infect not only birds, but also humans and other animals. However, most forms of the virus are restricted to birds. Kuwait last suffered a major outbreak of bird flu in 2007. On Feb 13, 2007, PAAAFR reported the initial outbreak of H5N1 originated in poultry in Wafra. Subsequently, 131 influenza virus infected poultry were confirmed from 20 farms throughout the country.

The disease resulted in high mortality rates among infected flocks, especially in commercial broiler farms in Wafra and among poultry raised in privately owned residential homes and backyard farms. Disease control measures were implemented starting from Feb 18, 2007, including control of poultry movement, vaccination, disinfection of infected premises and culling of 500,000 birds. The final case of subtype H5N1 was detected on April 20, 2007, and all restrictions were lifted on May 12, 2007. Kuwait was declared free of highly pathogenic avian influenza on July 21, 2007.

Worker killed by falling brick

KUWAIT: An Egyptian lost his life when a brick fell on his head while working in a park in Ahmadi. The body was later recovered by the coroner. Workers informed police about the incident, so Ahmadi police and paramedics rushed to the scene. A source said the contractor and some witnesses were summoned for questioning.

Domestic abuse

A Sri Lankan woman accused her Egyptian husband of beating her and stealing KD 310. She lodged a complaint at an Ahmadi police station. She said he beat her with a thick stick and threatened to harm her further, before fleeing the house. Police are looking for the suspect.

Confused at checkpoint

Jahra police sent a Syrian to criminal detectives after being caught in a checkpoint on Salmiyah road with a police vest and an axe. The suspect seemed nervous, so his car was searched and the vest and

axe were found in the trunk.

Stolen necklace

A Kuwaiti accused her friend of stealing her gold necklace after saying she will buy it. The necklace's value is estimated at KD 1,600.

Accountant runs off with cash

A Kuwaiti accused a Syrian accountant of stealing KD 3,000 before disappearing. The accountant was supposed to deposit the money in the company's bank account. The accountant's name was placed on the travel ban list and he is being sought. — Al-Rai

World Autism Awareness Day

By Dr Samira Al-Saad

KUWAIT: The rapid growth in the percentage of people with autism across the entire world has now given the World Autism Organisation (WAO) a high responsibility to coordinate as many countries as possible to find ways to diminish the disparity in autism awareness and access to services. WAO aims to incorporate more and more individuals and organizations worldwide to work for autism with only a sole mantra in mind to "REACH" autism.

It is a well-known factor that currently autism has no cure but the health of individual with autism can be significantly improved by treating those medical conditions that aggravate his/her autism symptoms. For this, the family of the individual with autism must first understand Autism and here is where WAO members need to play a significant role.

Every four years WAO conducts

International conference in different parts of the world; after through study to decide the best place from the bids received to make more awareness on autism and to reach more people through the conference. WAO started this in 2002 (Melbourne-Australia), 2006 (Cape Town-South Africa), 2010 (Monterrey-Mexico), 2014 (Kuwait), 2018 (Houston-USA) and the next 2022 will be in (Malaysia).

This helps autism professionals, parents and others to share information and best practice in autism field, give chance for self-advocacy in such events to reach autism, empowering parents all over the world to help themselves first, then help their children to help their community. Also to let their rights to be heard by political participation and advocacy. To talk and work more with society for education, training and employment and as the Secretary General's strategy for 2019 World Autism Awareness Day to focus on the use of technology as a tool in removing the barriers to their full social economic and political participation in society promoting equality, equity, and inclusion.

All is not far from what world leaders adopted for the 2030 agenda for sustain-



Dr Samira Al-Saad

able development (in 2015) the international community reaffirmed its strong commitment to inclusive, accessible and sustainable development and pledged that no one would be left behind. People with autism are one of them of course. Many goals we want to work together to "REACH" autism by enabling people with autism through the whole life journey to let them enjoy a fulfilling life and to be their voice even for the non verbal.

Equine therapy helps in autism treatment

KUWAIT: Equine therapy, also referred to as horse therapy, equine-assisted therapy, and equine-assisted psychotherapy is a form of experiential therapy that involves interactions between patients and horses. Equine-assisted therapy (EAT) encompasses a range of treatments that involve activities with horses and other equines to promote human physical and mental health. Equine therapy involves activities (such as grooming, feeding, haltering and leading a horse) that are supervised by a mental health professional, often with the support of a horse professional.

Both during the activity and after the patient have finished working with the horse, the equine therapist can observe and interact with the patient in order to identify behavior patterns and process thoughts and emotions. In spite of evolution in medicine and technology, there is no known cure for autism, but hopes rise up from the grounds as autistic children benefit from equine therapy due to the motor, emotional, and sensory sensations that come with riding a horse.

It is well-known that the autistic children feel like living in an isolated environment and are not able to communicate with others regularly, but with equine therapy it helps them demolish that barrier and it also helps in enhancing their psychiatric health. Director of Kuwait Center for Autism Dr Samira Al-Saad said in a statement to KUNA, that equine therapy is just a theory and is not considered an actual treatment for autism, it helps in breaking the communication barriers indeed but does not cure it.

"There are different methods in breaking those communication barriers but with the same efficiency," Al-Saad continued. "There are no official statistics for autistic children in Kuwait



KUWAIT: Equine-assisted therapy and equine-assisted psychotherapy is a form of experiential therapy that involves interactions between patients and horses. — KUNA

due to lack of awareness of this disease in the Kuwaiti society" she added. Al-Saad noted that Kuwait Center for Autism helps in spreading awareness about autism and ways to handle autistic people in their various cases.

On the other hand, researcher Battal Al-Battal said that the equine therapy programs that have been spreading worldwide showed positive outcomes in enhancing those children's psychological states through their social and motion interaction. Salma Al-Eissa, Equine Therapist, said to KUNA that parents now would not mind using equine therapy for their children thanks to its positive results especially for their concentration and communication with the outside world. Equine therapy dates back to the times when horses were used for therapeutic riding in ancient Greek, it was introduced in

Scandinavia after an outbreak of poliomyelitis.

Therapeutic Riding was introduced to the United States and Canada in 1960 with the formation of the Community Association of Riding of the Disabled (CARD). In the United States riding for the disabled developed as a form of recreation and as a means of motivation for education, as well as its therapeutic benefits.

Kuwait Center for Autism was established in 1994 by Dr Samira Al-Saad, a mother of a girl with autism. The main mission of the center is to spread autism awareness and ensure an accurate "Educational Program" to children with autism (a lifelong disability) for improving their educational and societal abilities taking into consideration the individual differences and in the meantime supporting their vocational talents and the possibilities of integration with society. — KUNA

KUNA's economic dept issues publication in three languages

KUWAIT: The Department of Economic and Oil Affairs at Kuwait News Agency (KUNA) issued a new publication (quarterly report) for the first half of 2018 in three languages: Arabic, English and French. The three-chapter report, with an annex on small to medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) projects and a full chapter covers a half-century-long Kuwait-China relationship, in addition to Kuwait Bourse, and Al-Shiqaya Renewable Energy Project.

Head of the Department and general supervisor of the report Hanan Al-Qaisi said in a statement that the specialized oil report, also enclosed within the full publication, is part of the state's development plan aiming at raising public awareness of the economic culture, as well as the importance of national economic institutions. Al-Qaisi added that this year's report was issued for the first time in three languages, in order to keep up with KUNA's progress in broadcasting news in a bid to reach various segments of the world.

She pointed out that last year's oil report won the Sharjah Government Communication Award for the best media initiative in government communication in the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) states in March 2018. She said that this year's report included three chapters: the first of which was devoted to the most important events on Kuwait Stock Exchange during the first half of 2018, including the inclusion of national stock exchange in FTSE Russell index and the inclusion into Morgan Stanley Capital International (MSCI) index in 2019.



She added that the second chapter reviewed economic relations between Kuwait and China, which witnessed a remarkable development during the last decade and accelerated significantly with the visit of His Highness the Amir Sheikh Sabah Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah to China in 2009. The third chapter covers Al-Shiqaya Renewable Energy Project, a joint venture developed by the Kuwait Institute for Scientific Research (KISR) and the Ministry of Electricity and Water, she noted. As part of KUNA's interest in Kuwait youth, especially entrepreneurs and owners of SMEs, the report also included an annex on the outlines of Kuwaiti initiative project, she said. — KUNA



JEDDAH: The Kuwaiti lawmakers during the 12th regular meeting of heads of GCC legislative and shura assemblies. — KUNA

Kuwaiti MPs satisfied with outcome of GCC meeting

JEDDAH: A number of Kuwaiti lawmakers lauded outcome of the 12th regular meeting of heads of GCC legislative and shura assemblies. The conference is one of the fruits produced by efforts of the GCC states, particularly the efforts that had been made by His Highness the Amir for tackling the Gulf rifts and maintaining the Gulf home spirit, the MPs affirmed. Holding of the meeting constitutes "an emphatic proof of the solidity of the Gulf home," said MP Rakan Al-Nisf, undersecretary of the parliamentary caucus, in remarks to KUNA.

Deliberations during the freshly concluded meeting addressed diverse topics concerning the Gulf and issues that would be tackled at forthcoming parliamentary meetings, he added. Dr Odah Al-Ruwaiee, Secretary General of the caucus, said the main feature of the meeting was presence of top legislators of all GCC member

states, adding that the talks addressed sustainable development, youth affairs, defending the Palestinian people and the Golan Heights.

MP Mohammad Al-Dallal stated that the convention final communique reflected its success in narrowing the gap and making coordination toward local, regional and international affairs. "Qatar's presence (in the meeting) alongside the UAE, Saudi Arabia and Bahrain was delightful news for GCC citizens," he said.

MP Ali Al-Degbasi said the conference succeeded in embodiment "of our slogan our Gulf and destiny are single." Arab and Muslim nations desire to see the GCC persisting with the member states' leaders tackling any obstacle obstructing cooperation among the member countries. His fellow lawmaker, Adel Al-Damkhi, lauded His Highness the Amir efforts for ironing out the inter-GCC differences. — KUNA

Local

Photo of the Day



A morning view of the Kuwait Towers taken from the shoreline. — Krishnadas Ramanujam/ KUNA

KIB sponsors an open day for Al-Kharafi Activity Kids Center

KUWAIT: Under the umbrella of its leading social responsibility program, Kuwait International Bank (KIB) recently sponsored an open day for Al-Kharafi Activity Kids Center; the region's first-of-its-kind center dedicated to the development and well-being of disabled children and youth. Held under the patronage of the Kuwait Foundation for Disabled Children, the event aimed at advocating the rights of persons with disabilities, as well as spreading happiness and joy amongst them on this joyous occasion.

The event took was attended by children of all ages and their parents, as well various local schools. The open day featured an array of activities, including live entertainment, games, and competitions for children of all ages. The Bank also distributed a number of gifts amongst the children to spread joy and wonderful memories that will last a lifetime.

On this occasion, Senior Manager of the Corporate Communications Unit at KIB, Nawaf Najia, said: "We are partners and members of the community; a 'Bank for Life'. At KIB, we believe that is our social duty to support all members of the local community, particularly children with disabilities. For this reason, we continue to seize every opportunity to support them through various means, promoting their rights and inclusion in the community - and celebrating with them on special occasions."

It is worth noting that KIB's leading social responsibility program features a wide range of initiatives that serve people with disabilities. Additionally, the Bank provides easily accessible banking services, and accordingly redesigned six of its branches in order to accommodate the needs of customers with special needs, including those who are visually impaired and deaf.



Maritime traffic suspended due to bad weather: KPA

KUWAIT: Maritime navigation has been suspended at the Shuwaikh, Shuaiba and Doha Ports due to bad weather conditions, the Kuwait Ports Authority (KPA) said yesterday. Maritime operations at Shuwaikh and Doha ports have stopped since 12 pm while in Shuaiba suspended since 8 am yesterday, KPA told KUNA in a statement. According to Kuwait Meteorological Department, the weather will witness active dusty winds during the coming hours at speed of more than 60 km/h, with low visibility in some areas and high sea waves of about seven feet. — KUNA

CBK sponsors the Digital Tejari festival

KUWAIT: The Commercial Bank of Kuwait sponsored the Digital Tejari festival at Al-Murooj Complex, within its continued interest to keep in touch with its customers. The festival was arranged by Al-Murooj and is celebrated for three days, during which CBK presented its digital banking services, with emphasis of the T-PAY service which was launched recently. CBK's Deputy General Manager - Corporate Communications Division Amani Al-Waraa said the bank's sponsorship of the Digital Commercial Market comes with the bank's efforts to orient patrons of Al-Murooj complex services with the bank's electronic services and to try the T-PAY service.



Embassy of Palestine in Kuwait marks anniversary of 'Land Day'



Palestinian Ambassador to Kuwait Rami Tahboub

By Faten Omar

KUWAIT: The Embassy of Palestine in Kuwait marked on Sunday the 43rd anniversary of "Land Day", the commemoration of the first intifada against the Israeli occupation of Palestinian territories. The event, which took place at the Abdhussain Abdulredha Theater, began with folk songs to revive Palestinian heritage. Palestinian Ambassador to Kuwait Rami Tahboub recalled the great actions of Kuwait in support of the Palestinian cause and reviving the Palestinian struggle against the Zionist aggression for years in order to restore their rights and land.

"While 43 years have passed since the events of the first Land Day, it continues to represent a symbol of struggle not only for Palestinian citizens of Israel, but for the general Palestinian public. For Palestinians, Land Day presents an opportunity not only to mark a past event, but also to think about creative and resilient ways to further resist Israeli land theft," he said.

The ceremony, which was held in cooperation with the National Council for Culture, Arts and Letters, was attended by Assistant Foreign Minister for Development and International Cooperation Nasser Al-Subaih. Songs by 'Coral Zaman' band and the Palestinian dabka were enjoyed by the audience, who sang and danced in traditional Palestinian costumes.

The 'Land Day' celebration will be held from March 30 to April 2 with a Palestinian photo exhibition and an



exhibition of Palestinian cartoonist Naji al-Ali, as well as cultural and educational events on the Palestinian identity. On March 30, Palestinians mark Land Day to express their attachment to their land and their national identity after Israeli authorities confiscated 21 acres of

Palestinian residential land in 1976, which resulted in the killing of six Palestinians and the wounding of hundreds. The Coral Zaman band was founded in Kuwait in 2016 by a youth group of artists and musicians from the Arab world to revive the original heritage of Palestine.

Brother attempts to kill brother in Mutlaa

By Hanan Al-Saadoun

KUWAIT: A Kuwaiti attempted to kill his brother in Mutlaa due to family disputes by setting his tent ablaze while he was inside. Police received a call about the fire in Mutlaa and they responded along with firemen, who put out the blaze. The suspect's brother has lodged a complaint.

Love gone bad

A Kuwaiti complained against a person known to her who attempted to break down her door and ended up damaging it. The suspect escaped before police arrived. The citizen called the police around dawn yesterday about a person attempting to forcibly enter her flat. Police arrived and found the door was damaged, so they asked her to go to the police station and lodge a complaint. She said that she had previous relations with the man, but after a while she discovered his intentions were bad, so she dumped him. But he continued to call her until his attempted break-in. Police are investigating the matter.

Kuwait grants \$2m to rebuild Gaza

GAZA: A grant provided by Kuwait worth \$2 million has been earmarked to aid reconstruction efforts in the war-ravaged Gaza Strip, the Palestinian Authority said yesterday. The sum of money is mainly allocated for infrastructure projects in Gaza. Palestinian Minister of Public Works and Housing Mufeed Al-Hasayneh told the press, thanking the Kuwaiti government for the support. Kuwait has pledged aid worth \$200 million to help rebuild and modernize Gaza. — KUNA

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International

TUESDAY, APRIL 2, 2019



UN blasts 'inhuman'
Brunei law on stoning
for adultery, gay sex

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Facebook removes 687 accounts, pages linked to India Congress Party



BIRGUNJ: Nepali villagers search for belongings in the debris of damaged homes at Bhaluhi Bhabaliya village in Nepal's southern Bara district near Birgunj yesterday. — AFP

Nepal storm kills 27; hundreds injured

Rare spring storm batters the rural district of Bara

KATHMANDU: A freak storm tore down houses and overturned cars and trucks as it swept across southern Nepal killing at least 27 people and leaving more than 600 injured, officials said yesterday as a major rescue operation gathered pace. The rare spring storm battered the rural district of Bara and adjoining areas late Sunday with high winds. Five children were among the dead, the home ministry said, as rescuers battled to get relief supplies to the region and evacuate injured. The winds were so fierce that they overturned a bus carrying passengers, witnesses said. Houses, trees and electricity pylons were all toppled in the storm.

Injured victims flocked to local hospitals that were

unable to cope and at least seven people were airlifted to Kathmandu for treatment. "We were in a shop when the wind started to pick up," Jay Prakash Das, a Bara resident, told AFP. "It suddenly became stronger and we saw people running to shelter. We closed our shutter and stayed in. When it died down after a minute or two we opened the shutter to see everything flattened ... trees, houses everything."

Killer trees

He added: "We rushed out to help. A man had died right next to our building under a tree. People had fractured bones and many had head injuries." "I've never seen anything like this. The winds took away

everything, my home and my family," Ram Babu Patel, 45, whose wife was killed in the storm, told AFP by telephone. "I was at home getting ready for dinner when the storm hit—it was unbelievable. We have nothing left." Many of the victims were crushed to death under the debris of their houses or by fallen trees and poles. The strong winds overturned parked cars.

Prakash Tharu, a volunteer in Bara district hit hard by the storm, described the scene of devastation in the villages. "The storm destroyed everything in its path. Houses have no roofs and trees are all down," Tharu said. "There is a desperate need for food and relief." Rescuers struggled to reach many settlements blocked by fallen trees and electricity poles. "Security

bodies including the army have been working intensely since Sunday night on rescues and relief," said Rajesh Poudel, Bara's district chief.

Every year hundreds die in landslides and floods during Nepal's monsoon season, but storms causing such high casualties in spring are rare. Nepal's difficult terrain and limited infrastructure often leave emergency workers struggling to reach far-flung areas. Prime Minister KP Sharma Oli expressed his condolences and said that the government would do what it could for treatment of the injured. The provincial government has announced free treatment and a financial assistance of 300,000 rupees (\$2,710) for families of the dead.—AFP

British MPs seek new Brexit plan

LONDON: British MPs will try again to chart a new Brexit course yesterday after rejecting Prime Minister Theresa May's deal for a third time, but the EU warned its patience was wearing thin. Less than two weeks before Britain risks crashing out of the European Union, MPs will hold a second round of votes on various options to try to break the political deadlock.

But any attempt to move towards closer ties with the EU risks splitting the government, and she might try one last time to get her deal in the coming days. EU leaders have called an emergency summit on April 10 and warned that unless Britain sets out a plan, it risks cutting ties with its largest trading partner two days later with no deal at all. "With our British friends we have had a lot of patience, but even patience is running out," European Commission President Jean-Claude Juncker told Italian public TV channel Rai 1 on Sunday.

'Ill-disciplined' cabinet

Britain voted by 52 percent to leave the EU in a 2016 referendum, but the process has been mired in divisions over the terms of the divorce and what kind of future ties to seek. The political chaos forced May to postpone Britain's original exit day from March 29, but she said it would be "unacceptable" for a further delay beyond European Parliament elections on May 23-26.

Frustrated with her approach, MPs in the House of Commons last week voted to give themselves powers to find an alternative strategy, by holding a series of "indicative votes". No single option won a majority in the first round but MPs will try again, with voting starting at 8.00 pm, and another day of debate is scheduled for this Wednesday. The two most popular options last week were a new EU-UK customs union or a public vote on any agreed deal, both backed by the opposition Labor party.

Some pro-European ministers might support a customs union, but that risks mass rebellion



LONDON: Britain's Prime Minister Theresa May (left) and Number 10 Chief of Staff Gavin Barwell (center) leave from the rear of 10 Downing Street in central London yesterday. —AFP

among the rest of May's cabinet, who believe it would curtail Britain's freedom after Brexit. Another widely discussed plan, based on the model of Norway's membership of the EU's single market, secured less support last week but many MPs abstained. In rare public remarks, chief whip Julian Smith - who enforces discipline among May's Conservative MPs - said a closer relationship with the EU was "inevitable" due to the make-up of parliament.

But in a BBC interview broadcast yesterday, he also noted the divisions among ministers, saying it was "the worst example of ill-discipline in cabinet in British political history". German junior foreign minister Michael Roth had harsher words when he addressed a meeting of his Social Democratic Party in Berlin this weekend. "Brexit is a shitshow, I'll say it quite undiplomatically," he said. He blamed people who "went to private schools and elite universities", saying: "They screwed it up and others have to take responsibility for it."

General election threat

May struck a divorce deal with the EU last

November, but it was rejected by MPs in January, on March 12 and again last Friday. The numbers of Conservative MPs against the plan fell after May pledged to resign if it passed, but her Northern Irish allies, the Democratic Unionist Party (DUP), are still opposed. Guy Verhofstadt, the leader of the European Parliament's Brexit committee, urged MPs to "find a compromise and stop this chaos". "This evening, for once voting 'Yes', instead of every time voting 'No'," he tweeted.

Cabinet ministers will meet on Tuesday morning to discuss the outcome of the ballots, and could still decide to hold a fourth vote on May's deal tomorrow or Thursday. The votes by MPs are not legally binding but the government fears they may lead to legislation that would force May's hand. "I fear we are reaching the limits of this process in this House," the prime minister said last week, fuelling speculation that the only way out may be a general election. But many Conservative MPs oppose the idea. The party's deputy chairman James Cleverly told Sky News: "I don't think an election would solve anything."—AFP

Congress's many promises to take on Modi in polls

NEW DELHI: From a monthly dole for the poor to jobs quota for women, India's main opposition Congress party is making one promise after another in a bid to oust Prime Minister Narendra Modi in a multi-phase general election that starts next week. Modi's ruling Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) has also weighed measures to woo farmers, small business owners and those who are less well-off. Here are the main promises made by Congress, which will release its election manifesto on Tuesday.

'Assault on poverty'

Congress will give 72,000 rupees (\$1,038) to each of India's poorest families every year if voted back to power, its president Rahul Gandhi said last week, calling the move a "final assault on poverty". The program, to be implemented in phases, would benefit 250 million of a population of 1.3 billion, Gandhi said. The BJP has called the announcement a gimmick while some economists have called it fiscally irresponsible.

Jobs

Gandhi says there are 2.2 million vacant government jobs and that Congress will fill them by March 31, 2020 if voted back to power.

Women empowerment

The party has promised to reserve a third of federal government jobs for women and push through the long-pending Women's Reservation Bill, which provides for 33 percent of seats in national and state assemblies to be reserved for women.

Healthcare

Congress has promised to more than double healthcare spending to 3 percent of GDP by 2024, provide free diagnostics and medicines through public hospitals, set up more medical colleges and give financial support to medical students.

Education

It has promised to boost spending on education to 6 percent of GDP by 2023/24, up from an estimated 2.7 percent in 2018.

Removing redtape

Gandhi has said he will relax rules for new businesses and offer tax incentives to firms in order to create jobs if he comes to power. New businesses would not need any government permissions in the first three years of operations. Congress would scrap taxes on investors in new businesses and make bank loans easier.—Congress has promised to reform the goods and services tax into a "simple and minimum tax". —Reuters

International

UN slams 'inhuman' Brunei law on stoning for adultery, gay sex

New law stipulates amputations for theft

GENEVA: The United Nations decried yesterday new "cruel and inhuman" laws set to take effect in Brunei this week which impose death by stoning for gay sex and adultery, and amputations for theft. "I appeal to the government to stop the entry into force of this draconian new penal code, which would mark a serious setback for human rights protections for the people of Brunei if implemented," UN rights chief Michelle Bachelet said in a statement.

Brunei, an absolute monarchy ruled for 51 years by Sultan Hassanal Bolkiah, has said it will implement the new penal code starting tomorrow. Brunei first announced the measures in 2013, but implementation has been delayed, in the face of opposition by rights groups, and as officials worked out the practical details.

The new law stipulates the death penalty for a number of offences, including rape, adultery, sodomy, robbery and insulting or defaming the Prophet Muhammad. It also introduces public flogging as punishment for abortion as well as amputation for theft, and criminalizes exposing Muslim children to the beliefs and practices of any religion besides Islam.

Bachelet pointed out that a wide range of UN rights experts had "expressed their concerns about the cruel, inhuman and degrading punishments contained in the Penal Code order". Her comments came after a long line of politicians and celebrities, including George Clooney and Elton John, condemned the new laws and called for a boy-

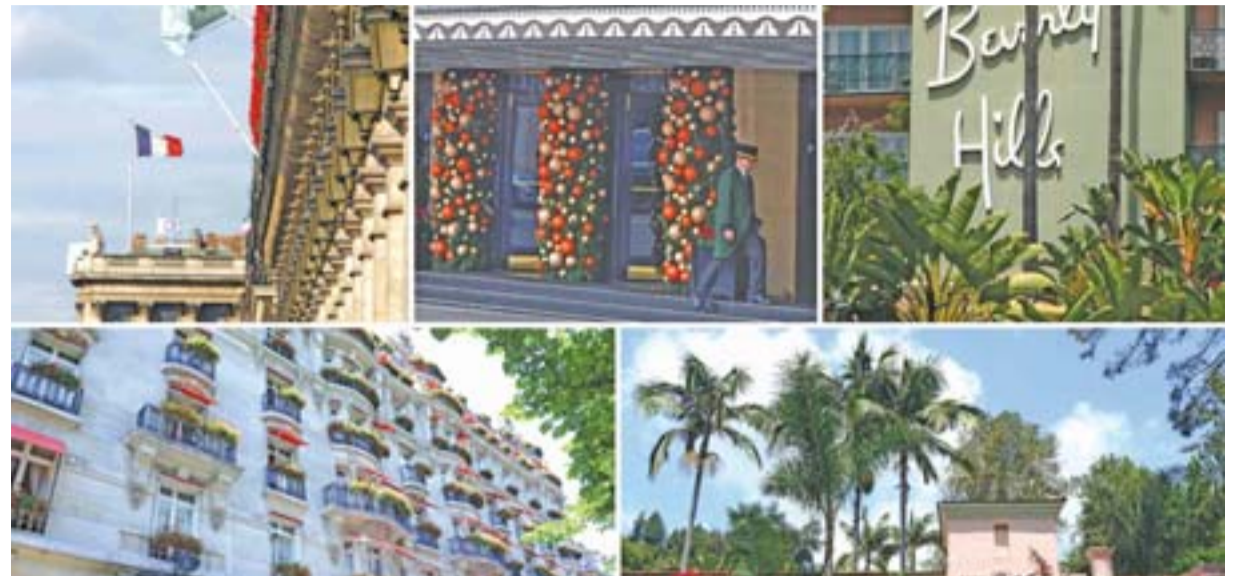
cott of hotels owned by the sultanate. Homosexuality has long been illegal in Brunei, which practices a stricter brand of Islam than neighbors Malaysia and Indonesia, but it will now become a capital offence. The law applies only to Muslims.

Last execution in 1957

Bachelet urged Brunei to uphold a long tradition of not applying the death penalty laws that have remained on its books. The country last carried out an execution in 1957. She stressed that international law imposes very stringent restrictions on the use of the death penalty, which can only be applied for the crimes of murder and intentional killing, and only after all due process requirements have been met.

"In reality, no judiciary in the world can claim to be mistake-free, and evidence shows that the death penalty is disproportionately applied against people who are already vulnerable, with a high risk of miscarriages of justice," Bachelet said. "I urge Brunei to maintain its de facto moratorium on the use of capital punishment."

The UN High Commissioner for Human Rights also warned that the new laws could encourage violence and discrimination on the basis of gender, sexual orientation and religious affiliation. "Any religion-based legislation must not violate human rights, including the rights of those belonging to the majority religion as well as of religious minorities and non-believers," she said. — AFP



A combination of pictures created shows the facades of five of the nine Dorchester Collection hotels owned by Brunei: (top left-right) Hotel Meurice in Paris, The Dorchester in London, The Beverly Hills Hotel in Los Angeles, (bottom left to right) The Hotel Plaza Athenee in Paris and The Hotel Bel-Air in Los Angeles. British pop legend Elton John has joined 'friend' George Clooney in calling for a boycott of nine Brunei-owned hotels over the sultanate's new death-penalty laws for gay sex and adultery. — AFP

Palestinians see little hope in Israeli elections

RAMALLAH: Tayseer Barakat is like many Palestinians when asked about the upcoming Israeli elections. He doesn't see much hope. "We have learned from past experience that we are always the victims of Israeli elections, and it doesn't seem there will be anything new," said 58-year-old Barakat.

"It is more than likely there will be no meaningful changes, despite our hopes that there will be something new to change the situation," he added as he walked with bags of groceries in Ramallah in the occupied West Bank. Israel's upcoming elections could have a direct effect on the Palestinians, but many have little interest in who wins, having lost hope it's more than 50-year occupation will end no matter which party is in charge. Some who do express concern say they are worried the campaign could lead to an uptick in incitement against Palestinians.

Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu's current coalition is considered the most right-wing in Israel's history and includes prominent members who rule out a Palestinian state while seeking aggressive settlement expansion. Some call for annexing large parts of the West Bank. Peace talks have been frozen since 2014. The Ramallah-based Palestinian Authority has previously made a freeze on settlement building a pre-requisite to re-entering peace talks.

At the beginning of the election campaign it was widely assumed Netanyahu would win, despite being dogged by corruption allegations. But former military chief Benny Gantz has emerged as a serious challenger, with polls showing his centrist Blue and White alliance slightly ahead of Netanyahu's Likud. Under those polls, Gantz would still fall far short of an outright majority and it is unclear whether he could assemble enough parties to form a coalition.

'Separation'

Early in the campaign, Gantz signaled openness to withdrawing settlers from parts of the West Bank. His alliance's platform favors "separation from the Palestinians" but does not mention a two-state solution. Palestinians initially saw encouraging signs, but Saleh Rafat, a member of the Palestine Liberation Organization's



KHAN YUNIS: Mourners carry the body of Bilal Al-Najjar, 17, during his funeral in Khan Yunis in the southern Gaza Strip. — AFP

executive committee, said he now believes the policies of Gantz and Netanyahu are similar.

"So far we haven't seen fundamental differences between the right-wing and the centre party," he said. "They are proposing a unified Jerusalem and to continue settlement and control over the Jordan Valley." Israel seized mainly Palestinian east Jerusalem in the 1967 Six-Day War and considers the entire city its capital. The Palestinians see the city's eastern sector as the capital of their future state.

Israel occupied the West Bank, including parts of the Jordan Valley, in 1967. More than 600,000 Israelis live in settlements in east Jerusalem and the West Bank, communities considered illegal under international law. The international community sees them as one of the largest obstacles to peace, though Israel disputes this while pointing to Palestinian attacks and what it calls incitement to violence.

Hafed Barghouti, a former Palestinian newspaper editor, said relative calm in the West Bank has led to less attention to the conflict in Israeli elections. Israeli politics have also shifted firmly to the right in recent years. "There is no Israeli party talking about the Palestinian issue. Those that do talk, do so in the language of a brutal occupation," he said. "The right, centre and left agree to ignore the Palestinian issue and focus more on the legalization of marijuana."

Whether to legalize recreational-use marijuana has received unexpected attention in the Israeli campaign. The Israeli elections come amid ongoing animosity between the two main Palestinian factions, president Mahmud Abbas's West Bank-based Fatah and Islamist movement Hamas, which controls the Gaza Strip. The split between the two has made Palestinian parliamentary and presidential elections impossible for more than a decade. — AFP

Algeria bans corruption suspects from leaving as Bouteflika clings on

ALGIERS: Algerian prosecutors yesterday announced fresh graft probes and a ban on corruption suspects leaving the country, as a government shake-up failed to halt calls for President Abdelaziz Bouteflika to quit. The ailing leader, who has rarely been seen in public since a 2013 stroke, is clinging to power in the face of mammoth demonstrations sparked by attempts to prolong his 20-year rule. The authorities did not say who was being targeted by the new investigations into corruption and illegal money transfers abroad, but they followed the arrest of the president's key backer, businessman Ali Haddad.

Haddad, who Forbes magazine describes as one of Algeria's wealthiest entrepreneurs, was detained overnight Saturday to Sunday at a border post with neighboring Tunisia, a security source said, without giving reasons for the arrest. On Sunday, as rumors swirled of frantic behind-the-scenes maneuvering, the Algerian authorities also banned all private aircraft from taking off and landing until the end of the month.

The North African state has been rocked by huge protests since Bouteflika, 82, announced in February that he was seeking a fifth term in office. The veteran leader, whose current mandate was meant to end on April 28, said last month he was pulling out of the race but postponed scheduled elections. The move has done little to assuage public ire and hundreds of thousands of people took to the streets of Algiers on Friday demanding the president and his entourage go.

Faced with the persistent anger, a succession of veteran Bouteflika loyalists have sought to distance themselves from the president in recent days. Armed forces chief of staff Ahmed Gaid Salah last week called for him to step down or be declared medically unfit. Long a faithful Bouteflika supporter, Gaid Salah said on television it was "imperative" to find a way out of the crisis "which responds to the legitimate demands" of the people in line with the constitution.



PARIS: Protesters rally against the Algerian ruling party at the Place de la Republique in Paris. — AFP

'Beginning of the End?'

On Sunday, Bouteflika unveiled a new government made up mainly of technocrats under recently appointed premier Noureddine Bedoui. The administration—which is supposed to steward the country towards a transition—includes Gaid Salah remaining in his position as deputy defense minister. The government unveiling failed to curb calls for Bouteflika to leave, as hundreds of people in Algiers demonstrated overnight against the announcement. Media outlets were awash with speculation that the appointments could help pave the way for Bouteflika's imminent resignation. The news website TSA described the new administration as a "result of compromise between the army command and the presidency".

The El Moudjahid daily, traditionally viewed as close to power, ran a headline reading "The Beginning of the End?" and said the army's proposal for Bouteflika to go "is the only one that offers a clear and convincing way out". The idea of Bouteflika's inner circle retaining their grip on power through a substitute leader has drawn short shrift from protesters dealing with high unemployment and economic hardships. Young people have made up a key part of the demonstrations in a country where half the population is under 30. — AFP

Israel loosens restrictions on Gaza fishermen

JERUSALEM: Israel loosened restrictions on fishermen off the blockaded Gaza Strip yesterday by allowing them to travel up to 15 nautical miles into the Mediterranean in one area, the largest distance in years. The decision comes after Hamas, the Islamist movement that rules Gaza, said it had been engaged in Egyptian-brokered talks with Israel on easing parts of the blockade in return for calm.

Israel has not commented on the negotiations. Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu is widely seen as wanting to avoid a severe escalation in the Gaza Strip ahead of April 9 Israeli elections. "The fishing zone in the Gaza Strip has been expanded to a maximum of 15 nautical miles," said COGAT, the Israeli defense ministry unit that oversees such regulations. It did not say in which areas the zone would extend to 15 nautical miles.

The Gaza fishermen's union said the zone was set at six nautical miles in the north—the area next to Israel—as well as 12 off central Gaza and 15 in the south near the Egyptian border. The distance is the largest allowed in years by Israel, which has fought three wars with Palestinian militants in the enclave and has blockaded it for more than a decade. Miriam Marmor, spokeswoman for Gisha, an NGO that monitors restrictions on Gaza, however noted that it remains short of the 20 nautical miles agreed to under the Oslo accords of the 1990s.

Gisha also said enforcement of the zone has in the past led Israeli soldiers to fire toward fishermen and to seize vessels for those accused of violating it. "The enforcement of such a complicated demarcation of various permitted distances is likely to endanger the lives of fishermen and threaten their equipment," it said. The distance has fluctuated in recent years from between three nautical miles up to 12 in certain areas.

In late February, Israel extended part of the zone to 12 nautical miles while other areas remained at six. On Sunday, Israel reopened its goods and people crossings with the Gaza Strip after having kept them closed for nearly a week following a rare long-distance rocket strike from the Palestinian enclave. Restrictions had also been placed on the fishing zone. — AFP

Ahead of LGBT+ crackdown, fleeing Bruneians fear for friends back home

KUALA LUMPUR: As a transgender woman growing up in Brunei, Zoe saw the country's slide towards conservatism from an early age, so plans to introduce strict new Islamic laws this week came as no surprise. The 19-year-old, who was born male but identified as female from early childhood, is now awaiting the outcome of her asylum application in Canada after fleeing her country late last year.

"Even before Sharia law, LGBT+ people could be prosecuted under civil law," Zoe told the Thomson Reuters Foundation, which is identifying her by only one name for her protection. "I've always been scared of living my life openly in Brunei. I still am. I still think about how I present myself, because I was conditioned to survive."

Brunei, a Muslim-majority former British protectorate with a population of about 400,000, is due to implement Sharia laws from April 3, punishing sodomy, adultery and rape with the death penalty, and theft with amputation. The laws, elements of which were first adopted in 2014, could see LGBT+ people whipped or stoned to death for same-sex activity. Some aspects of the laws will apply to non-Muslims. "I knew it was going to happen," said Zoe, who hopes to one day undergo hormone therapy and formally change her name to the one she sometimes goes by.

"Our oil reserves were dwindling and the sultan needed a way to control the economy once he started to enforce taxes and reduce the high subsidies." The Brunei Prime Minister's Department did not respond to an emailed request for comment yesterday. Brunei does not hold elections and any discontent is assuaged with generous government policies including zero taxes, subsidized housing, and free healthcare and education.

Zoe, who is worried that her LGBT+ friends back in Brunei do not fully appreciate how dangerous the situation will soon become, faces an uncertain future. "If I get sent back to Brunei, I will confess who I am and what I believe in to the Bruneian authorities," she said. "I'd rather die being true to myself than resenting a long life. I wish that Muslims who want Sharia law just keep it with themselves and God. Not enforce it onto other people."

Asia's silence

Sultan Hassanal Bolkiah, 72, is the world's second-longest-reigning monarch and prime minister of oil-rich Brunei. He ranks as one of the world's wealthiest people. Since details of the new laws were announced, actor George Clooney and musician Elton John are among celebrities who have called for a boycott of hotels owned by the government-owned Brunei Investment Agency. Britain, Australia, New Zealand and the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights have all called on Brunei to abandon changes to its penal code.

"It is seriously regrettable that Brunei's decision contravenes a number of international norms on human rights," New Zealand's Foreign Minister Winston Peters said in a statement on Sunday. Matthew Woolfe, founder of human rights group The Brunei Project, said it was now very unlikely that Brunei would backtrack, but diplomatic pressure from Asian countries could help ensure the laws were not enforced fully. "We want to see more Asian governments coming out and speaking up on this. They have been too quiet," said the Australia-based campaigner.

Socially conservative attitudes prevail across Asia, with Myanmar, Malaysia and Singapore banning sexual relationships between men, while Indonesia has seen an increase in raids targeting LGBT+ people in recent years. Members of the Association of South East Asian Nations, which did not respond to requests for a comment, have a principle of non-interference in each others' domestic affairs. "I'm not aware of any Asian country having come out and said anything about these laws," said Woolfe.

Brunei, which neighbors two Malaysian states on Borneo island, already enforces Islamic teachings more strictly than Malaysia and Indonesia, the other majority Muslim countries in Southeast Asia. Previously homosexuality was illegal in Brunei and punishable by up to 10 years imprisonment, while the sale of alcohol is banned and evangelism by other religions is forbidden. Ging Cristobal, project coordinator at OutRight Action International in Manila, urged other Muslim countries in the region to put pressure on Brunei. — Reuters

International

Fight and talk: Afghanistan war escalates - alongside peace push

Hundreds of Afghan forces killed or wounded

KABUL: Fighting in Afghanistan has escalated ahead of the usual spring season, as both sides seek to increase leverage in talks on a peace settlement - a gamble that analysts warn could also risk hardening positions. In March, hundreds of Afghan forces were killed or wounded in heavy clashes in southern, western and northern Afghanistan, according to unofficial reports. Two US special forces were killed near Kunduz, and attacks by both sides caused civilian casualties. US air strikes also accidentally killed Afghan soldiers, in a case of friendly fire.

"Government forces are on the offensive this year. We expect a lot of fighting and obviously casualties," said a senior Afghan security source. Seasonal trends to fighting have become less defined over the years, as most Taliban now fight near their homes and so do not need to wait for snow to melt in the mountain passes to travel to battlefields, said Graeme Smith, a consultant for the International Crisis Group (ICG).

Even so, the Taliban annually announces the start of a spring offensive with fanfare and a name evoking epic importance, such as last year's "Al Khandaq" campaign - named after the Battle of the Trench, fought by the Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) to defend the city of Madinah in Islam's early days. This year, Afghan forces beat the Taliban to naming their offensive, launching a spring operation dubbed "Khaled", an Arabic word for "endless", said the Afghan security source. "The objective of the operations this year will be to improve intelligence gathering and targeted strikes against the enemy," he said.

The "fight and talk" strategy has been used to describe the Afghan war as far back as the Obama US presidency. One diplomat said Afghanistan's escalation follows a similar path of greater fighting in South Sudan and Colombia ahead of peace settlements for those conflicts. But for a country 17 years into its latest war, the escalation only adds to a sense of discouragement. Rising violence also comes with the risk that positions will harden, deferring a

settlement, rather than creating urgency that could bring the sides together, said the ICG's Smith. Afghanistan Chief Executive Abdullah Abdullah, asked about the more aggressive strategy, said it simply reflected a need to be ready for every possibility. "If the government and the Taliban agreed on a ceasefire, then the security defense forces will act accordingly," he told reporters in Kabul. Pentagon spokesman Lieutenant-Colonel Kone Faulkner said in an email that there has been "no change" in US policies and in its partnered fighting with Afghan forces.

Taliban gearing up

The latest round of recurring peace talks ended in early March with both US and Taliban officials citing progress. The start of the next round has not been announced, but is expected this month. The negotiations came amid fierce fighting in several corners of Afghanistan, from Kunduz province in the north to Helmand in the south and Badghis in the northwest. Some 100 members of Afghan forces were killed in two attacks in Badghis and Helmand. Thirteen civilians, including 10 children, died in a US air strike in Kunduz and more civilians died in a Helmand stadium attack by the Taliban. Ninety-four members of the Taliban died in a single battle near Kunduz city, according to NATO's Resolute Support Mission, which is supported by troops from 39 countries to train, advise and assist Afghan forces. Fighting in the province killed two US soldiers a day earlier.

The Taliban, meanwhile, met recently to discuss the timing and name of its spring campaign, said a Taliban leader, speaking on condition of anonymity. "Our focus would be more specifically on targeted operations," the leader said. "Our top priority would be minimizing civilian losses." Some Taliban leaders had suggested simply continuing ongoing operations and awaiting the outcome of peace talks, he said. But the group decided against further delay once Afghan forces launched its Khaled offensive, he said. Taliban spokesman Zabihullah Mujahid said the



MAZAR-I-SHARIF: An Afghan shepherd watches his livestock as they graze along the road in Mazar-i-Sharif. — AFP

group would launch its spring offensive in about a month when the weather warms. One diplomat, whose country supplies soldiers to the Resolute Support mission, said he doubted the Taliban wanted to stop fighting, because it would be difficult to quickly regain the insurgency's fighting capability if its forces dispersed. "The Taliban's leverage is

their military activities," a second diplomat said. Both spoke on condition of anonymity because of the sensitivity of talks. Increased fighting also heightens concerns about civilian casualties, after a record 3,804 civilians were killed last year, said Anthony Neal, advocacy manager for the Norwegian Refugee Council in Afghanistan. — Reuters

News in brief

Quake hits Iran-Iraq border

TEHRAN: A 5.2-magnitude earthquake yesterday struck the western Iranian province of Kermanshah bordering Iraq, authorities said, without reporting damage or casualties. The quake struck a region already gripped by massive floods that have cut off entire cities and submerged many villages. More than 40 people were reported killed in floods last month across much of Iran. The national seismological centre said the quake's epicenter was 22 kilometers south of the city of Sumar and at a depth of 10 kilometers. "Thankfully there have been no reports of damage or casualties till now," Kermanshah's governor-general Houshang Bazvand told state TV. Iran sits on top of two major tectonic plates and sees frequent seismic activity. The last massive earthquake struck in November 2017 when a 7.3-magnitude tremor in Kermanshah province killed 620 people. — AFP

10 farmers killed in Nigeria

KANO: Armed men suspected of belonging to gangs involved in cattle rustling and kidnapping in northern Nigeria, attacked a village in Zamfara state leaving 10 people dead, a police spokesman said on Sunday. Gunmen on motorcycles invaded onion fields on Saturday outside the village of Kware in the Shinkafi district and shot dead farmers at work, Mohammed Shehu said. "We received a report of an attack in Kware by bandits in which 10 people were killed," Shehu said. "Security personnel were dispatched to the area to restore order," the spokesman said. He did not give details of the reason for the attack, but residents said it could be in reprisal for a recent military operation against the bandits in the area. Last week troops deployed in the state to fight the criminal gangs raided two of their training camps in north and northwest Nigeria. — AFP

Russia fines Jehovah's Witness

MOSCOW: A Russian court yesterday found a Jehovah's Witness guilty of participating in an extremist organization and ordered him to pay a \$5,000 fine, authorities and the religious movement said. Sergei Skrynnikov was fined 350,000 rubles (\$5,360), a spokeswoman for the district court in the southern city of Oryol said. The prosecution had demanded three years in jail for 56-year-old Skrynnikov, who was the second Jehovah's Witness to be convicted in Russia of having links to an extremist organization. Last month, the same court imprisoned a Danish Jehovah's Witness, Dennis Christensen, for six years for organizing the activities of an extremist organization. The Jehovah's Witnesses, a US-based Christian evangelical movement, decried the verdict. "Skrynnikov is yet another victim of Russia's campaign to crush the peaceful religious activity of Jehovah's Witnesses," spokesman Paul Gillies said in a statement. — AFP

15 killed in Myanmar bus crash

YANGON: At least 15 people were killed in Myanmar after the bus they were travelling in plunged into a gorge, police and state media said yesterday. The deadly accident happened in Bago region north of the commercial capital Yangon on Saturday evening. The bus was carrying 40 people when it hit a road sign and careered off the road plummeting 60 meters, state-run Global New Light of Myanmar reported. A local police officer who did not want to be named said 15 people were killed although the newspaper put the death toll at 16. More than a dozen were injured. "The bus conductor was killed and the driver has been hospitalized," the officer told AFP, adding that the driver will face charges. Most of the passengers were construction workers. Myanmar has a poor road safety track record. — AFP

The migration crisis stokes desperation on Greece's Lesbos

LESBOS: When thousands of people fleeing war and poverty began arriving on their Greek island, many on Lesbos welcomed them. Four years later a sprawling local camp is packed with desperate asylum-seekers and migrants - and islanders' patience is wearing thin. In the small village of Moria, local people living next to one of the region's largest migrant camps have grown tired of their role at the centre of Europe's migration crisis, while those trapped inside despair of overcrowded conditions and the long wait for asylum.

"There's a great indignation among locals. Europe must understand this burden, Greece shouldn't lift it by itself, it should be shared, every state must take its part," said Nikos Trakellis, Moria village chairman. He said it was as yet unclear how the issue would affect voting in local and European elections in May, with fears that the far-right could capitalize on anti-immigration sentiment across the bloc. "There are issues every day... all their sewage, the dirt we breathe it," he said, accusing migrants from the camps of stealing livestock and food.

At around 7,000, refugees and migrants on Lesbos currently outnumber the local

population by 2.5 to one. According to the UN refugee agency UNHCR, the situation is even more explosive on the island of Samos, at six to one. But it's not as if the migrants and refugees want to stay on Lesbos. Ibrahim Adamou, a 27-year-old from Togo, spent six months in the Moria camp, witnessing "disgusting" conditions and sleeping "on the ground, in the cold". He has been offered an asylum hearing in October.

Search for freedom

"Europe must not disappoint us," said Lesbos' outgoing mayor Spyros Galinos. "We are still waiting for pressure on the Moria camp to be lifted. They keep coming and this creates a bottleneck," he said. Most migrants want to move on to wealthier EU states such as Germany and France to rejoin relatives and find work unavailable in crisis-hit Greece. But EU borders have been closed for the past three years.

Both economic migrants and war refugees register for asylum regardless of their chances of success, clogging the system. "I thought I would find freedom in Europe," said Mohamed from Syria. He said he has been trapped on Lesbos for three years. The camp's deputy commander Dimitrios Vafeas admitted "there's a huge waiting list" to process claims. "We have arrivals every day, 90 percent of them Afghans. It's important to continue accelerating the transfers to the mainland," he told AFP.

The government has already transferred hundreds of the most vulnerable refugees to camps elsewhere in Greece. They are replaced within days by new arrivals. Living under such confined conditions fur-



LESBOS: Women stand outside tents at an unofficial camp outside the refugee camp of Moria on the Greek island of Lesbos. — AFP

ther saps the fragile health of camp residents. Caroline Willemen, Lesbos coordinator for Doctors Without Borders, said people suffered ailments associated with poor hygiene, diarrhoea, respiratory problems and mental illness.

Most people at the camp meet the criteria for resettlement in other EU countries, argued Stratis Skountianellis, a lawyer specialising in refugee cases. In the past people would only stay on the islands for a maximum of two days, according to UNHCR's representative in Greece, Philippe Leclerc. "But the slow workings of

Greek bureaucracy, and pressure by certain EU member states to keep migrants on the islands, have created overpopulation and suffering on both sides," he said.

Trakellis, the Moria village leader, said the 2015 crisis hit "like a cyclone". "Wherever you looked, there were refugees and migrants. Yes, we welcomed them but how long can you last? People are tired." According to EU border agency Frontex, Greece in 2019 registered some 5,500 migrant and refugee arrivals in the first two months of the year, just behind Spain. — AFP

At least 20 dead in Peru bus fire

LIMA: At least 20 people were killed and about 10 injured Sunday night in a bus fire at an illegal transport terminal in the Peruvian capital, emergency services said. A number of the victims burned to death, trapped on the upper level of the interprovincial bus in Lima, firefighters said. Passersby described scenes of panic and cries of terror. Much of the vehicle was reduced to a skeleton, and the corpses of some victims could still be seen in the seats.

Others asphyxiated on the stairway connecting the upper and lower levels. The tragedy reflected the chaos of Peru's public transport system, particularly in the capital of 10 million people where authorities are overwhelmed by transport problems. Initial reports said an electrical fault at the rear of the bus triggered the blaze just after 7:30 pm (0030 GMT).



LIMA: The bodies of passengers are seen in the charred remains of a bus that caught fire in an interprovincial bus station in a populous district north of Lima and left 20 people dead. — AFP

"The fire led to the deaths of at least 20 people," said Lewis Mejia, a fire department official. Authorities did not say how many people were on board. One unidentified man, broken by grief, told local television that he had lost six family members including his wife, children and grandchildren. AFP photographed one woman weeping, her face buried in her hands, while paramedics checked her. Lima's Mayor Jorge Munoz visited the injured in hospital and announced an investigation to punish those responsible.

"I am totally outraged," he said, recalling that insecurity and other problems had led to the closure of the Fiori terminal last year. The station is in Lima's populous northern San Martin de Porres district, from where the bus was to depart for the northern city of Chiclayo. Fiori was operating illegally after local authorities closed it in January 2018 for the unauthorized sale of fuel to public buses. The fire was one of the worst in Lima since December 2001, when a fireworks blast caused a market blaze that killed about 300 people. — AFP

Zelensky: Ukrainian comedian laughing all the way to the ballot box

KIEV: Volodymyr Zelensky has already been elected president of Ukraine in the popular TV show "Servant of the People", the third season of which began airing last week. His rise is strikingly similar to that of his character in the hit series. The 41-year-old comedian's real presidential bid started out as a long shot but, on the back of popular discontent with the political class, he has leapt to pole position. Zelensky's critics brand him a puppet of powerful rivals to Ukraine's current president, Petro Poroshenko. After taking a strong lead in a first-round vote at the weekend he will face the incumbent in a run-off on April 21.

In the TV show, a school history teacher is elected leader after a video rant against corruption goes viral. While supporters see the real-life Zelensky as a breath of fresh air, critics say his manifesto is vague and that a country at war should not be taking a chance on a political novice. The entertainer, who has earned comparisons to US actor-turned-president Ronald Reagan, shuns campaign rallies in favor of comedy gigs. He prefers to get his message across through videos on social media rather than press interviews. "For him personally, this is an interesting life experience, something he hasn't done before," Ukrainian political analyst Mykola Davydyuk said of Zelensky's approach to the campaign. "I'm not ruling out that he does have some burning desire to be president but, most likely, he's unconsciously acting out the role he's played on the screen," Davydyuk said. "And there is a section of the population who believe him and are willing to vote for him."

'It wasn't a joke'

In his comedy shows, which continued up to the very last day of the campaign going into the first round, the line between candidate and showman has been blurred. At a recent gig in the outskirts of Kiev, he took aim at Poroshenko-despite stressing the performance was not a campaign event. "Why is Poroshenko going for a second term? So that he doesn't get a first," Zelensky said, with the implication of a jail term for a leader who has been accused of corruption. "That's not funny," his on-stage partner replied.

"Well, it wasn't a joke," Zelensky said. Zelensky has been accused of being a "puppet" for Ukrainian oligarch Igor Kolomoysky, but he denies any political connection. Kolomoysky, one of Ukraine's richest and most controversial figures, became a regional governor at the start of Poroshenko's term but was forced to resign following a row over a state oil firm. He now lives in Israel. At various points in the campaign Poroshenko has referred to a "fugitive oligarch" trying to influence the vote from abroad. — AFP

International

Facebook removes 687 accounts and pages linked to India Congress Party

'Fake' accounts linked to Pakistani military deleted

NEW DELHI: Facebook Inc said yesterday it was removing 687 pages and accounts linked to India's main opposition Congress party, just days before voting begins in a general election, because of "coordinated inauthentic behavior" on the social media platform. The announcement marks a rare action from Facebook against a prominent political party in a country where it has more than 300 million users, the highest in the world.

Facebook said its investigation found that individuals used fake accounts and joined various groups to disseminate their content and increase engagement. Their posts included local news and criticism of political opponents such as Prime Minister Narendra Modi's Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP), Facebook said. "While the people behind this activity attempted to conceal their identities, our review found that it was connected to individuals associated with an INC (Indian National Congress) IT Cell," Nathaniel Gleicher, Head of Cybersecurity Policy at Facebook, said in a statement.

Gleicher added that Facebook was removing accounts based on their behavior, not the content they posted. India's staggered election, scheduled to begin on April 11, will end on May 19. Two of the samples shared by Facebook were of posts that criticized Modi's initiatives and called for supporting the Congress party and its president, Rahul Gandhi. Facebook has faced increasing pressure from authorities around the world, including the Indian government, to ensure its platform is not abused for political gains or to spread misinformation, especially ahead of elections.

Facebook has toughened up its rules governing political advertisements in India and many other countries to increase transparency. Last week, Facebook removed a social media network in the Philippines and took the unusual step of linking it to a businessman who said he had managed the president's online election campaign in 2016.

It has taken similar actions recently against accounts in Russia and Iran. Separately, Facebook said it had also removed another 227 pages and 94 accounts in India for violating its policies against spam and misrepresentation.

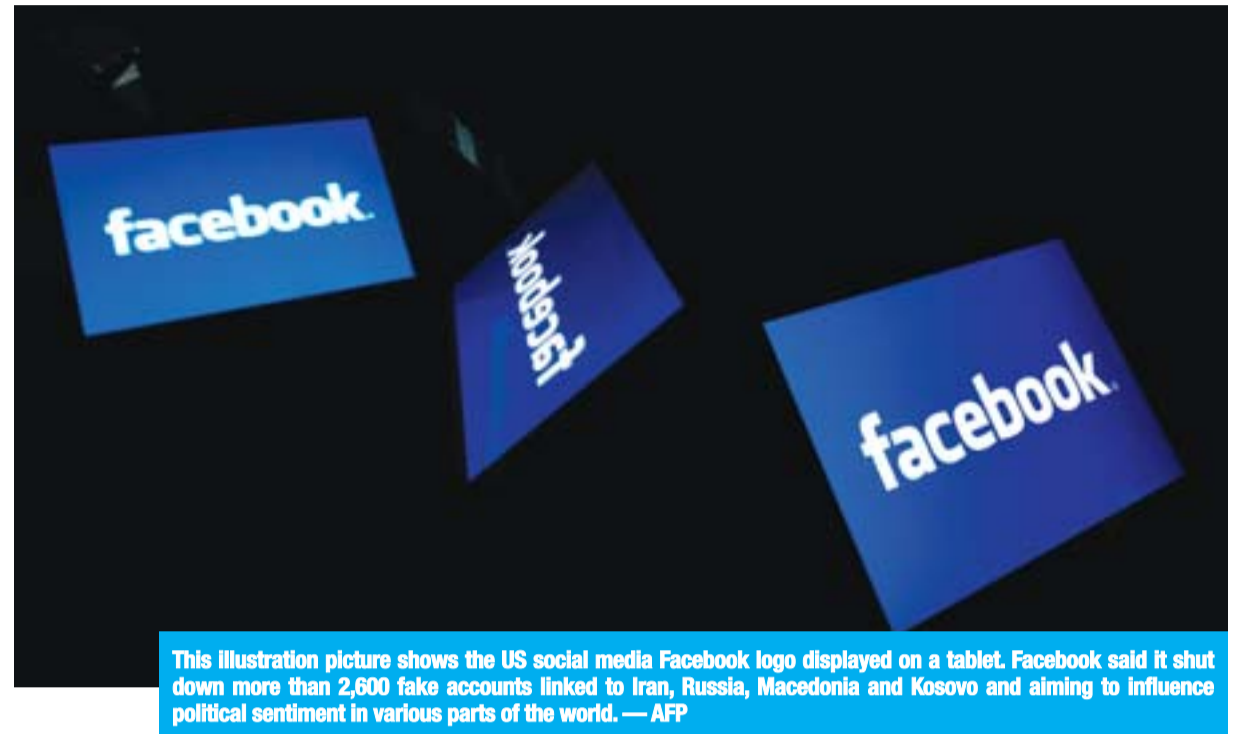
'Fake' accounts

In another development, Facebook is removing 103 pages, groups and accounts linked to the media wing of Pakistan's military, the social media giant announced yesterday, calling them "fake" accounts created to manipulate people. The statement by Facebook's head of cybersecurity policy, Nathaniel Gleicher, shines a rare light on efforts by Pakistan's shadowy military establishment to use social media as a propaganda tool.

"Today we removed 103 Pages, Groups and accounts for engaging in coordinated inauthentic behavior on Facebook and Instagram as part of a network that originated in Pakistan," Gleicher said in the statement. "Although the people behind this activity attempted to conceal their identities, our investigation found that it was linked to employees of the ISPR (Inter-Service Public Relations) of the Pakistani military," he said.

Gleicher said ISPR employees were operating military fan pages, as well as pages on Kashmir, "general Pakistani interest", and local and political news including on topics such as arch-rival India's army and politicians. Some 2.8 million accounts followed one or more of the pages, he said. Examples included a post from a page called "Pakistan Army - the BEST", with an image purporting to show a crashed Indian fighter jet with text reading: "Indian airforce has become a consistent failure which is evident from current embarrassment for India".

Others praised Pakistani prime minister Imran Khan for promoting peace, or propagated unverified claims a Pakistani pilot had shot down five Indian planes. "We are constantly working to detect and stop coordinated inauthentic



This illustration picture shows the US social media Facebook logo displayed on a tablet. Facebook said it shut down more than 2,600 fake accounts linked to Iran, Russia, Macedonia and Kosovo and aiming to influence political sentiment in various parts of the world. — AFP

behavior because we don't want our services to be used to manipulate people," Gleicher said. An ISPR spokesman had no immediate comment when contacted by AFP.

Facebook also said it was removing 687 pages and accounts engaged in similarly "inauthentic" behavior that were linked to India's opposition Congress party, which is contesting nationwide elections due to start on April 11.

Congress reacted cautiously, with spokesperson Manish Tewari saying the party "will need to verify the veracity of these reports". A recent standoff between India and Pakistan over the disputed region of Kashmir saw a deluge of "fake news" hit social media, raising concerns over misinformation in the upcoming election in the world's largest democracy. — Agencies

Five dead after food poisoning at French retirement home

TOULOUSE: Five residents at a retirement home in southern France have died and around a dozen others are in a serious condition after a suspected case of mass food poisoning, officials said yesterday. Twenty-two people at the privately operated Cheneraie residence in Lherm, a town south of Toulouse, began showing symptoms including vomiting after dinner on Sunday, police said in a statement. Four deaths were initially announced by officials, and a source close to the inquiry later told AFP that a fifth person had died.

About a dozen of the 82 residents at the site remain in serious condition. The meals involved have been kept for analysis, the regional health agency said, and residents were being questioned about what they ate. "We suspect food poisoning because these events occurred after the meal," deputy prosecutor Marie-Paule Demiguel told BFM television, adding that the kitchens at the residence would also be investigated.

The grand-daughter of one of the woman who died, aged 95, said she had been served a Perigord salad, a regional speciality that includes duck, ham and foie gras, a duck liver pate. "I still have the menu in my handbag and I know they had Perigord salad last night. What could that mean? Could it be the foie gras? They're going to do an autopsy in any case," the woman told the Depeche du Midi newspaper. The daughter of two other residents, who gave her name as Chantal, told journalists outside the home that "apparently the problem was with meals prepared specially for palliative care patients."

Private operator

The retirement home, open since 2006, operates



LHERM: A French gendarme stands at the entrance of the EHPAD (Housing Establishment for Elderly Dependent People) 'La Cheneraie' yesterday in Lherm, southern France, one day after five residents died due to food poisoning. — AFP

under license from the French government but is run by the private firm Korian, which claims to be the largest network of retirement homes in Europe, with over 800 sites in five countries, representing 78,000 beds. On the Paris stock market, Korian shares were posting some of the biggest losses yesterday, down more than 7 percent at 36.38 euros. The company announced its acquisition of the retirement home in January from its previous operator Omega, a French company which operates 12 homes in France.

"We learned yesterday of these four deaths and illnesses, and that there is suspected food poisoning, with an investigation and analyses underway, and we won't have any comment while awaiting the results," Korian said in a

statement. "If food poisoning is determined, this situation nonetheless remains quite rare in a sector that is subject to strict oversight in terms of food security," the AD-PA association of retirement home directors said. Several family members sought news of their relatives at the site yesterday morning, and a team of psychologists were on hand. A woman who declined to give her name said she came to check on her 84-year-old mother, who suffers from Alzheimer's. "Thank God she's OK. I learned only this morning, and I was quite upset," she said. The deaths come as the government is preparing a draft bill on financing the retirement of an ageing population of baby boomers, which is expected to require an additional nine billion euros (\$10.1 billion) in the health budget by 2030. — AFP

Timeline of events in Kim Jong Nam assassination

KUALA LUMPUR: Malaysian prosecutors yesterday dropped a murder charge against a Vietnamese woman - the last remaining suspect in custody over the assassination of the North Korean leader's half-brother. Doan Thi Huong pleaded guilty to the lesser charge of "causing injury" and is set to walk free next month due to sentence reductions.

It came after authorities last month rejected a request for her murder charge to be dropped entirely - a shock decision after the charge against her Indonesian co-defendant, Siti Aisyah, was withdrawn. The women would have been sentenced to death by hanging if convicted of the brazen murder of Kim Jong Nam at a Malaysian airport in February 2017. Here is a timeline of key events in the killing.

The Hit

A portly North Korean man, later identified as Kim Jong Nam, dies after being attacked at Kuala Lumpur International Airport on February 13. Seoul points the finger at its northern neighbor and says it was a political hit aimed at weeding out potential rivals to North Korean leader Kim Jong Un. Malaysian detectives track down two migrant women - one Vietnamese and one Indonesian - who they say are seen on CCTV carrying out the attack.

The two women, who are eventually charged with murder, say they had been paid to carry out what they thought was a prank for a reality TV show. An autopsy reveals Kim died from exposure to the VX nerve agent, an artificial chemical so deadly it is banned under international treaty and classified by the UN as a weapon of mass destruction.

The Fallout

Kuala Lumpur arrests North Korean citizen Ri Jong Chol in connection with the murder. Over the following days investigators say diplomats and airline employees from the isolated regime are also wanted for questioning. All are holed up at the North Korean embassy or have already left the country. North Korea pours scorn on what it calls "absurd" claims that VX was used, saying South Korea and the US are mounting a smear campaign against



SHAH ALAM: Vietnamese national Doan Thi Huong (center) arrives at the Shah Alam High Court escorted by Malaysian police women on the outskirts of Kuala Lumpur yesterday to stand trial for her alleged role in the assassination of Kim Jong Nam, the half-brother of North Korean leader Kim Jong Un. — AFP

it. Pyongyang insists the dead man was called Kim Chol and demands his body be returned. Investigators refuse to release the corpse. Malaysia cancels a visa-free travel deal with North Korea and expels North Korea's ambassador. Pyongyang hits back, kicking out Malaysia's envoy. Tensions escalate after North Korea bans all Malaysians from leaving Pyongyang. Malaysia retaliates and the international community calls for calm amid allegations of hostage holding.

The Detente

In early March, Ri Jong Chol is released from custody and deported from Malaysia. Frustrated Malaysian police say they believed he was involved in the plot but lacked evidence to prove it. At the end of the month, Malaysia's then-prime minister Najib Razak announces an agreement has been reached to return Kim Jong Nam's body to North Korea. Nine Malaysians stuck in Pyongyang will be free to leave and North Koreans in Kuala Lumpur will be allowed to go home.

In October, the two women go on trial over the murder. They maintain their innocence. Four men formally accused on a charge sheet of plotting with the women to murder Kim Jong Nam are identified by a police officer as North Koreans who fled Malaysia immediately after the assassination. The women's lawyers insist the North Koreans are the real masterminds. — AFP

China lists fentanyl as controlled substance in Washington gesture

BEIJING: China announced yesterday it will launch a crackdown on all fentanyl-like substances from May 1 following US pleas for Beijing to control a drug fuelling a deadly opioid crisis. China is suspected of being the main source of a powerful painkiller 50 times stronger than heroin that has caused record overdose deaths in the United States.

The issue has figured in trade talks between the United States and China, with Beijing promising to list any type of fentanyl when presidents Donald Trump and Xi Jinping agreed to a tariff truce in December. "The US is concerned about all variants (of fentanyl), and it has all been resolved," Liu Yuejin, deputy director of the National Narcotics Control Commission, said at a press conference.

Designating all fentanyl analogues as controlled substances from May 1 aims to prevent smugglers from skirting the law by changing formulas to make drugs similar to the painkiller. Liu outlined further work China would undertake, including inspections of key bio-medical and chemical industrial parks, cleaning up drug-related information online and cutting off criminals' online communication channels.

Chinese authorities will also urge courier companies to implement real-name registration for parcels, stepping up customs checks for high-risk international packages and enhancing enforcement co-operation. Sellers often ship fentanyl via express package services. These are big steps which would have a significant impact, said Mike Vigil, former head of international operations for the US Drug Enforcement Administration.

China produces 85 percent of the world's synthetic opioids, he said. "Without China's co-operation the United States would not be able to put a dent in the current opioid epidemic that has taken so many lives," Vigil told AFP. American officials attending the press conference declined to comment. Wang Hesheng, deputy director of China's National Health Commission, indicated some analogues of fentanyl with legitimate medicinal, industrial and scientific purposes would not be included in the listing. — AFP

Fire up the printers: Scramble as new Japan era name unveiled

AMI, Japan: At the Tokyo offices of a major calendar maker, executives and employees clustered around a television broke into applause as the country's next imperial era name was announced: Reiwa. While the Gregorian calendar is in common use in Japan, the country's imperial era system is also widely used and the announcement has been closely watched.

And for Kunio Kowaguchi, president of the Todan calendar and diary manufacturer, the announcement was more than just symbolic: It kickstarts a frantic period churning out new products bearing the "Reiwa" name. About 30 members of the company gathered around a television at the firm's Tokyo offices when Chief Cabinet Secretary Yoshihide Suga held up the traditional calligraphy revealing the new name.

"I like it, it's very good," Kowaguchi told AFP, pointing out that not many Japanese words begin with an 'r' sound. "Reiwa sounds modern but when you see the characters, it's solemn," he added. The government has not yet issued the official translation of the name's meaning, but it combines the characters "Rei" which can have meanings related to "order" but also "auspicious", and "Wa" meaning "peace" or "harmony".

As soon as the two-character name was announced, a Todan designer rushed to her computer to start preparing new layouts for products bearing "gengo" or imperial era dates. Another employee started consulting digital dictionaries to determine the order in which the strokes of the two characters should be written. That information was then passed on to a calligrapher who began carefully painting the two characters as Kowaguchi and others looked on. The wet ink was hurriedly dried first with a traditional fan and then with a hair dryer to allow the characters to be scanned as quickly as possible.

'50 kinds of calendars'

The new era name has arrived too late for Todan's rollout of 2019 calendars but the company will now start work on 2020 products, as well as a special production of 800 desktop calendars that will run from May 2019 to March 2020. For the year 2020, "we are talking about production plans for 50 kinds of calendars with gengo," Kowaguchi said.

"Plus the special edition for the first year of the new era," Japan is the only country in the world still using Chinese-style imperial calendars, and many people still remember historic events by the era year they occurred rather than the corresponding Gregorian date. So it wasn't just calendar makers firing up the printing presses yesterday, with Japan's newspapers quickly issuing special editions that prompted stampedes in parts of central Tokyo.

At Todan's factory in the town of Ami, 70 kilometers east of Tokyo, 70 workers had their own excited gathering at the firm's canteen to watch the era announcement. "We have all been working together in the past two years (since the abdication was announced) and I was filled with a sense of relief when I heard the name being announced," factory chief Junichi Ishii told AFP. "At the moment of the announcement, we all applauded," he added.

There wasn't much time to savor the moment though, with the factory springing straight into action to begin producing the special edition desktop calendars. Workers manned machines in rooms for printing, cutting and assembling the calendars that feature the name "Reiwa" prominently on their cover page. The large machines responsible for printing the calendars roared and churned out large sheets printed with multiple months, each of which was cut out and then assembled by hand into a calendar.

The calendars will be shipped immediately, and company president Kowaguchi said the initial plans for a run of 800 copies might prove insufficient. "We planned this as something that customers would keep as a commemorative product. — AFP

Analysis

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The First Daily in The Arabian Gulf

THE LEADING INDEPENDENT
DAILY IN THE ARABIAN GULF
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US woman says parents subjected her to FGM

An American woman from a strict white Christian community has told how her parents forced her to undergo female genital mutilation (FGM) as a child - a highly unusual case which activists said could lead to similar stories coming to light. Jennifer said she had decided to tell her story after launching a campaign to press her home state of Kentucky to outlaw FGM. The internationally condemned ritual, which typically involves the partial or total removal of the external genitalia, is most often associated with a swathe of African countries.

More than half a million girls and women from diaspora communities in the United States have undergone or are at risk of FGM, according to US government data. But anti-FGM campaigners say Jennifer's story suggests the secretive practice may also happen in some conservative white communities. Jennifer, who asked that her full name not be used, grew up in a conservative evangelical church where her father was a minister.

"We were taught men were the leaders and God made women to be submissive," she told the Thomson Reuters Foundation by phone. "Many things were considered a sin. For a woman to be sexual was seen as a sin, for her to have pleasure was a sin." Now in her early 40s, Jennifer described how she was cut with her older sister when she was five. "We were sent on a long trip. Mum and dad told us we were going somewhere special. It felt like an adventure," she said.

But the excitement quickly turned to terror. "I remember my arms and legs being held down and somebody covered my eyes. It was awful. I think I blacked out and when I came to they had tied my legs together," she said. "On the trip home I knew we had both gone through something terrible. When we got home my mum told us we weren't ever to talk about what had happened." For much of her life, Jennifer believed most women had gone through the same ordeal. She only realized this was not the case when she studied reproductive health at nursing school, but she did not confide in anyone for many years. "I thought it was a sin to talk about it. Religion can be a powerful tool for keeping someone silent," she said.

Flashbacks

An estimated 200 million girls and women worldwide have undergone FGM, according to UN data. It is practiced in at least 29 African countries and parts of the Middle East and Asia, but has also been reported in pockets of Latin America and Eastern Europe. Jennifer is the second white American woman from a strict religious background to talk publicly about undergoing FGM. Two years ago, Renee Bergstrom, now in her 70s, revealed she had been cut at a church clinic when she was three because her mother thought she was touching herself.

In the nineteenth century some doctors in the United States performed clitoral cutting to treat masturbation and other perceived sexual problems. Medical historians say the practice died out in the early to mid-twentieth century. "Jennifer's story is a new face to FGM, but we expect she's not the only one - it's possible it could still be happening in communities like hers," said Shelby Quast, Americas director at Equality Now, a global group working to end FGM. "What we do know is that wherever it happens, FGM is always used to control women and girls and their sexuality - and there is often strong pressure on them to remain silent."

Jennifer said she had endured chronic pain, repeated urinary tract infections and excruciating periods as a result of FGM. Sex was always painful and her injuries were so severe she could not give birth naturally. "It was a life of pain," she said, adding that she had also suffered depression, flashbacks and nightmares. "FGM takes away any chance of having a 'normal' life. It takes away the ability to have intimacy or relationships. It just changes every part of you. It was hard for me to trust anyone."

Jennifer thinks there are other women like her hidden in conservative church communities scattered throughout the United States. "I can't be sure, but it would be hard to believe I'm the only one," she said. She hopes her story will encourage others like her to break their silence and get support.

FGM trial

Jennifer has launched an online petition calling for a law against FGM in Kentucky, one of 21 states that does not criminalize the practice. Her campaign follows the collapse of a high-profile FGM trial in Michigan involving two doctors accused of performing FGM on nine girls. The prosecution was the first to be brought under a 1996 federal law banning FGM, but the judge dismissed the case in November, ruling that the power to criminalize the practice belonged to individual states. "This decision has empowered communities that practice FGM and put girls in jeopardy," Jennifer said. "It's also alarming because so many states don't have laws. I don't want Kentucky to be somewhere girls can be brought for FGM just because we don't have a law." — Reuters



Albanian military personnel walk next to MiG-19 jet fighters inside the main tunnel of the Gjader Air Base built near the city of Lezhe on Feb 5, 2019. — AFP

In hidden airbase, Albania stores MiGs for sale

On a barren hillside in northern Albania lies a portal to the country's communist past: A massive steel door creaks open to reveal a hidden former air base burrowed into the heart of the mountain. Made up of 600 m of tunnels that once teemed with military life, the secret Gjader air base is now a depot for dozens of hulking communist-era MiG jets collecting dust in the darkness. Three decades after shedding communism, Albanian authorities are still trying to sell off the Soviet and Chinese-made aircraft, of which there are dozens more in another nearby air base.

"Aligning our equipment and our weapons to the NATO standards" is part of Albania's "new chapter" with the Alliance, which it joined in 2009, says the military's Chief of Defense Bardhyl Kollçaku. As for the MiGs, "apart from nostalgia, (for which) we will keep some of them in our museum... the rest will be treated according to the domestic legislation for sale or other usage," he told AFP. The communist-era jets, which include MiG-19, MiG-17 and MiG-21 models among others, have been out of commission for well over a decade.

But museums, collectors and other aviation aficionados have already expressed interest in giving the relics a new home. When Albania first discussed selling the MiGs in 2016, requests came in from the Air and Space Museum in France, as well as a flight school in Germany. Yet no sales have been completed to date, with legal paperwork holding up the process.

New Zealand shooters back gun control after massacre

New Zealand will crack down on firearms ownership this week after the Christchurch mosques massacre that claimed 50 lives - and the Kiwi gun lobby, for the most part, is okay with that. In stark contrast to the United States, where even the most minor curbs on gun ownership meet ferocious opposition led by the National Rifle Association, New Zealand gun owners agree action is needed. The March 15 rampage by a white supremacist gunman has been a shock to the collective system. "We want to support our government in any changes to prevent a terrorist attack from happening in New Zealand again," Nicole McKee, secretary of the Council of Licensed Firearm Owners said.

Prime Minister Jacinda Ardern's government announced an immediate ban on military-style semi-automatic rifles (MSSAs) after the shooting and will put laws to parliament formalizing its action today. Finalizing such legislation can often take months but Ardern says the matter is so urgent it will be done by April 11. Further curbs - potentially including a gun register, tighter vetting and stricter gun storage rules - are set to be passed by the end of the year.

In a move that would be unthinkable in the United States, one of New Zealand's largest gun retailers, Hunting & Fishing, voluntarily stopped selling MSSAs and halted online firearms sales. "Such weapons of war have no place in our business - or our country," chief executive Darren Jacobs said. New Zealand has its own National Rifle Association, but since the shooting, it has been at pains to point out it is a small sporting organization, not a wealthy political lobby group like its American counterpart. "Our members shoot with single-shot bolt action rifles at paper targets," president Malcolm Dodson said.

Another office holder has told media the New Zealand NRA is considering changing its name to avoid any association with the American body. On the surface, New Zealand and the United States share many historical similarities, but they have a fundamentally different attitude towards firearms. Both are former British colonies that fought bitter wars against indigenous

populations and forged an individualistic frontier mentality. However, statistics highlight the difference. In 2016, New Zealand, with a population of about 4.7 million, had nine firearms-related homicides. In the United States, population approximately 327 million, there were 14,415, about 23 times the per capita rate as New Zealand.

A privilege or a right?

There are approximately 393 million guns in private hands in the United States, or 1.2 for every person, whereas New Zealand has about 1.5 million, or 0.3 per person. The New Zealand government believes there are 13,500 MSSAs in the country, while estimates put the number in the US at 15 million. Philip Alpert, a gun policy researcher at the University of Sydney, said the crucial difference between New Zealand and the United States was the US Constitution's Second Amendment, which guarantees the right to keep and bear arms.

Alpert, himself a Kiwi, said countries such as New Zealand viewed gun ownership as a privilege, while in America it was seen as an inalienable right. "We have a population who, when they travelled to America would get off the plane and be absolutely horrified to see people walking around with a gun," he said, adding that safety was at the center of New Zealand gun culture. Journalist Dawn Picken covered scores of shooting deaths in the United States and once had bullets lodged in her bedroom when a random gunman opened fire on her apartment building in Spokane, Washington state.

She said she had found a different mindset since moving to New Zealand in 2011. "It was quite refreshing as an American to come here and hear Kiwis who own guns say 'I don't think they should be easy to get and it's not my right, they should check I'm not predisposed to violence or going to go off the rails,'" she said.

However, like anywhere, New Zealand has a vocal fringe element. "Tyrant Prime Minister Kills Sports Shooting," screams the headline on one prominent pro-gun website. But former police minister Judith Collins had a blunt message for the US NRA and any other gun lobbyists who tried to inject themselves into New Zealand's gun control debate: "Bugger off." The difference in gun cultures has played out on social media since the Christchurch shooting. When a right-wing US website tweeted that "armed government thugs" were carrying out door-to-door gun confiscations in New Zealand, dozens of Kiwis left mocking replies. — AFP

Individuals are also on the waiting list, including Albania-based French businessman Julien Roche, who plans to install the plane in his garden. "It's not so easy to get this kind of aircraft now, because all of them have been mainly destroyed, not stored like they are in Albania," he told AFP, from a house brimming with eccentric items. He has put his name down for one of the oldest models, a Chinese-made MiG-15 with a price tag of around 10,000 euros (\$11,000), which was used by North Koreans before being gifted to Albania.

Closed to the public

Like the 7,000 concrete security bunkers that dot the countryside, the clandestine Gjader base was part of former communist dictator Enver Hoxha's plan to fortify his hermit state against feared foreign invasions that never materialized. More than 600 military personnel used to work inside the maze of tunnels that were shuttered in 2000 and remain off limits to the public. Jets flown after 2000 used a different military base, until the last of the planes were taken out of service following an accident in 2004.

After opening up the dark and damp tunnels to AFP, the base's current commander Fatmir Danaj admits the old planes evoke an unexpected nostalgia. "The pleasure of flying and of working in this base was unimaginable," 52-year-old Danaj said, as he shone his torch on a row of silver jets, which, as a young pilot, he used to land on the

runway that feeds into the mountain. Today, the scores of rooms inside - including a cafeteria, dorms and array of other offices - are empty except for a scattering of debris and the faded signs on their doors announcing their function. In one empty office, a reminder still hangs on the wall: "Attention! Put documents in their files and submit them to the secret administrative office before leaving the workplace."

NATO comes to 'Stalin City'

During his nearly 40 years of rule, Hoxha turned Albania into the most militarized country in the Balkans. That backfired spectacularly in 1997, seven years after the fall of communism when the country was swept up by an armed rebellion that saw citizens raid armories and military bases for weapons. Gjader was also breached, with people looting weapons and selling parts of some MiGs as scrap metal. Today the Albanian air force has only a small fleet of helicopters and its air space is protected by NATO.

In a sign of the changing times, the first NATO base in the Balkan region will be built in Albania's Kucova, once known as "Stalin City" as a symbol of friendship at that time between Albania and the Soviet Union. But Danaj still dreams of seeing Gjader returned to its former glory. "The base could serve as a museum, but with its modern infrastructure, its tunnel system, it can be functional again and serve NATO," he said. — AFP

Rwanda genocide killers learn new life back home

Dozens of ex-militia killers stroll around an open camp beneath mist-shrouded volcanoes in Rwanda. They are learning to reintegrate into the country whose government they have spent years trying to overthrow. These are men who helped carry out Rwanda's horrific 1994 genocide, and then formed a rebel army that has been fighting ever since. After the carnage of the Rwanda genocide, which began 25 years ago this April, the men who carried out the massacre of at least 800,000 mostly Tutsi people fled west to neighbouring Democratic Republic of Congo.

Some of them are former members of Rwanda's army. Others had joined the militia known as the "Interahamwe", club and machete-wielding Hutu gangs that carried out the killings targeting the Tutsi minority. Chased out of Rwanda, they formed a notorious rebel army, the Hutu fighters of the Democratic Liberation Forces of Rwanda, known by its French acronym, FDLR. But after a quarter of a century haunting Congo's forests, many of these veterans were exhausted and wanted to give up the fight. So a stream of rebels have returned home. Rwanda houses them at Mutobo, a camp some 100 km northwest of the capital Kigali and beneath the Virunga mountains, seeking to reintegrate them into society.

'Rwanda is my country'

Joseph Kabalindwi, a 50-year old former rebel major, said he laid down his arms in 2014 "to promote peace". Kabalindwi was one of 1,563 former FDLR fighters who returned to Rwanda in November 2018, after Congo refused to keep them on their soil any longer. But he says he is happy to be back. "Even though I left the country a long time ago, I remained Rwandan," said this ex-major with conviction. "Rwanda is my country, and I wanted to go home."

There is no fence around the camp, but Rwanda keeps a close eye on the former rebels. The government's Rwanda demobilization and reintegration commission, which runs the Mutobo camp, has handled 11,000 fighters from rebel forces since 1997. Each batch spends three months in the camp, before they can return to the

families and homes they left decades before. They are then also issued with identity papers and a one-off payment of 60,000 Rwandan francs (66 dollars) to start their new life.

'Miracle from God'

In Mutobo, the former FDLR receive civic education classes aimed at combating the bloody ideology that led to the genocide. The former guerrillas also learn how to participate in the reconstruction and development of the nation, and, for men who have spent years in military fatigues, training to reacquire them with civilian life. In November, Kabalindwi's brothers came to visit. They had last met in 1994. "They were very happy to see me," he said with a smile. "Some of us died in the forests of Congo, so for me it is a miracle from God to find someone who is still alive."

When he and his comrades returned to Rwanda, many believed that they would be killed immediately. Instead, they have been surprised by their reception. "Since we have been here, fear is gradually diminishing," Kabalindwi admitted. For many FDLR fighters, mistrust of Kigali is the main obstacle to their return - as well as the fear of facing justice for the crimes they committed.

In the classrooms where the men learn their lessons, the mood is serious. Focus Twiringiyimana, a 47-year old ex-FDLR fighter, takes detailed notes at a sewing machine, while the teacher at the blackboard offers instructions. Twiringiyimana passed through the camp a year ago, but has returned for training to become a tailor. For his old FDLR comrades still fighting in the bush, he offers a simple message. "They should come back to the country, to work for their own development," Twiringiyimana said. "They are only wasting time and it will do them no good."

Out of Belgian jail

Not everyone in the camp joined the FDLR. One newcomer is Bernard Ntuyahaga, a former army major, who arrived in December 2018 from Belgium after serving 20 years in prison. He was convicted over his role in the death of 10 Belgian soldiers with the UN peacekeeping force, who were slaughtered in 1994 as they protected the then Rwandan Prime Minister Agathe Uwilingiyimana. She was also murdered.

Ntuyahaga, now in his late 60s, returned to Rwanda in December against his will, after exhausting all legal efforts to remain in Belgium. Now he is taking classes in civic education. — AFP

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NEW YORK: Fur coats and hats are displayed in the window of a fur store in the fur district in Manhattan on Sunday in New York City. — AFP

US retail sales fall as economy slows

Core retail sales drop 0.2%, business inventories rise 0.8%

WASHINGTON: US retail sales unexpectedly fell in February, the latest sign economic growth has shifted into low gear as stimulus from \$1.5 trillion in tax cuts and increased government spending fades. There was, however, some encouraging news on the economy. Other reports yesterday showed a pickup in manufacturing activity in March and the third straight monthly increase in construction spending in February. Still, the risks to economic growth in the first quarter remain tilted to the downside.

The loss of momentum also reflects higher interest rates, slowing global growth, Washington's trade war with China and uncertainty over Britain's departure from the European Union. These factors contributed to the Federal Reserve's decision last month to abruptly end its three-year campaign to tighten monetary policy. The US central bank abandoned projections for any interest rate hikes this year after increasing borrowing costs four times in 2018.

"The consumer is lost in the woods and this makes for a gloomy economic outlook this year if they cannot find their way," said Chris Rupkey, chief economist at MFG in New York. "The Fed was wise to move to the sidelines." Retail sales dropped 0.2 percent as households cut back on purchases of furniture, clothing, food and electronics and

appliances, as well as building materials and gardening equipment. Data for January was revised higher to show retail sales increasing 0.7 percent instead of gaining 0.2 percent as previously reported.

Economists polled by Reuters had forecast retail sales rising 0.3 percent in February. Retail sales in February advanced 2.2 percent from a year ago. The surprise drop in sales in February could partly reflect delays in processing tax refunds in the middle of the month. Tax refunds have also been smaller on average compared to prior years following the revamping of the tax code in January 2018. Cold and wet weather could also have hurt sales.

The February retail sales report was delayed by a 35-day partial shutdown of the federal government that ended on Jan. 25. March's retail sales report, which was scheduled for publication on April 16, will be released on April 18. The dollar was trading lower against a basket of currencies, while Treasury prices were down. US stocks rose.

Excluding automobiles, gasoline, building materials and food services, retail sales fell 0.2 percent in February after an upwardly revised 1.7 percent surge in January. These so-called core retail sales correspond most closely with the consumer spending component of gross domestic product.

Demand weakening

They were previously reported to have rebounded 1.1 percent in January. Consumer spending accounts for more than two-thirds of economic activity. The sharp upward revision to core retail sales in January was insufficient to reverse December's more than 2.0 percent plunge, leaving expectations for tepid GDP growth in the first quarter intact.

Growth estimates for the January-March quarter are as low as a 0.8 percent annualized rate. The economy grew at a 2.2 percent rate in the fourth quarter after expanding at a 3.4 percent clip in the July-September period.

But green shoots are emerging in some sectors of the economy. In a separate report yesterday, the Institute for Supply Management said its index of national factory activity rose to a reading of 55.3 in March from 54.2 in February, which had marked the lowest level since November 2016.

The reading was slightly above expectations of 54.5 from a Reuters poll of 69 economists. A reading above 50 indicates expansion in the manufacturing sector and a reading below 50 indicates contraction. Another

report from the Commerce Department showed construction spending rose 1.0 percent to a nine-month high in February after surging 2.5 percent in January.

The February retail sales report showed receipts at building materials and garden equipment and supplies dealers tumbled 4.4 percent, the biggest drop since April 2012. Receipts at clothing stores fell 0.4 percent and those at furniture outlets dropped 0.5 percent.

Sales at food and beverage stores declined 1.2 percent, the biggest drop since February 2009. Receipts at electronics and appliances stores fell 1.3 percent, the largest decline since May 2017.

But consumers bought more motor vehicles, with sales at auto dealerships rebounding 0.7 percent after declining 1.9 percent in January. Households also spent more at service stations, likely reflecting higher gasoline prices. Online and mail-order retail sales rose 0.9 percent. Sales at restaurants and bars edged up 0.1 percent and spending at hobby, musical instrument and book stores increased 0.5 percent. Slowing demand was highlighted by a fourth report from the Commerce Department showing business inventories rose 0.8 percent in January. — Reuters

Trump and Saudi at odds over oil prices: Report

LONDON: US President Donald Trump and the Saudi government have closely aligned views on most issues but they disagree significantly on the desirable level for oil prices, which could become a source of volatility in 2019/2020. In keeping with his iconoclastic approach to governing, Trump has kept up a public commentary on oil prices and the role of Saudi-led OPEC in messages on Twitter as well as television interviews.

So far in 2018/19, the president's interventions have revealed his preference for a benchmark oil price below \$70 per barrel (using front-month Brent futures as a benchmark). He has normally restricted himself to generalized criticism of the Organization of the Petroleum Exporting Countries (OPEC) when prices have been below \$75 per barrel.

However, when prices have moved above that level, Trump has sharpened his criticism, singling out Saudi Arabia and other Gulf states, and noting that they benefit from an expensive US security umbrella. The United States is increasingly both a major producer and consumer of

petroleum, so the main impact of changing prices is no longer felt through the external balance of payments but the internal distribution of income. Rising prices transfer income from consumers, motorists and the industrial Midwest to oil drillers and producing states such as Texas, Oklahoma, North Dakota and Alaska. The president calculates, correctly, that the marginal voter in his electoral coalition in 2016 and likely again in 2020 is a motorist in the Midwest rather than a driller in Texas.

He risks losing more voters from a rise in prices than he does from a fall, which explains why his messaging on Twitter has focused on the benefits from lower prices. Recent presidential comments have also revealed a preoccupation with the fragility of the economy as the global expansion slows, and modestly lower oil prices would, on balance, support continued growth.

Saudi revenue

In contrast, Saudi Arabia needs prices above \$70 and perhaps over \$80 to shore up its government finances, pay for an expensive economic transformation, and stem the deterioration in its own balance of payments. Saudi Arabia's total foreign reserve assets were unchanged at the end of 2018 from the end of 2017, around \$497 billion, according to the kingdom's monetary authority.

The kingdom needs to maintain a large cushion of liquid reserve assets to maintain confidence and avoid a run on its currency, which is pegged to the dollar, and cannot afford reserves to fall too far. — Reuters

BMW's UK Mini plant shuts for 4 weeks despite Brexit delay

LONDON: BMW's Mini plant in Britain closes for four weeks from yesterday in a move planned over a half year ago to help the company deal with any disruption resulting from Brexit, which has since been delayed. The German carmaker, which builds just over 15 percent of Britain's 1.5 million cars, moved its annual summertime shutdown to April to "minimize the risk of any possible short-term parts-supply disruption in the event of a no-deal Brexit."

But Britain's departure from the EU has now been pushed back from March 29 until at least April 12 or potentially much later, scuppering the timing of major contingency plans for some carmakers.

Shutdowns are organised far in advance so employee holidays can be scheduled and suppliers can adjust volumes, making them hard to move. "This is what our company and our workforce have planned for over many months and it is fixed into our business planning," said a BMW spokesman. It represents the latest headache for Britain's once roaring car sector which had been on track for record production but since 2017 has posted sharp falls in sales, output and investment.

The overwhelmingly foreign-owned industry has

become increasingly incredulous as a stable and attractive investment environment descends into one of its deepest political crises, risking the free and frictionless trade the sector relies on.

BMW's Rolls-Royce factory in Goodwood will close for two weeks whilst Jaguar Land Rover's (JLR) three car plants and engine facility and Honda's Swindon facility will also shut for a few days this month as part of Brexit contingencies. It has been a turbulent few months for the sector after Nissan cancelled plans to build a new sport utility vehicle at its English Sunderland plant and Honda said it would shutter its plant in 2021 in the biggest blow to the sector for years.

Toyota provided a rare boost when it announced plans to build cars for Suzuki at its English car plant.

BMW, which is also closing its central English Hams Hall engine facility and Swindon press shop and sub-assembly site for four weeks, has said it could move some engine and Mini output out of Britain if there is not an orderly Brexit. Carmakers face a number of risks if there is a disorderly Brexit, including delays to the supply of parts and finished models, new customs bureaucracy, the need to recertify models and an up to 10 percent tariff on finished vehicles.

A series of investment decisions are coming up, including whether Peugeot's parent company PSA will keep its Ellesmere Port plant open and if it will build electric vans at its southern English Luton facility. Petrochemicals firm Ineos is also due to choose the location for its off-roader whilst a decision is pending on whether JLR will build electric vehicles in its home market. — Reuters

Business

Tesla boom lifts Norway's electric car sales to record market share

Tax exemption, growing availability boost electric cars

OSLO: Almost 60 percent of all new cars sold in Norway in March were fully electric, the Norwegian Road Federation (NRF) said yesterday a global record as the country seeks to end fossil-fueled vehicles sales by 2025.

Exempting battery engines from taxes imposed on diesel and petrol cars has upended Norway's auto market, elevating brands like Tesla and Nissan, with its Leaf model, while hurting sales of Toyota, Daimler and others.

In 2018, Norway's fully electric car sales rose to a record 31.2 percent market share from 20.8 percent in 2017, far ahead of any other nation, and buyers had to wait as producers struggled to keep up with demand.

The surge of electric cars to a 58.4 percent market share in March came as Tesla ramped up delivery of its mid-sized Model 3, which retails from 442,000 crowns (\$51,400), while Audi began deliveries of its 652,000-crown e-tron sports utility vehicle.

The sales figures consolidate Norway's global lead in electric car sales per capita, part of an attempt by Western Europe's biggest producer of oil and gas to transform to a greener economy.

The International Energy Agency (IEA), which includes plug-in hybrids when calculating electric car sales, measured Norway's share of such cars at 39 percent in 2017, far ahead of second-placed Iceland on 12 percent and Sweden on 6 percent.

In China, the market share was 2.2 percent in 2017, and in the United States just 1.2 percent, IEA data show. While the numbers will vary from month to month, half of all cars sold in 2019 in Norway will probably be fully electric, the head of the Norwegian Electric Vehicle Association (NEV) said.

"We are pretty sure we are going to reach 50 percent

market share in total this year. Maybe even pass it, which is pretty amazing," NEV Secretary General Christina Bu told Reuters.

Tesla's Model 3

Cars that rely solely on internal combustion engines with no hybrid electric unit had a market share of only 22.7 percent in March, the lowest on record. Buyers of electric cars emphasized both economic and environmental aspects of the vehicles.

"To be honest, it is first and mostly because of the tax. The tax on cars in Norway is very high but on electric cars, it's nothing," said Glenn Joergensen, 54, an airline pilot taking delivery of a Tesla Model 3 in the town of Lillestrom outside Oslo. Thomas Mengshoel, 45, a psychologist visiting a Tesla dealership in Oslo, said his son had influenced his choice.

"My son tells me the most (about electric cars), which is interesting. Of course we have discussions about being aware of environmental issues. We talk about it, about pollution and taking care of the environment," he said.

Nissan's Leaf electric car was the top-selling car in Norway last year, while in March, the Tesla Model 3 was the biggest seller. Together with the company's Model S and Model X, Tesla sold 5,822 cars, corresponding to a 31.7 percent market share.

The California-based carmaker last year hired more than 360 people in Norway, more than doubling its service staff to help meet rising demand for service and repairs. "We are growing as fast as physically possible to address the service issues, and are absolutely on track to solve these issues," a company spokesman said. — Reuters



OSLO: A file picture shows a Model S (left) and Model X (right) electric cars of US car maker Tesla parked on a parking in Oslo, Norway. Electric vehicles took a new step forward in March in Norway by capturing for the first time more than 50 percent of the market share of new vehicles, according to figures from the Road Traffic Information Council (OFV) published yesterday. — AFP

Upbeat data, trade hopes lift Wall Street

NEW YORK: Wall Street surged yesterday as upbeat manufacturing data out of the United States and China, as well as further hints of progress in US-China trade talks helped extend last quarter's buoyant mood.

US stocks ended the first quarter on a strong note on Friday, with the S&P 500 logging its best quarter since 2009 as investors bet the United States and China will strike a deal to end their protracted trade war. The benchmark index, which is trading 2.5 percent away from its record closing high hit in September, triggered a "golden cross" pattern, in which the 50-day moving average crosses above the 200-day moving average.

Many investors believe the technical signal could portend more gains for stocks in the short term. Spurring gains in global stock markets, China's manufacturing sector unexpectedly returned to growth for the first time in four months in March, in a sign that government stimulus measures may be slowly gaining traction.

US manufacturing numbers also came in better-than-expected, helping investors overlook soft retail sales data. "Better manufacturing data out of China over the weekend

has helped push equity markets into the 'black' on day one of a new quarter," Dean Popplewell, vice president of market analysis at Oanda said.

Technology and financial stocks provided the biggest boost to the S&P 500. Chipmakers, which get a large part of revenue from China, also rose. The Philadelphia Semiconductor index jumped 1.43 percent.

Bank stocks rose more than 2 percent, while gains of more than 1 percent were seen in industrial, energy and material sectors.

Defensive utilities and real estate were the only two sectors trading lower among the 11 major S&P sectors. At 10:12 a.m. ET, the Dow Jones Industrial Average was up 199.40 points, or 0.77 percent, at 26,128.08, the S&P 500 was up 20.89 points, or 0.74 percent, at 2,855.29 and the Nasdaq Composite was up 53.73 points, or 0.70 percent, at 7,783.05. Economic data came as a relief to markets concerned about a global growth slowdown after the Federal Reserve abruptly ended its monetary tightening policy cycle, driving the 10-year U.S. bond yields below 3-month T-bill rates for the first time in more than a decade.

China's State Council said on Sunday it would continue to suspend additional tariffs on U.S. vehicles and auto parts after April 1, in a goodwill gesture following a U.S. decision to delay tariff hikes on Chinese imports. General Motors Co rose 1.6 percent and Ford Motor Co was up 1.9 percent. Wynn Resorts Ltd jumped 6.7 percent, the most among S&P companies, as March gambling revenue from the Chinese territory of Macau was higher than the previ-



SEOUL: Currency dealers monitor exchange rates in front of a screen showing South Korea's benchmark stock index in a trading room at the KEB Hana Bank in Seoul. — AFP

ous month. Shares of MGM Resorts International rose 3.2 percent and Las Vegas Sands Corp climbed 3.3 percent.

Lyft Inc shares fell 9.2 percent as brokerage Guggenheim Securities started coverage of the ride-hailing startup's shares with a 'neutral' rating. The company debuted on the Nasdaq on Friday.

Advancing issues outnumbered decliners for a 3.47-to-1 ratio on the NYSE and a 2.46-to-1 ratio on the Nasdaq. The S&P index recorded 57 new 52-week highs and no new lows, while the Nasdaq recorded 54 new highs and 9 new lows. — Reuters

WTI hits 2019 high as oil extends Q1 gains on tight supply

LONDON: US crude oil hit a 2019 high yesterday and Brent gained a dollar after tight supply and positive signs for the global economy drove both benchmarks' largest first-quarter gains in nearly a decade.

US West Texas Intermediate (WTI) futures were up 68 cents, or 1.13 percent, at \$60.82 by 1125 GMT, after briefly reaching their highest in more than four months at \$60.90. WTI gained 32 percent in the first quarter. Brent crude for June delivery was up \$1.03, or 1.52 percent, at \$68.54, having risen 27 percent in the January-March period.

Positive Chinese factory gauges and signs of progress in Sino-US trade talks have boosted sentiment, helping to buoy regional stock markets. "Better-than-expected Chinese manufacturing data has helped markets begin the first day of the new quarter on a bullish note, with major stock indices across Asia surging," said Mihir Kapadia, chief executive of Sun Global Investments.

"Chinese manufacturing output is quite reflective of global demand, and any increase indicates a flurry of economic activity across major economies." The United States and China said they made progress in trade talks that concluded on Friday in Beijing, with Washington saying the negotiations were "candid and constructive" as the world's two largest economies try to resolve their trade war.

Analysts have turned cautiously optimistic on the oil market, a monthly Reuters poll showed on Friday, lifting their forecast for the average Brent price in 2019 for the first time in five months to \$67.12.

Hedge funds and other money managers raised their net long US crude futures and options positions to 243,209 in the week to March 26, the US Commodity Futures Trading Commission said. On the supply front, booming American production has steadied, with the US government reporting on Friday that domestic output in the world's top crude producer edged lower in January to 11.9 million barrels per day. US energy companies last week reduced the number of oil rigs operating to the lowest level in nearly a year, cutting the most rigs during one quarter in three years, energy services firm Baker Hughes said. — Reuters

Japan business confidence drops in April: BoJ survey

TOKYO: Confidence among Japan's biggest manufacturers fell sharply this quarter, the Bank of Japan's quarterly business survey showed yesterday, suggesting a stuttering recovery for the world's third-largest economy.

The central bank's April Tankan report-a quarterly survey of about 10,000 companies-showed a reading of 12 among major manufacturers, a steep fall from 19 in the previous quarter.

Economists say a slowdown in the Chinese economy was partly to blame, with worries that a rise in crude oil prices could eat into profits also weighing on business confidence. The index for non-manufacturers slipped to 21 from 24 in the previous quarter. The Tankan report, the broadest indicator of how Japan Inc. is faring, marks the difference between the percentage of firms that are upbeat and those that see conditions as unfavorable.

Japan's economy grew a modest 0.5 percent quarter-on-quarter at the end of last year. However, the cabinet office has recently revised down its judgment on the economy as a separate business confidence index declined in January for the third straight month. Analysts have also warned that US-led trade wars could be a major risk factor for the Japanese economy still struggling to win a long battle against deflation. — AFP

Italy's Ferrero to buy biscuit businesses of Kellogg

MILAN: Italian chocolate giant Ferrero said yesterday it was buying the biscuit and snack businesses of the American Kellogg Company for \$1.3 billion (1.16 billion euros).

"The Ferrero Group... will acquire the cookie, fruit and fruit-flavored snack, ice cream cone and pie crust businesses from Kellogg Company," which generated sales of approximately \$900 million in 2018, it said. The brands Ferrero will acquire include

popular Koebler cookies as well as Famous Amos and Murray Sugar Free cookies and fruit snacks such as Stretch Island.

Ferrero, founded as a family business in 1946 and now the third-largest company in the global chocolate confectionery market, has acquired several US brands and businesses since 2017.

The company behind Ferrero Rocher and the hazelnut spread Nutella said it would also be buying from Kellogg six food manufacturing facilities across the US, from Washington to Kentucky, as well as two plants in Chicago. The Kellogg biscuit businesses "are an excellent strategic fit for Ferrero as we continue to increase our overall footprint and product offerings in the North American market," said Giovanni Ferrero, Executive Chairman of the Ferrero Group. — AFP

EXCHANGE RATES

AL-MUZAINI EXCHANGE CO.

EUROPEAN & AMERICAN COUNTRIES

Euro	345.930
Sterling Pound	402.510
Canadian dollar	230.570
Turkish lira	55.970
Swiss Franc	310.010
US Dollar Buying	303.850

ASIAN COUNTRIES

Japanese Yen	2.752
Indian Rupees	4.440
Pakistani Rupees	2.198
Sri Lankan Rupees	1.735
Nepali Rupees	2.752
Singapore Dollar	226.890
Hongkong Dollar	38.862
Bangladesh Taka	3.605
Philippine Peso	5.809
Thai Baht	9.633
Malaysian ringgit	77.018

GCC COUNTRIES

Saudi Riyal	81.401
Qatari Riyal	83.839
Omani Riyal	792.853
Bahraini Dinar	810.550
UAE Dirham	83.109

ARAB COUNTRIES

Egyptian Pound - Cash	20.400
Egyptian Pound - Transfer	17.585

Yemen Riyal/for 1000	1.225
Tunisian Dinar	105.190
Jordanian Dinar	430.860
Lebanese Lira/for 1000	2.034
Syrian Lira	0.000
Morocco Dirham	32.418

DOLLARCO EXCHANGE CO. LTD

Rate for Transfer	Selling Rate
US Dollar	303.340
Canadian Dollar	227.760
Sterling Pound	404.095
Euro	345.095
Swiss Frank	305.505
Bahrain Dinar	809.355
UAE Dirhams	83.265
Qatari Riyals	84.500
Saudi Riyals	82.055
Jordanian Dinar	430.540
Egyptian Pound	17.619
Sri Lankan Rupees	1.727
Indian Rupees	4.420
Pakistani Rupees	2.169
Bangladesh Taka	3.617
Philippines Peso	5.768
Cyprus pound	18.105
Japanese Yen	3.760
Syrian Mint	1.590
Nepalese Rupees	2.766
Malaysian Ringgit	75.495
Chinese Yuan Renminbi	45.665

Thai Bhat	10.550
Turkish Lira	56.685
Singapore dollars	225.141

BAHRAIN EXCHANGE COMPANY

CURRENCY	BUY	SELL
British Pound	0.391042	0.404942
Czech Korune	0.005252	0.014552
Danish Krone	0.041823	0.046823
Euro	0.335089	0.348789
Georgian Lari	0.112722	0.112722
Hungarian	0.000975	0.001165
Norwegian Krone	0.031414	0.036614
Romanian Leu	0.054895	0.071745
Russian ruble	0.004655	0.004655
Slovakia	0.009130	0.019130
Swedish Krona	0.028831	0.033831
Swiss Franc	0.299695	0.310695
Australasia		
Australian Dollar	0.208819	0.220819
New Zealand Dollar	0.201978	0.211478
America		
Canadian Dollar	0.222952	0.231952
US Dollars	0.300950	0.306250
US Dollars Mint	0.301450	0.306250
Asia		
Bangladesh Taka	0.003061	0.003862

Chinese Yuan	0.043959	0.047459
Hong Kong Dollar	0.036771	0.039521
Indian Rupee	0.003790	0.004562
Indonesian Rupiah	0.000017	0.000023
Japanese Yen	0.002661	0.002841
Korean Won	0.000259	0.000274
Malaysian Ringgit	0.070963	0.076993
Nepalese Rupee	0.002684	0.003024
Pakistan Rupee	0.001542	0.002312
Philippine Peso	0.005780	0.006080
Singapore Dollar	0.219903	0.229903
Sri Lankan Rupee	0.001367	0.001947
Taiwan	0.009776	0.009955
Thai Baht	0.009278	0.009828
Vietnamese Dong	0.000013	0.000013
Arab		
Bahraini Dinar	0.794580	0.811080
Egyptian Pound	0.017766	0.020366
Iranian Riyal	0.000084	0.000086
Iraqi Dinar	0.000210	0.000270
Jordanian Dinar	0.425351	0.434351
Kuwaiti Dinar	1.000000	1.000000
Lebanese Pound	0.000152	0.000252
Moroccan Dirhams	0.021445	0.045445
Omani Riyal	0.786019	0.791699
Qatar Riyal	0.079500	0.084440
Saudi Riyal	0.080260	0.081560
Syrian Pound	0.001293	0.001513
Tunisian Dinar	0.096874	0.104874
Turkish Lira	0.049050	0.060550
UAE Dirhams	0.081629	0.083329
Yemeni Riyal	0.000992	0.001072

Business

Stockpiling frenzy drives UK factories ahead of Brexit

Inventory buildup phenomenon not seen before in G7 economy

LONDON: Factories in Britain stockpiled for Brexit at an explosive rate last month, unlike anything seen before in a major rich economy, pushing manufacturing growth to an unexpected 13-month high, a survey showed yesterday.

The IHS Markit/CIPS UK Manufacturing Purchasing Managers' Index (PMI) rose to 55.1 from 52.1 in February, confounding all forecasts in a Reuters poll that had pointed to a reading of 51.0. The headline figure far exceeded readings from the eurozone, where a global slowdown has left factories in a slump. But British manufacturers are increasingly worried that their surge of activity, fuelled by preparations to exit the European Union, will make way for a sharp decline later, survey compiler IHS Markit said.

"Encouraging as today's figures may appear, the true picture of UK manufacturing continues to be obscured by stockpiling, driven by the ongoing Brexit uncertainty, and this pattern looks unlikely to change until manufacturers see some whiff of white smoke above Westminster," Helena Sans, head of manufacturing at Barclays, said. Lawmakers rejected Prime Minister

Theresa May's Brexit deal for a third time on Friday, leaving Britain's withdrawal from the EU in turmoil on the very day it was supposed to leave the bloc.

British politicians now have until April 12 to come up with an alternative, after which the country could leave the EU without a deal to ease its transition - something most economists think will harm the economy. That risk prompted British factories to ramp up stocks of parts and finished products at a record pace in March to minimize any disruption to supply lines.

The PMI's gauge of stocks of factory purchases, which feeds into the headline index, rocketed to 66.2 from 59.9 in February, the highest seen in a Group of Seven rich country since IHS Markit's records began in 1992.

IHS Markit said this would limit future growth. "The stock-building boost introduces a major headwind for demand, output and jobs growth moving forward," Rob Dobson, director at IHS Markit, said. "Manufacturers are already reporting concerns that future trends could be constrained as inventory positions across the

economy are unwound." Stockpiling is also likely to reduce manufacturers' operating profit, leaving less money for investment even in the event that Brexit goes smoothly from here.

Yesterday's PMI showed factories stemmed two months of job cuts and there was a small rebound in export orders after they fell in February. Still, there were signs that customers in the EU were starting to switch away from British suppliers. "It looks as if the impact of Brexit preparations, and any missed opportunities and investments during this sustained period of uncertainty, will reverberate through the manufacturing sector for some time to come," Dobson said.

But Andrew Wishart, an economist at consultancy Capital Economics, said Britain's economy would easily meet his forecast to pick up a bit of speed and grow by 0.3 percent in the first quarter of 2019 - if Wednesday's PMI survey for the dominant services sector stays at its recent solid pace. "As we've got used to saying, what happens next depends on Brexit," he said. — Reuters



LONDON: British-made confectionery displayed at the "Broken English" shop, which sells British goods in Berlin's leafy district of Kreuzberg. — AFP



JIANGSU: A staff member transfers new cars waiting to be exported at a port in Lianyungang in China's eastern Jiangsu province yesterday. China's manufacturing sector ended its four-month downward trend in March, official data showed. — AFP

Manufacturing in China returns to growth in March

BEIJING: China's manufacturing sector unexpectedly returned to growth for the first time in four months in March, in a sign that government stimulus measures may be slowly gaining traction, a private business survey showed yesterday.

But growth in new domestic and exports orders was marginal, suggesting the economy will remain under pressure in coming months and will likely require more policy support before it can convincingly stabilize. The Caixin/Markit Manufacturing Purchasing Managers' Index (PMI) expanded at the strongest pace in eight months in March, rising to 50.8 from 49.9 in February, above the neutral 50-mark dividing expansion from contraction on a monthly basis and the highest level seen since July 2018.

Economists polled by Reuters had forecast the reading for March would stay unchanged at 49.9. The surprise expansion seen in the Caixin survey echoed that seen in the official PMI released on Sunday, which also showed factory activity defying expectations for another contraction in March.

"With a more relaxed financing environment, government efforts to bail out the private sector and positive progress in Sino-US trade talks, the situation across the manufacturing sector recovered in March," Zhengsheng Zhong, director of macroeconomic analysis at CEBM Group, said in a commentary accompanying the data release. China has made proposals in talks with the United States on a range of issues that go further than it has before, including on forced technology transfer, as the two sides work to overcome obstacles to a deal to end their

protracted trade war, US officials told Reuters on Wednesday.

But sources close to the talks have stressed that a deal is by no means certain, and tit-for-tat tariffs on both sides have remained in place. Zhang noted the employment situation improved significantly in March, a trend that may ease some government and investor concerns after the unemployment rate in urban areas for February rose to the highest since early 2017.

Caixin's findings showed factories added headcount in March for the first time in 65 months, arresting a relentless spell of job shedding since October 2013. Some firms were hiring to support higher production and new business development, the release said.

New orders, an indicator of future activity, increased for the second month running, though the pace of growth was marginal. Output also grew for the second straight month. New export orders expanded after contracting in the previous month. Though the rate of increase was fractional, Caixin said the broad trend appeared to have steadied in the first quarter. Chinese manufacturers also signaled an improvement in pricing power in March, which could ease pressure on profit margins. Output charges edged up into expansionary territory and outpaced growth in input prices, reflecting reduced pressure from raw material costs.

"The producer price index might have risen faster year-on-year in March, and increased month-on-month, compared with a monthly decline in February," Zhong added.

Optimism among businesses edged up to a 10-month high partly on expectations that market conditions, both at home and abroad, will improve, the statement said.

But purchasing activity declined for the third straight month, suggesting some firms remain cautious.

Economists at Nomura have forecast that China's industrial production growth will moderate again in April and May after a brief rebound in March mainly due to last year's low base. — Reuters

worst-case scenario arrives, we have to be prepared," he added. European institutions and national governments "have taken actions... to minimize the potential impact" while "the private sector is more prepared... than it was only six months ago," de Guindos said. But with the eurozone economy slowing late last year and into the start of 2019, a disorderly Brexit "could be a sort of amplifier of the negative impacts and the downward trends" by undermining confidence still further, he said. "Markets sometimes overshoot" in reacting to political events, de Guindos noted.

The former Spanish economy minister's warning followed up a similar statement from Dutch central bank chief Klaas Knot. "Markets haven't priced in a hard Brexit," he told German business daily Handelsblatt. "There could be significant repricing on markets and the pound would come under pressure" if it comes to pass. — AFP

New Zealand PM touts 'important' China ties amid Huawei spat

BEIJING: New Zealand Prime Minister Jacinda Ardern yesterday played up her country's "critically important" ties with China while President Xi Jinping called for "mutual trust" amid tensions stemming from security concerns over Chinese telecom giant Huawei. The two leaders made the remarks as they met at Beijing's Great Hall of the People on Ardern's first trip abroad since the Christchurch mosque attacks.

"Your visit to China fully reflects the importance that you and the New Zealand government attach to China-New Zealand relations," said Xi, calling the island nation a "sincere friend and partner". The trip is also Ardern's first trip to China since she was elected in late 2017 — an unusually long wait for the leader of a nation that signed a pioneering free-trade deal with Beijing in 2008.

Relations between Beijing and Wellington have been strained in recent months after New Zealand's intelligence agency last November halted plans for Chinese-owned telecom giant Huawei to participate in a proposed 5G network, citing "significant security risks".

But Ardern said yesterday her visit to Beijing aims to further her country's "critically important relationship" with China-New Zealand's largest trading partner, with two-way trade totalling NZ\$27 billion (\$18.4 billion) in 2018. Ardern had repeatedly played down the spat with Huawei.

Last month she said New Zealand was in talks to minimize the security risks posed by using the Chinese telecom giant's equipment in

5G infrastructure, raising the prospect of a compromise on the issue.

In his opening remarks to Ardern, Xi urged both countries to "adhere to mutual trust (and) the principle of mutual benefit" as bilateral relations between the countries face a "new trend".

'Greatest common denominator'

The New Zealand prime minister also held talks with Chinese Premier Li Keqiang before her meeting with Xi. The two discussed ways for New Zealand to participate in Beijing's ambitious Belt and Road Initiative, a global trade infrastructure programme that includes Pacific island nations that traditionally fell under the spheres of influence of Canberra and Wellington. Li urged both sides to aspire for the

"greatest common denominator" and that "when each side's businesses invest in each other's businesses, they can enjoy a fair, transparent, convenient environment".

Ardern called for upgrading New Zealand's free trade agreement with China and said the country "welcomed high-quality foreign investment", her office said in a statement after the meeting.

Her short visit to China comes in the wake of a mass shooting at two mosques in Christchurch last month that left 50 people dead and prompted her to overhaul New Zealand's gun laws.

A longer trip had been planned, was but shortened to just a day following the attack. Both Xi and Li expressed condolences for those killed in the shooting. — AFP



BEIJING: New Zealand's Prime Minister Jacinda Ardern (left) arrive for a meeting with China's President Xi Jinping at the Great Hall of the People in Beijing yesterday. — AFP

Turkish lira turns positive

ISTANBUL: The Turkish lira firmed yesterday, clawing back early losses after President Tayyip Erdogan's AK Party lost control of the capital Ankara in local elections and trailed in Istanbul, Turkey's largest city, as the last votes were tallied. At 1137 GMT, the lira stood at 5.5290 against the US dollar, firming from Friday's close of 5.5550. It weakened as far as 5.7001 in early trade.

The lira tumbled almost 30 percent against the dollar in last year's currency crisis. In an echo of that crisis of confidence, it has swung wildly in the last six trading days as the government and central bank unleashed a series of stop-gap support measures.

Turkey's economic recession weighed on voters. In Istanbul, the mayoral candidate of the main opposition Republican People's Party (CHP), Ekrem Imamoglu, and his AKP rival, ex-prime minister Binali Yildirim, both said Imamoglu was around 25,000 votes ahead. Earlier, both parties had declared victory.

In Ankara, the CHP mayoral candidate, Mansur Yavas, won a clear victory, according to Turkish broadcasters. The results, if they stand, will mark the first time the AK Party and its Islamist predecessors have lost control of Turkey's two largest cities in 25 years.

Populist measures?

Markets are nervous that the results of the election will lead Erdogan to pursue more populist measures, said Inan Demir, senior emerging market economist at Nomura. "The losses in the largest cities will lead him to be more defensive, trying to shore up electoral support via populist measures, which increases risks for markets, for fiscal policy and monetary policy," he said.

Istanbul's BIST 100 stock index rose 0.91 percent yesterday.

In a speech yesterday, Erdogan pledged that Turkey would now focus on its troubled economy. Turkey slipped into recession late last year. "The expectation is that emphasis will be given to needed structural reforms in a period of four years without elections," said one banker, who declined to be identified. "If there is a delay in this, it will increase pressures on markets," he said, adding that the lira would likely remain in a 5.50-5.70 band while the uncertainty persists.

In the week ahead of elections Turkish stocks, bonds and the currency sold off, prompting the government to direct banks to temporarily starve a key London market of lira liquidity, according to officials. Investors were also weighing up a statement yesterday from Moody's rating agency, which said the erosion of Turkey's foreign currency reserves is a credit negative and that central bank use of reserves to prop up the lira currency poses renewed questions about its transparency and independence.

The renewed slip in Turkey's financial markets and uncertain policy reaction to recession raises a risk of further capital flight, Moody's said, adding that the results of local polls would likely determine the future path of macroeconomic policy. Both Erdogan and Finance Minister Berat Albayrak, the president's son-in-law, have promised to implement reforms after the elections to address economic woes.

Every decision by the government will have an impact on the lira as investors look forward to a package of reforms to be revealed in coming weeks to restore confidence in the lira after last week's drastic measures, said Piotr Matys, emerging markets forex strategist at Rabobank.

"While all previous AKP electoral victories were perceived as a source of political stability, on this occasion investors could be reluctant to give the administration benefit of the doubt that the next four years will be dominated by efforts to rebalance the economy and address structural vulnerabilities." — Reuters

Germany doubtful about Facebook chief's reform pledge

BERLIN: Germany's justice minister voiced skepticism yesterday about Facebook's willingness to reform, speaking after a Berlin meeting with its founder Mark Zuckerberg.

"For the past year, Mark Zuckerberg has been speaking about Facebook's responsibility to society, democracy and the privacy of more than two billion people," said Katarina Barley in a statement.

"But we haven't quite seen it yet. Facebook's behaviour has cost it a lot of trust." Facebook has drawn fire on several fronts — for allowing users to spread hate speech and even live-stream the bloody New Zealand mosque attacks, to letting foreign powers meddle in politics to broad concerns over its collection of personal user data. Germany has for years vocally complained about Facebook allowing far-right groups and other extremists to spread hate speech that breaches German sedition laws.

Zuckerberg last Saturday called for governments to play a "more active role" in regulating the internet, urging more countries to adopt versions of sweeping European rules aimed at safeguarding user privacy.

The US internet giants have long resisted government intervention, but the leading social network reversed course amid growing calls for regulation, in an apparent bid to help steer the debate.

Addressing privacy protection, Zuckerberg said he would support more countries adopting rules in line with the European Union's sweeping General Data Protection Regulation.

Barley, after talks with Zuckerberg, remained critical. "Facebook already has every opportunity to guarantee the highest level of data protection, regardless of state regulation, for its users," she said. "Instead, barely a month goes by without a new security scandal."

She also criticised Zuckerberg's plan to merge the technical infrastructure behind Facebook's WhatsApp and Messenger chat services and Instagram's communications feature. — AFP

Euro central bankers warn of no-deal Brexit risk to markets

FRANKFURT: Financial markets have not "priced in" the risk of a no-deal Brexit and could suffer turmoil if the "worst-case scenario" materializes, top European central bankers warned yesterday.

The risk of Britain crashing out of the EU on April 12 is "something that we cannot neglect," European Central Bank vice-president Luis de Guindos told European Parliament lawmakers in Brussels.

"Markets have not priced in the possibility of a no-deal scenario... just suppose that this

Business

Zain announces Abdullah Boneil as winner of Mini Cooper grand prize

Announcement at launch event of all-new Samsung Galaxy S10 devices

KUWAIT: Zain, the leading digital service provider in Kuwait, announced Abdullah Salman Boneil as the winner of the Mini Cooper 2019 grand prize during the launch event of the all-new Samsung Galaxy S10 devices held at the Avenues mall in collaboration with Al-Babtain Turnkey Solutions.

Zain offers the new generation of Samsung's flagship devices knowing the passion customers have for the latest and most advanced products in the world of technology. The all-new Galaxy devices feature precise laser cutting, on-screen security, and a Dynamic AMOLED that's easy on the eyes and makes the Infinity-O Display the most innovative Galaxy screen yet.

Zain's postpaid customers can now get the new Galaxy S10 devices with a variety of new plans starting at KD 31 monthly, including 100 GBs of 4G LTE Internet and 2500 local minutes. The company is keen on offering the most flexible and competitive plans to suit customers' unique personal and professional needs.

The latest addition to Samsung's Galaxy smartphone lineup is built on the best-in-class Galaxy Foundation of design innovation and cutting-edge technology. Security was moved from the back of the phone to the front, fusing the Ultrasonic Fingerprint directly into the screen. The Ultra Wide Camera allows taking stunning, cinematic pho-

tos with a 123 degree field of vision, and the intelligent camera helps users shoot stunning photos by suggesting image compositions and automatically optimizing camera settings to the scene. The new Galaxy lineup also features Dolby Atmos enhanced sound with stereo speakers tuned by AKG.

The all-new Galaxy S10e, S10, and Galaxy S10+ feature a 24-Hour Intelligent Battery to power the devices all day long by learning the user's daily routine and usage patterns, powering down apps they don't need. Also, Adaptive Power Saving Mode manages the user's battery life based on the prediction of their day. In addition, wireless PowerShare gives users the ability to share their power with other devices, while fast Wireless Charging 2.0 gets the phone back to 100 percent faster.

This offering comes in line with Zain's aim to provide its customers with a superior telecommunications experience, and springs from its core understanding of their needs. The company aims at providing its customers with an unmatched experience on Zain's most advanced network. Zain emphasized its commitment to the needs of the largest customer base in Kuwait, and will continuously look into expanding its horizons to introduce the latest and most advanced solutions in the market to meet its customers unique needs and aspirations.



The winner receiving his award at Zain's main HQ

Al-Sayer Holding sponsors Kuwait EPA's World Water Day

KUWAIT: Al-Sayer Holding in coordination with its subsidiary Al-Sayer Engineering has participated along with the Kuwait Environment Public Authority sponsoring World Water Day at EPA building about focusing attention on the importance of water. This year's theme, 'Leaving no one behind', adapts the central promise of New Kuwait 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development that as sustainable development progresses, everyone must benefit.

According to Nehad Al-Haj Ali, Deputy Group Manager Corporate Excellence, World Water Day on 22nd March every year, brings into our focus our continuous efforts on Sustainable Development Goal 6 which is crystal clear: water for all by 2030. This means leaving no one behind. But today, billions of people are still living without safe water - their households, schools, workplaces, farms and factories struggling to survive and thrive. Marginalized groups - women, children, refugees, indigenous peoples, disabled people and many others - are often over-



looked, and sometimes face discrimination, as they try to access and manage the safe water they need.

As per Vivek Kohli, Senior Manager-Oil, Paint and Garage Equipment, Al-Sayer Engineering is in continuous endeavor of introducing the new environmental friendly technology and product in the state of Kuwait, like steam car wash which can significantly reduce the contamination of the water for washing the car which Al-Sayer group (Toyota & Lexus and other Automotive) received for the service, Eco friendly batteries, water based automotive paints, synthetic motor oils and ecofriendly tires.

Al-Sayer Holding has always demonstrated its commitment towards the sustainable business practices and UNDP 2030 in all the business and operations and participated in all such activities which reflects the same to its stakeholders.

Warba Bank announces 5 winners of Al-Sunbula draw

KUWAIT: Warba Bank, "the Best investment Bank" and "Best Corporate Bank" in Kuwait, held its weekly Sunbula draw number 13. The draw announced the five lucky winners in the presence of representatives from the Ministry of Commerce and Industry and bank officials.

The bank proudly announced the lucky five winners of the KD 1000 prize: Naser Mohammad Naser Al-Hajri, Saad Mohammad Saad Al-Azmi, Faisal Hafeth Owaid Al-Hosaini, Niveen Mohammad Fathi A Abdulghani and

Eurozone inflation dips, raising stakes for ECB

BRUSSELS/FRANKFURT: Eurozone inflation unexpectedly slowed in March, adding to the pressure on the European Central Bank (ECB) as it battles an economic slowdown which threatens to undo years of stimulus. Headline inflation in the 19 countries sharing the euro slowed to 1.4 percent in March from 1.5 percent a month earlier, short of market expectations for a steady rate and also well below the ECB's target of almost 2 percent.

In a more worrying sign, a closely watched underlying inflation figure that excludes volatile food and energy prices, slowed to 1.0 percent, its weakest reading since April 2018. Although wages are rising and employment is at a record high, consumer prices have repeatedly disappointed and underlying inflation remains weak, baffling policymakers and putting in doubt the central bank's ability to control prices.

ECB President Mario Draghi has long predicted a rise in underlying inflation, only for the data to disappoint and forcing the ECB to ask for even more time to lift prices. "Today's price data should further depress inflation expectations in the market, all the more so as the head-

Fahhad Saud Fahhad Al-Ajmi. Al-Sunbula both account and fixed deposits are the perfect choices for customers who wish to save money and achieve steady returns while at the same time have the opportunity to win cash prizes throughout the year.

In line with the bank's mission to develop and differentiate its offerings, Warba Bank has enhanced its Sunbula campaign for 2019 with more cash and prizes reaching more than KD 1 million.

Warba Bank will continue its weekly draws for five winners of KD 1,000 each. What's new in 2019 are the "Mega Draws" which will be held every quarter to reveal five winners, the 1st winner will get KD 100,000! The four winners thereafter will each get the latest Land Cruiser VXR. Furthermore, the final Mega draw held in January 2020 will feature 2 more Land Cruiser VXRs!

As for the chances for winning, each customer is eligible to enter the draw against each

KD 10 in the Sunbula Account. Nevertheless, Sunbula Fixed Deposit investors also get chances in the Sunbula draws along with high expected returns that reach up to 3.5 percent distributed either monthly or at maturity upon the customer's preference.

Furthermore, Warba Bank is leveraging on its Customer Onboarding solution, in line with its ambitious five-year strategy that enables non-Warba Bank customers to request the opening of Al-Sunbula account in a simple electronic manner without having to visit the branch, through five simple steps in five minutes. New customers will be able to request opening the account at anytime, anywhere, through the new and unique electronic system used to implement this service. Representatives will then contact the customer to determine the appropriate time to visit the branch to get required signatures, verify the customer's identity, deliver his/her debit card, and activate the account.



Brexit, economic uncertainty hits demand: EasyJet

LONDON: British no-frills airline EasyJet yesterday said that uncertainty surrounding Brexit and the economic outlook is hitting demand for air travel. The announcement came in a trading update to coincide with the start of the group's second half.

"For the second half we are seeing softness in both the UK and Europe, which we believe comes from macroeconomic uncertainty and many unanswered questions surrounding Brexit which are together driving weaker customer demand," chief executive Johan Lundgren said in the update.

EasyJet added that given the uncertainty, its outlook for the second half "is now more cautious". The news sent the company's share price diving 8.0 percent to £10.28 in early deals on London's FTSE 100 index, which was up 0.8 percent overall.

For the first half, EasyJet said that group revenue was expected to have grown by more than seven percent to £2.34 billion (\$3.01 billion, 2.72 billion euros). "EasyJet has performed in line with expectations in the first half," Lundgren said in the trading statement.

"We have flown around 42 million customers with a significantly reduced number of cancellations and continued high levels of customer satisfaction." He added: "We are operationally well prepared for Brexit. Now that the EU Parliament has passed its air connectivity

legislation and together with the UK's confirmation that it will reciprocate, means that whatever happens, we'll be flying as usual."

In order to continue to fly smoothly in Europe post Brexit, EasyJet has also set up three airline divisions split between Austria, Britain and Switzerland. — AFP



GENEVA: An EasyJet Airbus A320 commercial plane with registration HB-JXF is seen landing above a British Airways commercial plane at Geneva Airport in Geneva. — AFP

Italy's budget deficit and debt to rise in 2019, 2020, OECD says

ROME: Italy's finances will deteriorate this year and next, with debt and the budget deficit both rising because of recession and higher public spending, the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development said yesterday.

In a special report on Italy, the Paris-based OECD said the deficit would rise to 2.5 percent of gross domestic product this year, above the 2 percent target Rome agreed in December with the European Commission. The economy will shrink by 0.2 percent this year, the OECD said, confirming a forecast last month, before expanding 0.5 percent in 2020.

Political uncertainty and high borrowing costs will offset the expansionary policies adopted by the coalition government of the 5-Star Movement and the League, it warned.

Most other forecasters expect Italy's economy to stagnate this year rather than shrink. The government still officially forecasts 1 percent growth, although it's expected to lower that in a new planning document later this month. "Italy continues to suffer from long-standing social and economic problems," the OECD said, citing issues ranging from low employment and rising poverty to gaping regional disparities and stagnant productivity.

Italy's inflation-adjusted, per capita GDP is lower than in the year 2000, it said, making it unique among the OECD's 36 member countries.

In a bleak 153-page report, the think-tank forecast unemployment would rise from 10.6 percent in 2018 to 12.0 percent this year. "The dearth of job opportunities pushes many young people to emigrate, exacerbating Italy's already fast population ageing and depriving the country of energy, talent and entrepreneurship," it said.

The budget deficit will rise to 3.0 percent of GDP in 2020, the OECD said, assuming the government does not adopt increases in sales tax included in its latest fiscal plan. Italy's public debt, proportionally the highest in the euro zone after Greece's, will hit a record 133.8 percent of GDP this year and climb to 134.8 percent in 2020, the OECD said.

The government targets a decline in debt from 132.1 percent in 2018 to 130.7 percent this year and 129.2 percent in 2020.

Rome's 2019 budget "rightly aims to help the poor," the OECD said, but it warned that the "citizens' income" welfare benefit would require marked improvements in job-search and training programs to help people find jobs. The budget's other flagship measure, a reduction in the retirement age, will lower economic growth in the medium term and risks worsening inter-generational inequality and increasing the public debt, the OECD said. — Reuters

What's On



LAPA stages 'Saleh Returns'

Sponsored by NCCAL, Al-Jarida, Al-Anbaa and Al-Seyassah dailies, LOYAC's Academy for Performance Arts (LAPA) recently launched its first World Theatre Day Festival with a performance for The Arabic Theatre Company titled 'Saleh Returns' performed at Kuwait National Arabic Museum stage. The 50 minute

play: 'Saleh Returns' tackled a number of sociopolitical issues in a comic way focusing on passivity and its consequences. The play written by Dr. Nadia Suleiman Al-Qena'e was starred by Ya'qoub Hayat as Saleh and the performance was accompanied by songs from Khaled Al-Thuwaini.



Lulu Hypermarket launches Food Carnival 2019

Lulu Hypermarket, the leading regional retailer, launched its eagerly-awaited annual mega food festival, the Lulu Food Carnival 2019, at its Al Rai outlet on March 27, 2019. World renowned Chef Michael Swamy inaugurated the promotion, in the presence of top management at Lulu Kuwait, a large gathering of customers, well-wishers and media personnel.

During the 11-day promotional period, a variety of culinary contests and record-breaking food displays were organized at Lulu outlets. A major draw during the promotion was the live cooking demonstration by Chef Swamy, during which he interacted with his fans while imparting several cooking tips. Other highlights during the food carnival were the numerous cooking competitions and record-shattering food displays.

The culinary contest began a day earlier, on March 26, 2019, to accommodate the variety of daily competitions that allowed budding child chefs, and accomplished lady chefs, to show off their culinary skills and compete in a spirited manner. The cooking contests included competitions in Continental, Indian, Arabic and Chinese cuisines as well as in preparation of desserts. Cooking without Fire, Wow the Master Chef, Taste & Win, and Make & Eat competitions added to the allure of the food carnival.

The Junior Chef contests and Kitchen Queen contests were highly competitive affairs that drew an enthusiastic response. Winners of the culinary contests, and participants alike, walked away with valuable gifts, cash vouchers and certificates. Adding to the carnival's attraction were several record-breaking food displays presented by the talented chefs of Lulu Hypermarket. The lengthy displays included a 20-meter long cake, a 10-meter long hotdog, the longest assorted cakes display, longest basboosa and longest banana cake.

Special pot biryani, cutting of the millefeuille pastry, and the soft butter cake cutting also attested to the skills of Lulu Hypermarket's in-house chefs. Lulu Hypermarket prides itself on providing shoppers with a customer-centric, value-driven experience by delivering high-quality



Jumeirah Messilah Beach Hotel & Spa joins Earth Hour 2019

Jumeirah Messilah Beach Hotel & Spa proudly celebrated Earth Hour 2019 by dimming all lights for an hour across the hotel in an effort to reduce the environmental impact and draw attention to environmental issues. Jumeirah Messilah Beach Hotel & Spa marked Earth Hour 2019 by joining millions of people and business organisations around the world in raising awareness and taking action against the worldwide global warming issue.

Earth Hour is an annual international event created by the World Wildlife Fund (WWF), to raise awareness towards the need and take action on climate change. With the challenges of the global economy, leaders and people remain focused on the growing threat of climate change and place a high priority on environmentally-friendly solutions as one of the ways to overcome those challenges.



HORECA 2020 to take place at Fair Grounds

Leaders Group for Consulting and Development's general manager Nabila Al-Anjeri said that Horeca Kuwait exhibition 2020 would be held in the period of January 22-24, 2020. She added that the exhibition would be organized jointly with the Hospitality Services Company and that preparations for it had already started.

Al-Anjeri added that the exhibition would be held over a total area of 6500 square meters at hall number 8 at the Mishref International fair Grounds and that it intends keeping the valuable trust it gained from leading hospitality, food industries and hotel equipment companies during previous exhibitions.

"Preparations for the coming cycle of the exhibition have gone a long way", Al-Anjeri said noting that recent statements made by some official concerning HH the Amir's wish to build Kuwait and set its future plans regardless of oil resources express a great deal of ambition but requires an early start to define the roles to be played by each non-oil sector that would help turn Kuwait into a commercial and financial hub.

Al-Anjeri added that most exhibitors and sponsors had already signed contracts for the new cycle as soon as the previous one was concluded last January. She also noted that the

project the government has been talking about require full governmental support to the private sector, namely the hospitality sectors.

Further, Al-Anjeri stressed that Kuwait cannot isolate itself from the world around us including neighboring and brotherly countries that have various projects to attract millions of tourists. "Recent studies show that around 8.3 million tourists from EU would visit the region by 2030 and that most of them will visit UAE whereas only 140,000 are expected to visit Kuwait", she underlined.



Sheraton Kuwait, Four Points by Sheraton launches weekend bundle

With its renowned facilities and world class standards, Sheraton Kuwait and the Four Points by Sheraton Kuwait welcomes you for a wonderful and unequalled stay. Sheraton Kuwait and the Four Points by Sheraton Kuwait is launching an exquisite weekend bundle. The package includes room rates including breakfast as well as special privileges to enjoy the diverse cuisines in all our in-house restaurants. Bringing the world



to you, from Al Hamba's lavish international buffet to the exquisite traditional Lebanese taste at Le Tarbouche, the finest Iranian cuisine at Shahrayar and authentic Indian dishes at Bukhara restaurant.

As for the lovers of exquisite ambiance, Italian Riccardo restaurant would be the best choice with its exclusive traditional Italian dishes, while the prestigious English Tea Lounge welcomes its guests who are seeking an alluring experience tasting the finest original tea selection along with a delectable scones and snacks. If you're looking for contemporary and classic Italian cuisine, La Mamma Pizzeria at Four Points by Sheraton Kuwait offers unique pizzas baked in wood fired oven and modern Italian dishes to meet each and every culinary desire. Many distinctive benefits awaits our guests who will surely enjoy an indulgent and matchless stay; free Wi-Fi, daily complimentary shuttle to the Avenues Mall and an M H Al Shaya discount vouchers for an exceptional shopping experience.

ACK wins at 'CEO HSE Excellence Award'

The Australian College of Kuwait (ACK) was awarded first place in the HSE Performance Award Ceremony, in the 12th Kuwait National Petroleum Company (KNPC) Health, Safety and Environment Excellence (HSE) Performance Competition under the 'External Organizations' category. The project submitted by ACK was the 'Fire Safety Day' event which was organ-

ized by the Healthy Living Committee in collaboration with ACK School of Business as part of their applied learning studies.

The Fire Safety Day was an event held by ACK which focused on the important aspects of fire safety and how to properly handle building and kitchen fires. The Kuwaiti Fire Department attended the event to give attendees important lessons on how to react to fire accidents and also provided hands-on instruction on how to use a fire extinguisher. ACK would like to thank KNPC for this recognition and looks forward to future cooperation.



Health & Science

Residents split on future of Romania's trash heap 'time-bomb'

European Commission demands closure of Pata-Rat

CLUJ-NAPOCA, Romania: The towering heap of rubbish at the Pata-Rat landfill in western Romania has been condemned as an "environmental time bomb" but for many of its neighbors, this putrid mountain of refuse is a livelihood—one they want to protect from closure. Looming on the hills near Romania's fifth-biggest city Cluj-Napoca, the trash heap rises to five storeys high in places, emitting a noxious odor and oozing substances that environmentalists say are poisoning the soil.

Children play among the mounds of debris. In fact, they live here. Dozens of families—mostly from the country's Roma minority—have made homes in makeshift shacks on the edge of the landfill site, sometimes after being expelled from illegal dwellings elsewhere. While environmentalists and some locals want the site cleaned up, others depend on it for a living, with whole families subsisting on the income they make from recyclable waste that they pick from the heap with their bare hands.

Linda Zsiga, 37, and her family were relocated to the site by the city authorities in 2010 to live in a container with no sanitation. She has since managed to find accommodation elsewhere in Cluj and is now an activist for Demos, a new leftist party. Zsiga has made the closure of the site and the rehousing of those who live alongside it a key priority. "No one should have to live here, in such inhuman conditions," she says.

The European Commission has demanded the closure of Pata-Rat and has set aside funding for new waste disposal systems to eliminate the need for the site. City authorities say they are cooperating although a definitive solution has so far eluded them.

Dallas in the debris

Many inhabitants of Pata-Rat are fearful of losing their meager livelihood if the site closes. Claudia and her hus-

band have lived for around 40 years in a part of the site that residents call "Dallas". With their two children they scrape a living by reselling cardboard, plastic bottles and metal cans. "We live how we can, just surviving from day to day. But what are we going to do in future?" says the 68-year-old, expressing her fears over a possible closure. "We were lucky but now it's over."

Brussels has pushed Romania to accelerate its efforts to clean up its rubbish disposal systems, with the European Court of Justice last year issuing a judgment against Romania for failing to close 68 landfill sites which pose risks for the environment and for public health. Recently Cluj city authorities buried the oldest part of the tip under a layer of earth and restricted access to the newer parts of the landfill site. For environmentalists, the site closure cannot come quickly enough.

Pata-Rat represents "a ticking environmental time bomb, the explosion is just a matter of time," according to Sandor Korosfof from the "Floarea de colt" environmental pressure group. He says there is "poisonous rubbish seeping into the ground" and that some of the waste catches fire "several times a year", spreading toxic ash over fields where cattle graze.

Salvation from Brussels?

While some Pata-Rat residents are angry at Brussels for the proposed closure, Zsiga thinks that the EU could yet be the salvation of the camp. "Europe could do many things. Most of all it could make available funds to build social housing or for an integrated rubbish disposal centre," she says, adding that such a facility has been promised by city authorities for several years. "Europe is correct and honest... but the problem comes from above, from the government," says Zsiga, whose activism targets what she calls the "corruption" of Romania's political class.



CLUJ-NAPOCA: Workers sort garbage at Pata-Rat landfill next to Cluj-Napoca city. — AFP

Mateias, a 51-year-old carpenter, also thinks that the "EU does a good job, it sets rules for us but the rules aren't followed." He works as a day laborer and also scours the rubbish around "Dallas" to find cardboard and clothes that he can burn when he's running short on firewood. As for the younger residents of Pata-Rat, 11-year-old Bebe says he spends his afternoons playing football with his friends in the slum. For now, the school bus that takes him

to school in Cluj is one of the few things that links the residents of the shanty town with the rest of the city. With the future uncertain, some residents are trying to plot life after Pata-Rat. Ion, who lives with his two adolescent sons around a hundred meters from one of the rubbish heaps, says he hopes he might be able to find work as a street cleaner with the municipal authorities. "Otherwise I don't know what we'll do to survive," he says. — AFP

Fossil 'mother lode' records Earth-shaking asteroid's impact

WASHINGTON: Scientists in the US say they have discovered the fossilized remains of a mass of creatures that died minutes after a huge asteroid slammed into the Earth 66 million years ago, sealing the fate of the dinosaurs. In a paper to be published Monday, a team of paleontologists headquartered at the University of Kansas say they found a "mother lode of exquisitely preserved animal and fish fossils" in what is now North Dakota.

The asteroid's impact in what is now Mexico was the most cataclysmic event ever known to befall Earth, eradicating 75 percent of the planet's animal and plant species, extinguishing the dinosaurs and paving the way for the rise of humans. Researchers believe the impact set off fast-moving, seismic surges that triggered a sudden, massive torrent of water and debris from an arm of an inland sea known as the Western Interior Seaway.

At the Tanis site in North Dakota's Hell Creek Formation, the

surge left "a tangled mass of freshwater fish, terrestrial vertebrates, trees, branches, logs, marine ammonites and other marine creatures," according to Robert DePalma, the report's lead author. Some of the fish fossils were found to have inhaled "ejecta" associated with the Chicxulub event, suggesting seismic surges reached North Dakota within "tens of minutes," he said.

"The sedimentation happened so quickly everything is preserved in three dimensions—they're not crushed," said co-author David Burnham. "It's like an avalanche that collapses almost like a liquid, then sets like concrete. They were killed pretty suddenly because of the violence of that water. We have one fish that hit a tree and was broken in half." The fossils at Tanis include what were believed to be several newly identified fish species, and others that were "the best examples of their kind," said DePalma, a graduate student and curator of the Palm Beach Museum of Natural History in Florida.

"We look at moment-by-moment records of one of the most notable impact events in Earth's history. No other site has a record quite like that," he said. "And this particular event is tied directly to all of us—to every mammal on Earth, in fact. Because this is essentially where we inherited the planet. Nothing was the same after that impact. It became a planet of mammals rather than a planet of dinosaurs." The paper is to be published in the Proceedings of the Academy of Natural Sciences.—AFP



UNITED STATES: This handout photo shows a partially exposed, perfectly preserved 66-million-year-old fish fossil uncovered by Robert DePalma and his colleagues. — AFP

CLINIC PAGE



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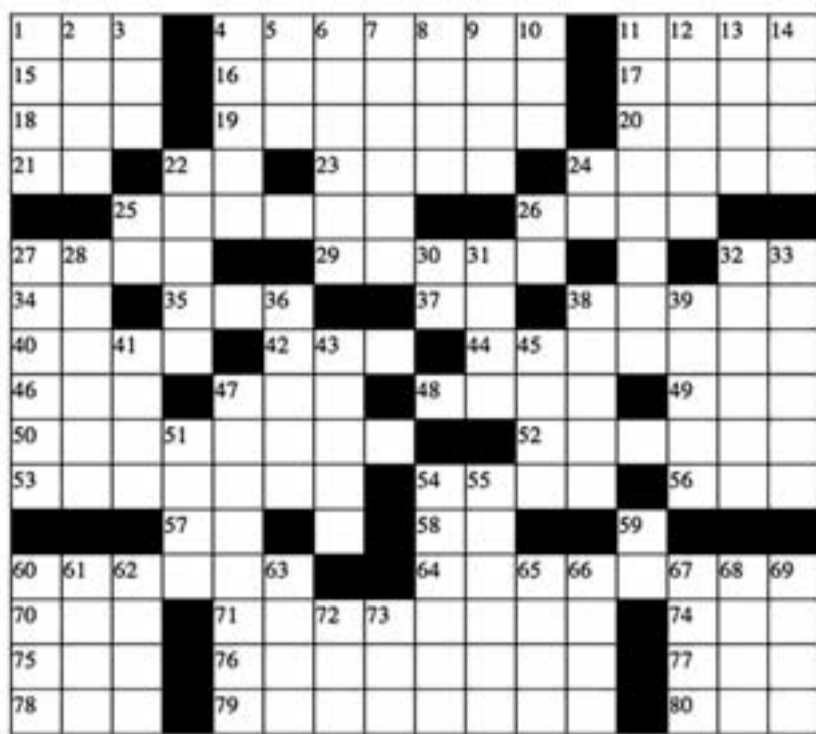
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Stars

CROSSWORD 2173



ACROSS

1. Syndrome resulting from a serious acute (sometimes fatal) infection associated with the presence of staphylococcus.
4. A flattened stem resembling and functioning as a leaf.
11. A book of the New Testament.
15. A legal document codifying the result of deliberations of a committee or society or legislative body.
16. An orchid of the genus *Liparis* having few leaves and usually fairly small yellow-green or dull purple flowers in terminal racemes.
17. (Greek mythology) Goddess of the earth and mother of Cronus and the Titans in ancient mythology.
18. The syllable naming the sixth (sub-diant) note of a major or minor scale in solmization.
19. Outermost layer of the pericarp of fruits as the skin of a peach or grape.
20. The probability of a specified outcome.
21. A public promotion of some product or service.
23. A member of a European people who occupied Britain and Spain and Gaul in pre-Roman times.
27. Title for a civil or military leader (especially in Turkey).
29. Any of various perennial South American plants of the genus *Loasa* having stinging hairs and showy white or yellow or reddish-orange flowers.
34. An artificial language for international use that rejects all existing words and is based instead on an abstract analysis of ideas.
35. A sheath worm to protect a finger.
37. Date used in reckoning dates before the supposed year Christ was born.
40. Dance the slam dance.
42. A Kwa language spoken by the Yoruba people in southwestern Nigeria.
44. A city in central Texas.
46. The elementary stages of any subject (usually plural).
48. A United Nations agency created to assist developing nations by loans guaranteed by member governments.
49. System of measurement based on centimeters and grams and seconds.
50. Give a description of.
52. Port city of Denmark in eastern Jutland.
53. A short aria.
56. An affirmative.
57. A Mid-Atlantic state.
58. A state in New England.
60. Be compatible or in accordance with.
64. Device consisting of a set of keys on a piano or organ or typewriter or typesetting machine or computer or the like.
70. A plant hormone promoting elongation of stems and roots.
71. A person who worships idols.
74. The cry made by sheep.
75. Small cubes with 1 to 6 spots on the faces.
76. In an adroit manner.
77. A container.
78. Any of various trees of the genus *Ulmus*.
79. The levorotatory form of dopa (trade names Bendopa and Brocadopa and Larodopa).
80. The compass point midway between northeast and east.

DOWN

1. The basic unit of money in Western Samoa.
2. Any of a number of fishes of the family Carangidae.
3. A hormone produced by the anterior pituitary gland.
4. A metal or leather projection (as from the sole of a shoe).
5. Fleshy folds of tissue as those surrounding the mouth.
6. Situated at an apex.
7. Australasian kingfishers.
8. Using speech rather than writing.
9. Made of packed earth or gravel.
10. Apparent power to perceive things that are not present to the senses.
11. Lacking gonads.
12. A group of Plains Indians formerly living in what is now North and South Dakota and Nebraska and Kansas and Arkansas and Louisiana and Oklahoma and Texas.
13. The periodic rise and fall of the sea level under the gravitational pull of the moon.
14. An impudent or insolent rejoinder.
22. An area of sand sloping down to the water of a sea or lake.
24. A radioactive element of the actinide series.
25. A gonadotropic hormone that is secreted by the anterior pituitary.
26. A state in midwestern United States.
28. Pod of the peanut vine containing usually 2 nuts or seeds.
30. The blood group whose red cells carry both the A and B antigens.
31. Someone who works (or provides workers) during a strike.
32. An infectious disease of the tropics transmitted by mosquitoes and characterized by rash and aching head and joints.
33. A port city of south central Ukraine on an arm of the Black Sea.
36. Indicated by necessary connotation though not expressed directly.
38. (Greek legend) The greedy king of Phrygia who Dionysus gave the power to turn everything he touched into gold.
39. Easily irritated or annoyed.
41. Interface consisting of a standard port between a computer and its peripherals that is used in some computers.
43. Cubes of meat marinated and cooked on a skewer usually with vegetables.
45. (informal) Exceptionally good.
47. Of or involving or contained in the arteries.
51. Give over.
54. Antiarrhythmic drug (trade name Enkaid) used to treat life-threatening arrhythmias but increases the risk of sudden death in heart attack patients.
55. The quarter of many European cities in which Jews are required to live.
59. A heavy odorless colorless gas formed during respiration and by the decomposition of organic substances.
61. The lower house of the parliament of the Republic of Ireland.
62. A complex red organic pigment containing iron and other atoms to which oxygen binds.
63. Tropical starchy tuberous root.
65. A sharp high-pitched cry (especially by a dog).
66. Genus of prickly shrubs and small trees of the Caribbean region.
67. A French abbot.
68. Water falling in drops from vapor condensed in the atmosphere.
69. A native or inhabitant of Denmark.
72. Canadian hockey player (born 1948).
73. A toilet in England.

STAR TRACK



Aries (March 21-April 19)

At work you come across to your coworkers as knowing exactly what needs to be done. You have a knack for dreaming up the best way to accomplish work acts that put you ahead of the game where higher ups are concerned. Your thinking is clearer right now than it's been in a while. Personal relationships work more easily because you seem to have a flair for making things better where they're concerned. Even if you have to give up on someone you love, you're making clearer decisions in a logical sense before you pull the plug.



Taurus (April 20-May 20)

Your mind is perhaps working too well right now. Others, who's mind doesn't process as quickly as yours, get on your nerves. Consider that before you tell coworkers how you actually feel about their slow mind set. On the job might not be the place to let someone know you think they're less than up to par. This is on you now. To top it off, your patience may be tested when someone challenges your thoughts. Tolerance is the kind of challenge at work that can play over into your personal life. Learning the lesson of being considerate may be why you're having to experience this now.



Gemini (May 21-June 20)

Although you may see more with your intuitive side right now and be proven right later, don't make any sudden changes at home or at work. If you do you may have to change again just as suddenly. You're thinking and that's good especially since you seem to be in rare form but, isn't there always a but, you need to use logical thought processes before engaging in making your ideas a reality. Build the model, so to speak, to see if it stands. There might be a few dissenters but in the long run, you can trust your gut.



Cancer (June 21-July 22)

You have a need to talk and express yourself today with someone you consider a trusted friend. Perhaps your psychic side has peeked out from under the bushel you call your mind. Some things you just can't explain. Forgiveness and love are two big things on your mind now although you may want to hold onto one of those for a minute longer. There could be emotional differences with someone you love and you need to express how you really feel. You feel frustrated by the effort. Hence the best friend with whom you are talking today.



Leo (July 23-August 22)

You could find yourself in a Mexican Standoff when someone at the office bucks up to you. Since you're not sure you like this person anyway, try to walk away from an argument. Generally, the two people in the argument don't give the people on the sidelines too much room to think neither is stupid. Keep your calm. Take the time to consider making your life better. Since you only control you, Leo, perhaps it's time to put into action what you're thinking such as making better food choices and more. Take time to relax more too. You'll need it today.



Virgo (August 23-September 22)

Today you could be challenged by someone at work. You find that you're not in the mood for such a trivial argument but you're not going to give in either. It's the principal of the thing for you and you think you have right on your side. No one ever wins an argument, Virgo. The best you can do is come out in a tie. You're not good with that either. Friends and acquaintances come to you for advice. You seem to be talking out of both sides of your mouth now but in a good way. You're appreciated really. Take that into consideration and be glad when the days almost over.



Libra (September 23-October 22)

You start your month with added incentive. Your psychic side is showing now and you just realized it. That's because you're having feelings that are right on. Work becomes clearer when you feel you know just what it takes to make it better. People's negativity drops away when you discuss work issues and say what they were about to say. It catches them off guard and gives you the opportunity to expound on what you want them to consider. This works in your personal life as well. Enjoy your time in this sun.



Scorpio (October 23-November 21)

This is an intense time for you now on the emotional front and if it's there you know it's throughout your life at the moment. People need to give you your room especially at work if they're sensible. Of course, that travels over into your personal life as well. You feel a little isolated. Thank goodness that's short-lived. You don't need that on top of the hair trigger you're playing with now, Scorpio. Someone, including you, may live to regret the sting from your potent tail that's going to be let loose if another dares to cross you now.



Sagittarius (November 22-December 21)

Today brings the desire for the good life and all that entails. Emotionally and mentally you can see into the future right now or at least see the way issues will play out later. This is a good perception to use because it gives you a leg up on work issues and on your love life. If you feel something isn't quite right, then it isn't. Do some research as you know you will be digging into the situation. This is a period of great material gain. Work hard and make it come into being for you.



Capricorn (December 22-January 19)

You find yourself thinking about and working through some deep, dark, secret, sensitive items now. Because you may be involved with your own problems now you don't mind listening to, maybe even relishing, common gossip. You figure you may be able to find a solution to your issues while learning something juicy. It's like a movie without the actors. Most people who don't really know you would never believe you liked this sort of thing just by looking at you, Capricorn. But here you are. Friendships along with group activities that center on making life better for all fill a need.



Aquarius (January 20-February 18)

Though you'd like to be out on the town, reality calls you to work today. It's all business now so you know you wouldn't be happy playing with your friends because your critical thinking mind is not going to allow it. Besides you know that you're the leader today. Your intuitive side is giving you the knowledge of new things that can be put to work quickly for making more money for all involved. Coworkers listen to you because they've seen your penchant for creative business ideas work too many times before, Aquarius. Be glad you went to work today. Enjoy your evening with friends.



Pisces (February 19-March 20)

You're feeling inward but not alone. You only want to spend time with the one closest to you right now and that is your lover. You're thinking and being silent. Your love partner may believe you don't even want to take time with him or her. You'll have to make your feelings known. Otherwise you may get those Pisces feelings hurt and have more on your plate than that which you bargained. Dreams are part of what you want to make your world. Creative ideas come from the psychic side. You know they work well when they come from there. Enjoy time after work getting more acquainted with the one you love.

Wordsearch Puzzle

Animals 6 - Word Search

E T T T L W T A N E Y H G I T Y O
B T E B E E X B R E P G T X W R C
C D R K R K V P A M S I I X O A E
R F G R R A T K S Z A O V B A G L
O C E O I J T T A H H D O X B U O
C F V Z U L N L P T A W I G I O T
O B B D Q A B B I V B R Q L N C N
D W N K S A F X U A E G K A L O A
I N F A T W I L D E B E E S T O M
L R E R W R T G N O E L E M A H C
E H O T U U E P O N C Q T O L X E
P S Z M R R A N A C O N D A W T M
S T E E G A Y A S M B O I B V N W
Q L Z E N I M R E G U L L H K Q E

- | | | |
|-----------|----------|------------|
| ALBATROSS | FERRET | PHEASANT |
| ANACONDA | GIBBON | SHARK |
| ARMADILLO | GULL | SQUIRREL |
| BADGER | HYENA | VULTURE |
| CHAMELEON | LEMUR | WILDEBEEST |
| COUGAR | LOON | |
| CROCODILE | MARTEN | |
| EGRET | MONGOOSE | |

Yesterday's Solution

Animals 5 - Solution

P N E X Q R A R A N X I K Y N R B
X F O Z P M U S S O P C Q N O P Z
A A G O Q P E H E H W J O D U Z E
N L G S M O O S E T R R N U H K L
A C W T Q O W J R Y T O Y X X N S
U O B I R A C V V P C X N V I K B
G N V E L G T M D V S Z X F I N N
I C M L Q B O O V I J Q F H O S K
R O O U R P A H R R N U D M S P F
Z W V M S L Z C T T P G T V T H Z
Z Q O A P K L E Q R O I O Y R M R
D L M A R M O S E T A I S V I P G
E J C Y X I U X Z B J W S G C F W
P A N D A T Y B A E U Z T E H P T

- | | | |
|---------|----------|----------|
| ALPACA | MARMOSET | PYTHON |
| ASP | MOLE | SKUNK |
| CARIBOU | MOOSE | SWALLOW |
| CONDOR | MULE | TORTOISE |
| COW | MUSKOX | WARTHOG |
| DINGO | OSTRICH | |
| ELK | PANDA | |
| FALCON | POSSUM | |

Yesterday's Solution

D R A B A E R A T O R I M O
H A R E S C E N E R Y R A D
A R A W A K L A C E T A T E
K E B A B B A L S A A N A S
R P A Y E E S B I A
A I D E R O S T R A T E
D N A B I B H N A S A L E
A L G A M A F A I L L I D
P E D I C A B L A L L Y G A G
A T A R A X G S E I N E
I I L A M A A D A D
A K A N N A B U A S H
B H A G A R U S S I A S A T
O A R A B E L I A L E M M A
H M O R A D I A N C E E A R
M A N P R O C L A I M W H O

Daily Sudoku

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

Yesterday's Solution

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

Lifestyle

TUESDAY, APRIL 2, 2019



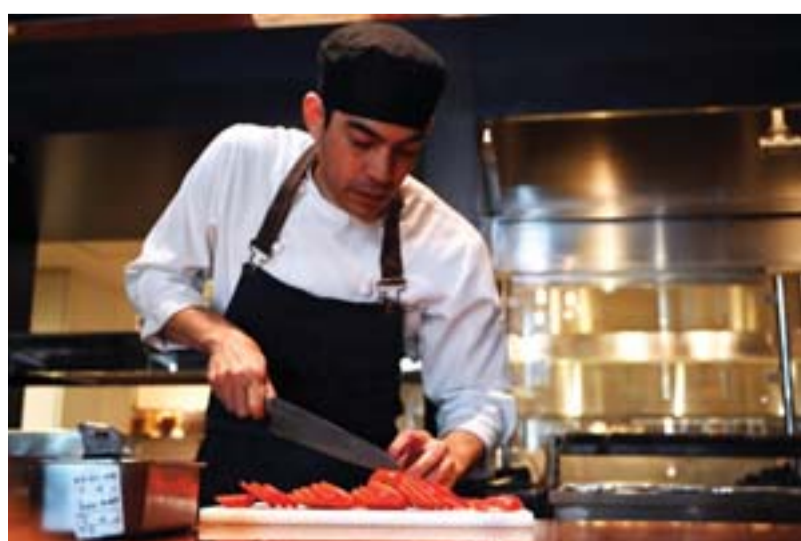
People view "The Bull" (Il Toro), a 1950s life-size bronze and mixed metals sculpture by late Italian sculptor Francesco Messina, following its installation in the Vittorio Emanuele II shopping gallery in downtown Milan yesterday, as part of the event "Milano Capitali". — AFP



Patrick Shimada, the chef de cuisine at The Oak Door of the Grand Hyatt Tokyo hotel poses with a 3kgs burger in Tokyo.



Patrick Shimada preparing a 3kgs burger.



Patrick Shimada preparing a 3kgs burger.



EMPEROR BURGER: TOKYO CHEF WHIPS UP \$ 900 MONSTER FOR NEW MONARCH

A Tokyo restaurant is honoring the crowning of the new Japanese emperor next month with a football-sized wagyu beef hamburger served between gold-dusted buns—at an eye-watering cost of \$900. The juicy three-kilogram (six-pound) whopper, painstakingly prepared by chefs at the swanky Oak Door steakhouse in Tokyo's Roppongi district went on sale Monday. It measures 25 centimeters (10 inches) in diameter and is topped with foie gras, slices of Japanese beef and freshly shaved black truffles. "We wanted to do something to celebrate the new emperor and a new era for Japan," head chef Patrick Shimada told AFP at a private unveiling. "It also gets me more in touch with my Japanese roots," added Shimada, a fourth generation Japanese American who concocted the jumbo dish. "Doing this through an American-style burger using Japanese ingredients—it's kind of like myself in a bun."

The Golden Giant Burger, which commemorates the coronation of Crown Prince Naruhito on May 1 and marks the ushering in of Japan's new Reiwa Era, will stay on the menu until the end of June—although it costs a king's ransom. The super-sized feast, which is sprinkled with gold flakes, will set hungry diners back a meaty 100,000 yen (\$903) — but comes with a bottle of wine to help soften the blow.

Japan's current Emperor Akihito will abdicate at the end of April, becoming the first living monarch to step down in 200 years, relinquishing the Chrysanthemum Throne to his son. Japan revealed the name of its new imperial epoch on Monday after 31 years of the Heisei Era. As chefs get busy grilling their giant burgers, in mediaeval times cooking meat—particularly beef—would have landed them in hot water. A 1,200-year ban on the consumption of meat in Japan—first decreed in the seventh century on a



seasonal basis—saw people severely punished for defying the law and was only ended by the Emperor Meiji in 1872.

Modern Japan, famous for its sushi and rich array of seafood dishes, has wholeheartedly embraced American burger culture since the end of World War II. "There are so many burger places in Japan these days," said Shimada. "Walk down the street and you can get a burger almost anywhere. Things catch on—and when they catch on in Japan, they kind of blow up." — AFP



Patrick Shimada, the chef de cuisine at The Oak Door of the Grand Hyatt Tokyo hotel poses with a 3kgs burger in Tokyo. — AFP photos



Mac tackles gender inequality at AMP London Conference

Annie Mac says women shouldn't feel "pressured to rise up to levels of testosterone" to get their "point heard". The BBC Radio 1 DJ hosted a panel discussing gender inequality at her AMP London Conference Day at the Moth Club in Hackney, London on Friday, where she was joined by industry folk, including NME editor Charlie Gunn and Glastonbury co-organizer Emily Eavis. They each discussed their experiences as females in the male-dominated industry, with the chat entitled 'Where Are All The Female Bosses?', and Annie recalled a conversation she had with Wolf Alice frontwoman Ellie Rowsell about how she shouldn't have to "shout" to be heard. Annie - who recently teamed up with Smirnoff and the PRS Foundation's Keychange to take charge of their Equalising Music campaign - said: "I remember interviewing Wolf Alice and I remember her saying 'I don't want to have to speak in the language of men. I don't want to have to shout, maybe I want to whisper, and I still want to get my voice heard, I think that should be OK.' "I think that's a really interesting conversation the idea of women feeling pressured to rise up to levels of testosterone to get your point heard. "Wouldn't it be nice if

we can all sit round and have a cup of tea and make massive decisions." Meanwhile, Emily - who curates the Glastonbury line-up with her father Michael Eavis - also opened up about the lack of female headliners at festivals and admitted the problem is that there isn't a "big enough pool of artists at that level" altogether, whilst she highlighted how important it is that a "conscious effort" is made to "push the women through". She said: "There aren't enough female headliners, there isn't a big enough pool of artists at that level. "We're having to try and get people out of retirement in order to play. "My dad keeps going 'what about the chaps! "There aren't that many blokes coming through either, but we need to make a conscious effort to push the women through. "We love taking not obvious headliners and putting them on the Pyramid stages, but we don't have enough -we need more women to choose from." AMP London took place over four-days in the British capital and included industry panels and performances from the likes of Sam Fender, Mahalia and Two Door Cinema Club.



JAMIE LAWSON: ED SHEERAN LOOKS AFTER HIMSELF ON TOUR

Jamie Lawson says his pal Ed Sheeran is more of a tea drinker than a boozer these days. The 'Wasn't Expecting That' singer - who was the first artist to be signed by Ed's record label Gingerbread Man Records - hit the road with the pop megastar last year, and has revealed that the 'Castle on the Hill' hitmaker is all about getting plenty of sleep and not waking up to a hangover on tour. He told The Sun newspaper's Bizarre column: "Ed is pretty controlled. "He juggles enjoying himself and making sure he's well enough to put on a great show. "It is early nights for everyone. "I don't think Ed's wild days are over but touring at that level is very difficult in terms of keeping yourself healthy." The 28-year-old star recently offered Jamie

his expert advice on the songs for his latest album, 'The Years In Between', and the 43-year-old singer/songwriter is thankful for having the 'Perfect' hitmaker as his mentor. He said: "Ed is mentoring me in a sense - I would play him the recordings we had done. "He gave me advice, he's always been in that role for me. "This is the third record I have with him and it feels good because he has faith in what I do." It's no surprise that Ed prefers tea on tour, as he previously admitted that a hot brew is the secret to his songwriting success. He said: "I only ever create sober. I like to be alert. I find ideas happen when you have a cup of tea."



Busted's Wembley show crashed by stage invader



Busted's Wembley show was crashed by a stage invader. The pop punk trio - Charlie Simpson, James Bourne and Matt Willis - were performing their final song of the career-spanning set, 'Year 3000', at The SSE Arena when an overexcited man managed to jump on the stage, before being "restrained" by security staff. An onlooker at the gig on Saturday told The Sun newspaper's Bizarre column: "Some guy jumped on stage and had to be restrained by security. "He was going mad. The boys faced a terrifying security threat." Meanwhile, the 'Crashed the Wedding' hitmakers recently found themselves submerged in sand for their music video for new single 'Shipwrecked in Atlantis', and James had a scare when he couldn't feel his legs. Matt recalled: "We had half a ton of sand covering our bodies so we couldn't move and snuggled to breathe. "James lost the feeling in his legs." The 'What I Go To School For' hitmakers will next be seen headlining Hampton Court Palace Festival on June 8. The band recently reached number two in the Official UK Chart with their LP 'Half Way There' and they plan to perform some songs from the record as well as their greatest hits on the night. James recently admitted that Busted are "just finding" their "rhythm". The 35-year-old star and his bandmates went back to their pop punk roots on 'Half Way There' but freshened up their sound. James was asked by fans on Twitter how they can top the record and he said that their new music will be even "better" as they are enjoying being in the band again. When one fan asked when their next record will be out, he replied: "Our albums will keep getting better. Trust me on that. I feel like we're just finding our rhythm." And when another said: "How can they honestly get better than they are now? HALF WAY THERE IS THE BEST! (sic)", he wrote back: "They will get better." Another user tweeted that they hope they don't "lose their Busted vibe", to which he replied: "The vibe is here to stay."



TAKE THAT WILL CONTINUE INTO THEIR 80S

Gary Barlow says Take That will continue into their 80s. The 48-year-old frontman - who is joined by Howard Donald, 50, and Mark Owen, 47, in the 'Never Forget' group - has reassured fans that their upcoming 30th anniversary tour does not spell the end of the band and admitted he feels like they are "just over half way" through their career. Gary told The Sun newspaper's Bizarre column: "The end? Absolutely not. "The other day I thought 'Do you know what, we're probably just over half way through the story. "I think there's loads more still to come." The 'Shine' hitmakers - who have 12 number one singles to their name - are more focused on the future than ever before. Gary continued: "We've been quite an ambitious band in the past. "We've always wanted more No1s and now that's the ambition just to continue." Howard also confessed that if he started to lose his luscious thick mop of curls, he wouldn't want to be a pop star anymore. He admitted: "That's all I've worried about since 21 because

a couple of my brothers have really receded. "I'm like, 'God, I really don't want to look like them. I won't be a pop star anymore.'" The Manchester boyband formed in 1989, along with part-timer Robbie Williams and former member Jason Orange. There had been talk of both of them rejoining the group for the special milestone. However, Robbie - who quit Take That in 1995, a year before they originally split, and rejoined from 2009 to 2012 - admitted that although he would have loved to mark three decades of the band, he'd only be willing to do it if Jason came back after leaving in 2014. He said: "I'm up for it. But I don't know what their calendar says, what my calendar says. I don't know what their manager says. "We'd all love to do it. I'd love to get Jason back involved, realistically I don't think so. "If we could get Jay back it would be perfect."



Pete Doherty: Brexit will be good for music

Pete Doherty thinks Brexit will be good for the British music industry. The 'Broken Love Song' hitmaker is excited to see the "incredible backlash" reaction from musicians when the United Kingdom leaves the European Union. Asked by Channel 4 News if he felt Brexit would be bad for the music industry specifically, he shared: "No, it'll be the best thing in the world for music. You'll see, you'll get the most insane new wave of the most incredible [acts]. You see the difference between writing a poem in prison and writing a poem in a cottage by a lake, you know. There will be an incredible backlash." Meanwhile, Pete previously insisted he is always the "last to know" about the future of his band The Libertines. He said: "I'm always the last to know, of course, but apparently we're playing some gigs in Chile, Argentina, and Brazil. I've got a feel-

ing I'm going to love it over there." And the singer feels more involved in his new solo project and really "believes" in the music. Speaking about his new solo project, he added: "These new songs, this new line-up - I'm part of it, you know? It's a small group. There's more people in the band than there are in the whole crew plus management ... I'm really inside these new songs. I believe in them." Pete also previously confessed he finds it "difficult" to just go out there and have fun when he's on stage. He said: "This is something I have to learn - this is a fault of my own. It's not an idealistic thing where I think 'You should not have fun, you should be serious'. Not at all. I'd love to go out there and have fun and enjoy it, but I just can't. It's not in my make up. I find it very difficult."

Drake turns The O2 into The O3

Drake has turned The O2 into The O3 for his residency at the venue. The Canadian rapper will spend seven nights at the 20,000-capacity arena as part of his 'Assassination Vacation Tour' and in a nod to the lyric from his hit single 'God's Plan', the The O2 has had their sign changed at the entrance to the building. Alongside a series of images of the changed signage: The O2 wrote on Twitter: "Turn The O2 into The O3. This is God's Plan. #DrakeTheO3 (sic)" Whilst on tour in the UK, Drake has made a series of surprise intimate appearances. Last week, the 'In My Feelings' hitmaker played a mini set at Leicester's Club Republic nightclub, where he performed 'Sicko Mode', 'Nonstop' and 'God's Plan'. Drake also showed up to rising rapper Loski's London show. The hip-hop superstar headed to the O2 Kentish Town Forum in north London, to see the 19-year-old artist who he listed as an inspiration for his latest LP 'Scorpion'. The 'Hotline Bling' rapper was filmed by a fan on the balcony of the 2,300-capacity venue rapping along to Loski's song 'Money & Beef'. The 32-year-old star also crashed Fredo's concert ahead of the opening night of the UK leg of his own tour in Manchester recently. The Grammy-winner dropped by the O2 Ritz, which holds just 1,500 people, a day before his gig at nearby Manchester Arena, to join the London star for a rendition of the former's song 'Nonstop' from his record-breaking LP 'Scorpion'. Fredo fans paid just £25 a ticket for the concert and went crazy for the hip-hop superstar. He warned himself up before his extravagant first show of the tour in the Northern city. Fellow UK rapper DAVE was also a special guest at Drake's Manchester show. The extravagant production sees the Grammy Award-winner perform on a 360 degree LED stage, with flying drones with lights, lasers, fireworks, and even had a rotating yellow Ferrari hovering over the crowd. After performing the emotional number 'Upset', footage is shown on big screens of Drake as a child and in the studio. The montage also includes a clip of Drake with his former on/off flame Rihanna, then footage is shown of the rapper crying into his hands.



Edgar Wright created Cornetto Trilogy to get free ice cream

Edgar Wright created the 'Cornetto Trilogy' because he wanted free ice cream. The 'Three Flavors Cornetto trilogy' are comprised of the three British comedy films, 'Shaun of the Dead', 'Hot Fuzz' and 'The World's End' - all of which starred Simon Pegg and Nick Frost and were directed by Edgar who co-wrote the movies with Simon. The Wall's ice cream cone is referenced in all three movies and on the 15th anniversary of hilarious zombie romp 'Shaun of the Dead', the 44-year-old director admitted that the trilogy exists is because they were given free Cornettos at

the film's after-party and they wanted more. However, their plot to land more complimentary Cornettos didn't work. Sharing photos of the cast at the 2004 premiere on his Twitter account, Edgar revealed: "It was 15 years since the London premiere of 'Shaun Of The Dead'. It was such a great night, possibly my favorite after party too. "At the after-party they gave out free Strawberry Cornettos (as featured in the movie) so me and Simon contrived to mention Cornettos in the next one as a way of getting more free ice cream next time around... (we didn't)". The filmmaker previously joked that the series

was a play on Krzysztof Kieslowski's 'The Three Colors Trilogy' and says it was a "silly joke that stuck". He said: "It's a half-joke, it's something that came up after 'Hot Fuzz' because we used Cornetto ice cream in both 'Shaun of the Dead' and 'Hot Fuzz' and some journalist pointed that out and said, 'Are you going to make this a trilogy?' "And I said, 'Yes, it's going to be like Krzysztof Kieslowski's 'The Three Colors Trilogy.' That was a silly joke that stuck."

STAR WARS: THE EMPIRE STRIKES BACK LIVE TO TOUR



'Star Wars: The Empire Strikes Back Live' is set to tour live in concert in 2019. Following the success of 2018's arena tour of 'Star Wars: A New Hope Live with Orchestra' the next installment of the 'Star Wars: Film Concert Series' will travel around the UK with Oscar-winning composer John Williams' musical score performed live to the film. The performance will feature The Novello Orchestra and will be conducted by David Mahoney and will begin at Manchester Arena on September 27, before moving onto Leeds, Birmingham, Liverpool and Glasgow. 'Episode V' follows Han Solo (Harrison Ford) and Princess Leia (Carrie Fisher) as they flee from ice planet Hoth to Cloud City to escape the clutches of the Empire, however, they are captured by Darth Vader who is laying a trap to lure his trainee Jedi Knight son Luke Skywalker (Mark Hamill) to the planet so he can attempt to turn him to Dark Side

of The Force. Legendary composer Williams has scored all eight of the main movies in the sci-fi series, which began with 1977's 'Star Wars: A New Hope' for which he earned an Academy Award for Best Original Score. His scores for 'The Empire Strikes Back', 'Star Wars: Episode VI - Return of the Jedi' and 'Star Wars: Episode VII - The Force Awakens' were also nominated for Best Original Score at the Oscars. Williams, 87, is the Academy's most nominated living person and the second most-nominated individual in history after Walt Disney with five Academy Awards and the composer also has four Golden Globe Awards, seven British Academy Film Awards and 22 Grammy Awards to his name. The concluding part of the Skywalker saga 'Star Wars: Episode IX' is released this December.



Ryder was 'obsessed' with Heathers script

Winona Ryder became "obsessed" with the 'Heathers' script when she landed a role in the cult classic movie. According to the film's producer Denise Di Novi, the now 47-year-old actress simply loved the plot for the 1989 dark high school comedy and insisted on playing the role of Veronica Sawyer in the picture despite her agent advising her against it. In an interview with Variety marking the movie's 30th anniversary, Di Novi said: "Winona Ryder is so smart, very brave and unusual. She was this amazing 15 year old, if you can believe it. Winona got obsessed with the script." The movie follows Veronica as she joins a high school clique of popular girls all named Heather (Kim Walker, Lisanne Falk and Shannen Doherty), however, she starts to question the bullying behavior. However, when bad boy student J.D. (Christian Slater) joins the school, Veronica becomes obsessed with him and he tricks her into killing the clique's leader Heather Chandler (Kim Walker). Veronica then learns that J.D. is out to kill everybody he doesn't like and even plans to blow up the school. The film's screenwriter Daniel Waters believes the movie's long-term appeal is that the story lulls viewers into a false sense of security and even the title sequence song 'Que Sera Sera' - which was re-recorded by Syd Straw as Doris Day wanted nothing to do with the movie due to its foul language and nudity - makes audiences believe they're watching a film with a "nice message at the end". He said: "The whole thing about 'Heathers' was lulling you into thinking you're watching a different movie. [The song] makes them think they're watching a film about girls, a film about teenagers, rebels and bullies and it's going to have a nice message at the end. Then you slap everybody in the face in the middle and mess with their minds." The film has inspired stage show 'Heathers the Musical' and after a successful run in London's West End it will be returning later this year.

Hamill to voice Chucky in Child's Play reboot

Mark Hamill will voice Chucky in the upcoming 'Child's Play' reboot. The 67-year-old star will provide the voice of the iconic horror character Chucky in the Orion Pictures revival of franchise, also starring Aubrey Plaza, Brian Tyree Henry, Tim Matheson and David Lewis. Announcing the news at WonderCon, Mark said: "If you're wondering whose going to play Chucky in the new Child's Play, you're looking at him." Producer David Katzenberg went on to hail the 'Star Wars' actor as "a gifted and celebrated vocal performer" and insisted the 'Kingsman: Secret Service' actor has shown "incredible energy and commitment" towards the project. Katzenberg said: "We feel incredibly lucky to have an icon creating a new take on an iconic character. Mark is a gifted actor and celebrated vocal performer, and he's approached this challenge with incredible energy and commitment." The forthcoming film will use the same plot as the original 1988 film - in which Chucky was voiced by Brad Dourif - and star Aubrey, 34, as Karen Barclay a mother who unwittingly gives her son Andy (Gabriel Bateman) a toy doll that hides the soul of a serial killer. In the original film, Andy's mother gives him a talking Buddy doll, however, in the remake Buddy is an "Artificial Intelligence human companion" manufactured by the Kaslan Corp, the world's leading developer of interactive tech products for home and lifestyle. Neither Dourif - who voiced the character in all four of the series' theatrically released sequels - nor creator Don Mancini will be directly involved in the new reboot which will be helmed by Lars Klevberg and penned by Tyler Burton Smith. 'Child's Play' is set to be released in the US on June 21.



McCarthy and Spencer to star in Thunder Force

Melissa McCarthy and Octavia Spencer are in talks for 'Thunder Force'. The stars are reportedly in negotiations with comics creator Mark Millar for Netflix's new superhero comedy helmed by McCarthy's husband Ben Falcone, who also wrote the script. Although plot details are being kept under wraps, according to Deadline the film will see Melissa, 48, and Octavia, 46, receiving special powers and using them in hilarious ways and the picture will be produced by Marc Platt, Falcone and McCarthy. 'Bridesmaids' star McCarthy is coming off a Best Actress Oscar nomination for her performance in 'Can You Ever Forgive Me?' whilst Spencer recently acted as executive producer on 'Green Book' which won Best Picture at this year's Academy Awards. McCarthy, 48, will soon be seen in the upcoming sci-fi comedy 'Super Intelligence' which she will also co-produce alongside her husband who will helm the project. The 'Spy' actress has been cast in the role of Carol Peters, who is a former corporate executive who finds her life changes dramatically when she's selected for observation - alongside James Corden who will voice the world's first super AI intelligence who makes



contact with her through the gadgets she uses in her life. Meanwhile, Spencer, 46, is set to reunite with 'The Help' co-star Bryce Dallas Howard, 37, in a new female ensemble comedy by 'Ice Age: The Meltdown' screenwriter Jim Hecht and 'Mad Men' writer Tracy McMillan entitled 'Fairy Tale Ending'.

Sophie Turner's X-Men: Dark Phoenix role acted as mental health lesson

Sophie Turner learnt a lot about how mental health can affect loved ones filming 'X-Men: Dark Phoenix'. The 23-year-old star previously revealed she experienced what it was like to hear voices in her head for research for the part of psychic Jean Grey, who gets possessed in the next installment of the blockbuster superhero franchise. And Sophie - who has been open about her own battle with depression and anxiety - says she also came away with more knowledge on how having a family member or close friend with mental illness can impact the lives of the people around them. She told the May issue of Harper's Bazaar UK: "The biggest thing I took away from this movie is what mental health problems can do to family and friends because it is 'too painful' to see. "I have had a lot of people close to me who have struggled with their mental health, including myself, so it's something I'm really passionate about." Sophie - who is engaged to Joe Jonas - also admitted she has been enjoying taking some time out to find what else she is "passionate" about other than being an actress and revealed she is an avid painter and dancer. She said: "I've been trying to figure out what I like to do for myself. "It's been 10 years of playing someone else, and doing what I'm told, and now I'm like 'Hmmm. Maybe I should find some hobbies.' I'm passionate about lots of things. I'll sit in my house in New York and paint. And I'm doing ballet again." Speaking about facing some of the symp-



ptoms of schizophrenia herself, she said last year: "As soon as Simon [Kinberg] kind of told me what the movie was about we just started straight away sharing ideas, sharing materials. "Simon gave me a big, big book on schizophrenia. "I actually found this thing online, on YouTube. And it was just kind of repeating, repeating, repeating, what it sounds like being a schizophrenic. "So I used to walk around town with all these voices in my head. Kind of feel it out. And see what it felt like." Sophie also delved into how sufferers of split personality disorder cope with waking up in the morning and having no recollection of what they did the night before. She said: "We also explored Multiple Personality Disorder as well. "And what that feels like to kind of wake up and not know what you did, what happened and that sheer panic and how that affects you."

McKenna Grace to star in the new Ghostbusters film

Mckenna Grace is to star in the new 'Ghostbusters' film. The 'Captain Marvel' actress will appear in the remake of the 1984 classic movie, which is being directed by Jason Reitman. Not much is known about the part Grace will play in the film. 'Ghostbusters 3' has been handed a premiere date of July 10, 2020 and will be developed by Reitman, whose father is Ivan Reitman, who directed the original two 'Ghostbusters' movies. Speaking about the project, he shared: "I've always thought of myself as the first 'Ghostbusters' fan, when I was a six-year-old visiting the set. I wanted to make a movie for all the other fans. This is the next chapter in the original franchise. It is not a reboot. What happened in the '80s happened in the '80s, and this is set in the present day ... This is very early, and I want the film to unwrap like a present. We have a lot of wonderful surprises and new characters for the audience to meet." Meanwhile, Dan Aykroyd previously teased that 'Ghostbusters 3' could still feature an appearance from Bill Murray. The 66-year-old actor appeared alongside Bill (Dr. Peter Venkman), Ernie Hudson (Winston Zeddemore) and the late Harold Ramis (Dr Egon Spengler) - who died in February 2014 - in the franchise, and hasn't ruled out a reunion with the three remaining Ghostbusters in the follow-up to 1989's 'Ghostbusters 2'. He said: "There is a possibility of a reunion with the three remaining Ghostbusters. "It's

being written right now ... I think Billy [Murray] will come. The story's so good - even if he plays a ghost ... I never begrudged him not being in the third movie, though I wrote a nice part for him in 'Hellbent', where the Ghostbusters go to hell. He's got very high standards and a high bulls**t detector." — Bang Showbiz



Lifestyle | Features

Catholic priests burn Harry Potter books in Poland

Catholic priests in Poland burned books they say are sacrilegious this weekend, including tomes from British author J.K. Rowling's Harry Potter series of fantasy novels. "We obey the Word," priests said in a Facebook post showing photographs of the public book burning and quoting Biblical passages from the book of Deuteronomy in the Old Testament. One passage exhorting believers to destroy the enemies of God includes the command to "burn their idols in the fire". The post, on a page run by the Catholic "SMS from Heaven" evangelical group, stirred controversy and has gone viral.

Photographs show three priests carrying a basket of books and other items, including an African-styled face mask through a church to an outside fire pit. Priests are seen saying prayers over the fire pit where other items, including a 'Hello Kitty' umbrella and a Hindu religious figurine, are also burning. Contacted by AFP on Monday, the Polish Episcopate and local bishop acknowledged the incident but declined to comment. The local parish did not answer calls. The book burning took place "after the 10:00 am mass on Sunday, at 11:00 am," an unnamed parishioner at the church in the northern Polish city of Gdansk told the TVN24 commercial news channel.

"And these offerings, which were brought (to the church) during the week, were taken in front

of the church and there was a bonfire." Parishioners were asked to bring items linked to "negative energy" and superstitious beliefs, including good luck charms, the parishioner added.

Child abuse scandal

"I'd like to believe this is a joke... Seriously? Are people burning fantasy literature in the 21st century in some kind of sick ritual?!" one Facebook user said in a comment underneath the post. "It's hard for me to believe that we're so backward!" the user added. Other Facebook users, however, backed the book burning. "Get rid of everything that does not please God and see how your life will change," one person posted. Launched in 1997, the Harry Potter series of books spins an epic tale of good and evil focused on the adventures of the eponymous bespectacled young wizard as he struggles against the dark wizard Lord Voldemort.

It has sometimes drawn criticism from religious and conservative circles for what they say is its focus on witchcraft. This latest incident comes as Poland's influential Roman Catholic church struggles to deal with the fallout of revelations about paedophilia among priests that are unprecedented in this overwhelmingly Catholic country. Last month, the Polish episcopate admitted for the first time that nearly 400 of its clergy had sexually abused children and minors over the last three decades. That reflected the findings published in February by a



charity focused on sex abuse in the church. A survey published in the liberal daily Gazeta Wyborcza Monday suggested that 64 percent of Poles want a secular state, with 29 percent opposed and seven

percent without an opinion. The poll was carried out March 5-11 by Kantor Millward Brown on a random representative sample of 1,500 adult Poles. — AFP

Photos circulating on social media show priests saying prayers over the fire pit.



Blood stained bandages on the ground outside The Marathon clothing store owned by Grammy-nominated rapper Nipsey Hussle where he was fatally shot along with 2 other wounded, in Los Angeles on Sunday.

Grammy-nominated US rapper Nipsey Hussle shot dead

Grammy-nominated rapper Nipsey Hussle was shot dead in the US city of Los Angeles Sunday, sparking an outpouring of grief from fellow celebrities as the city's mayor blamed "senseless gun violence." Local media reported Hussle, 33, was shot in front of his own clothing store Sunday afternoon at close range, by a man who fled in a getaway car. "Our hearts are with the loved ones of Nipsey Hussle and everyone touched by this awful tragedy," LA Mayor Eric Garcetti tweeted. A police spokesman told AFP the suspected shooter remained at large. Two other people were wounded. "L.A. is hurt deeply each time a young life is lost to senseless gun violence," Garcetti said. The Los Angeles Times reported the shooting was "likely planned and gang-related."

'Gone 2 soon'

The Grammy-nominated rapper found minor commercial success but was highly revered among his peers, and his shock death triggered an outpouring of tributes from hip hop royalty. "Gone 2 soon," rapper Snoop Dogg posted on Instagram. "I'm so sad right now I'll just reflect on the good times we had." Superstar Rihanna posted that "this doesn't make any sense! My spirit is shaken by this! Dear God may His spirit Rest In Peace and May You grant divine comfort to all his loved ones! I'm so sorry this happened to you @nipseyhussle." Outside his clothing store, a crowd gathered behind yellow police tape, and a grief-stricken woman clasped her hand over her mouth.

At least one cartridge case lay on the ground, near a black ball cap. Long part of the underground rap circuit, Hussle struggled to find fame but began selling his own mixtapes, which rap king Jay-Z once bought 100 of for \$100 each. Hours before his death Hussle—whose youth was intertwined with Los Angeles gang culture—tweeted: "Having strong enemies is a

blessing." Hussle's "Victory Lap" scored a Grammy nomination for Best Rap Album at this year's ceremony.

It was his first formal album, which dropped after six years of teasing but ultimately lost the honor to rap's woman of the moment Cardi B. Megastar Drake also posted his condolences, saying: "My whole energy is just at a low right now hearing this." "You were a real one to your people and the rest of us," Drake wrote. "Rest easy my g." Born Ermas Asegbedom, Hussle was seen by many in Los Angeles as a lynchpin of the community, redistributing his earnings into the violence-plagued neighborhoods he came from. The artist was involved in a project to reclaim the California city's southern districts for the black residents who made it sing.

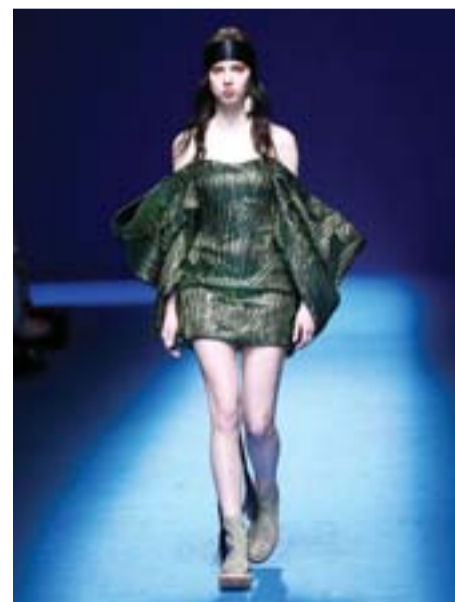
"Hussle had a vision of a neighborhood built for and by the sons and daughters of South L.A.," said city councilman Marqueece Harris-Dawson in a statement following news of the rapper's death. "During his life, he moved from shadows into the bright hope of freedom and community revitalization." Hussle was open about his early years in the notorious Crips gang, telling the Los Angeles Times newspaper in 2018: "We dealt with death, with murder." "It was like living in a war zone, where people die on these blocks and everybody is a little bit immune to it," he said. "I guess they call it post-traumatic stress, when you have people that have been at war for such a long time." — AFP



In this file photo Nipsey Hussle arrives at the 2019 Roc Nation THE BRUNCH in Los Angeles. — AFP photos



Models display creations from the "Beautyberry" collection by Wang Yutao during the China Fashion Week in Beijing. — AFP photos



UNKNOWN FOOTAGE OF JOHN LENNON, YOKO ONO RESURFACES AFTER 50 YEARS

Fifty years after John Lennon and Yoko Ono famously staged a honeymoon "bed-in" for peace in an Amsterdam hotel, a Dutchman has unearthed 30 minutes of color footage of the event from his cellar. The couple spent a week mostly under the sheets at the Hilton hotel to spread a pacifist message—smoking, eating, singing and playing guitar while receiving journalists for interviews.

The European leg of their honeymoon, which included an unusual press conference in Vienna with the glamour pair obscured inside a giant "bag", was a huge media event—each step captured by photographers and videographers. This included a Dutch team shooting footage for a two-part, 84-minute documentary, a kind of video diary filmed at the pair's request. It was broadcast only once, shortly after the honeymoon, and shown at the Edinburgh Film Festival the same year before disappearing into the archives of broadcaster KRO, where Jan Hovers was employed in the 1980s.

During a major cleanup of used film reels, he stumbled

upon a tin marked: "Mr & Mrs Lennon's Honeymoon" among others earmarked for the rubbish heap. "I asked if I could keep it and they said: 'No problem, it will all be destroyed anyway'." Hovers told the Nieuwsuur current affairs program broadcast Sunday. He said he watched the footage with great pleasure, but then "forgot about it".

"I never thought it could be unique material. I thought it was a copy. There was no internet of course, so one could not check." As Amsterdam marks the 50th anniversary of the unusual honeymoon, a former colleague remembered that Hovers had once mentioned the find to him. The colleague "knocked on the door and said: 'Didn't you have a film of John and Yoko from the time?' Only then did I fetch it from the cellar," Hovers said.

'Very special'

Lennon, co-founder, singer, and songwriter for the Beatles, married Ono in Gibraltar in 1969. He was shot dead

in New York in 1980. Lennon and Beatles biographer Mark Lewinsohn told Nieuwsuur he had no idea the footage existed until now and described it as "very special". "It's a great addition to the archive... It's another half-an-hour of film of John Lennon and Yoko Ono that will tell us things that will make us more informed and better appreciate what they did."

The footage, parts of it broadcast by Nieuwsuur, shows the couple in long, white pyjamas in their bed on different days, with two large posters reading "Hair Peace" and "Bed Peace" sellotaped to the hotel window behind them. In one part, Lennon is sitting in bed playing guitar as Ono looks on, in one they are eating, and in another we see the pair from the back, sitting up the bed as they switch off the light to go to sleep. After their Amsterdam sojourn, the couple flew to Vienna for a press conference where they spoke to reporters from within a large bag. — AFP



Fifty years after John Lennon and Yoko Ono famously staged a honeymoon "bed-in" for peace in an Amsterdam hotel, a Dutchman has unearthed 30 minutes of color footage of the event from his cellar. — EPA

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Tuesday, April 2, 2019

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Expected Weather for the Next 24 Hours

BY DAY: Cloudy to partly cloudy and with moderate to fresh southerly wind changing to north westerly wind later on, with speed of 20 - 60 km/h causing rising dust with a chance for scattered rain.

BY NIGHT: Dust will subside gradually and Partly cloudy with light to moderate north westerly wind to variable wind, with speed of 06 - 26 km/h.

WEATHER WARNING			Fresh wind	
STATION	MAX. EXP.	MIN. REC.	SFC. CHART 01/04/2019 0000 UTC	
KUWAIT CITY	27 °C	23 °C		
KUWAIT AIRPORT	27 °C	22 °C		
ABDALY	28 °C	21 °C		
BUBYAN	*** °C	*** °C		
JAHRA	28 °C	22 °C		
FAILAKA ISLAND	25 °C	22 °C		
SALMIYAH	23 °C	22 °C		
AHMADI	23 °C	22 °C		
NUWAISIB	27 °C	20 °C		
WAFRA	28 °C	21 °C		
SALMY	29 °C	20 °C		

4 DAYS FORECAST						
DAY	DATE	WEATHER	Temperatures		Wind Direction	Wind Speed
			MAX.	MIN.		
Tuesday	04/02	Warm	26 °C	18 °C	VRB	06 - 20 km/h
Wednesday	04/03	Warm and some scattered clouds will appear	29 °C	19 °C	NE-SE	12 - 35 km/h
Thursday	04/04	Relatively hot and Partly cloudy	31 °C	18 °C	VRB-SE	08 - 28 km/h
Friday	04/05	Relatively hot and Cloudy to partly cloudy with a chance for rain that might be thunders at times	32 °C	21 °C	SE	15 - 40 km/h

PRAYER TIMES	
Fajr	04:18
Sunrise	05:38
Zuhr	11:52
Asr	15:23
Sunset	18:06
Isha	19:24

RECORDED YESTERDAY AT KUWAIT AIRPORT	
MAX. Temp.	28 °C
MIN. Temp.	21 °C
MAX. RH	85 %
MIN. RH	38 %
MAX. Wind	SE 68 km/h
TOTAL RAINFALL IN 24 HR.	.83 mm

CHANGE OF NAME

I, Priyanka Elizabeth Babu (given name) holder of Indian Passport L4904943 do hereby change my name to Priyanka Elizabeth (given name) Babu (surname) for all purposes. I also undertake to effect the change in all my other public documents. (C 5507)

I, Noble John holder of Indian Passport No: J5545465 issued at Kuwait on 19/05/2011. Hereby declare that, my given name is John. (C 5509)

I, Asha Abraham holder of Indian Passport No: J6456943, issued at Kuwait on 27/07/2011. Hereby declare that, my given name is Asha and surname is Abraham. (C 5509)

I, Anabel Noble John holder

of Indian Passport No: S9733164, issued at Kuwait on 11/09/2018. Hereby declare that, my given name is Anabel Noble and surname is John. (C 5509) 31-3-2019

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Arrival Flights on Tuesday 2/4/2019				Departure Flights on Tuesday 2/4/2019			
Airlines	Flt	Route	Time	Airlines	Flt	Route	Time
JZR	254	Amman	00:05	JZR	1075	Doha	13:00
JAI	572	Mumbai	00:15	KAC	545	Cairo	13:30
THY	766	ISL	00:30	JZR	113	Doha	13:30
JZR	734	Cairo	00:50	SAW	702	Damascus	13:30
THY	772	Istanbul	00:50	JZR	123	Dubai	13:40
JZR	722	Alexandria	00:55	MSR	611	Cairo	14:10
PGT	858	Istanbul	01:00	UAE	872	Dubai	14:15
KAC	102	London	01:20	AXB	394	Kozhikode	14:15
DLH	625	Dammam	01:25	QTR	1079	Doha	15:00
RJA	642	Amman	01:35	FDB	060	Dubai	15:10
UAE	853	Dubai	01:45	GFA	222	Bahrain	15:25
THY	764	Istanbul	01:50	KAC	673	Dubai	15:40
IGO	1757	Kochi	01:55	SVA	501	Jeddah	15:45
ETH	620	Addis Ababa	02:15	KAC	775	Riyadh	15:50
KLM	446	Bahrain	02:30	KAC	743	Dammam	15:55
GFA	211	Bahrain	02:30	KNE	530	Jeddah	16:00
QTR	1086	Doha	02:40	KAC	615	Bahrain	16:05
OMA	643	Muscat	02:55	KAC	563	Amman	16:10
MSR	612	Cairo	03:05	KAC	619	Doha	16:10
RBG	211	Luxor	03:05	ETD	304	Abu Dhabi	16:20
KKK	1268	Istanbul	03:05	FEF	342	Sohag	16:25
ETD	305	Abu Dhabi	03:05	OMA	646	Muscat	16:35
MSR	606	Luxor	03:10	KAC	785	Jeddah	16:40
QTR	1076	Doha	04:00	ABY	128	Sharjah	16:45
LMU	5510	Cairo	04:00	JZR	105	Bahrain	16:55
KAC	414	Bangkok	04:00	SYR	342	Damascus	17:00
IGO	1751	Chennai	04:10	FDB	052	Dubai	17:40
KAC	418	Manila	04:25	UAE	858	Dubai	17:45
KAC	784	Jeddah	04:30	KAC	283	Dhaka	17:45
JZR	716	Sohag	04:40	QTR	1073	Doha	17:50
UAE	873	Dubai	04:55	KAC	343	Chennai	18:00
FDB	069	Dubai	05:00	KAC	331	Trivandrum	18:00
KAC	382	Delhi	05:05	JZR	733	Cairo	18:10
THY	770	Istanbul	05:10	SVA	511	Riyadh	18:15
JZR	404	Hyderabad	05:10	JZR	253	Amman	18:15
KAC	1544	Cairo	05:10	GFA	216	Bahrain	18:20
DHX	170	Bahrain	05:20	JZR	127	Dubai	18:35
JZR	112	Doha	05:25	JZR	501	Lahore	18:40
KAC	346	Ahmedabad	05:30	JZR	403	Hyderabad	18:40
KAC	332	Trivandrum	05:40	KAC	381	Delhi	18:55
JZR	402	Mumbai	06:05	FDB	064	Dubai	19:20
KAC	362	Colombo	06:10	JZR	721	Alexandria	19:20
KAC	284	Dhaka	06:10	UAE	876	Dubai	19:30
KAC	302	Mumbai	06:25	QTR	1081	Doha	19:55
THY	6376	Istanbul	06:30	RJA	641	Amman	20:00
KAC	678	Dubai	06:55	RBG	556	Alexandria	20:05
BAW	157	London	07:05	ABY	124	Sharjah	20:05
KAC	204	Lahore	07:10	GFA	218	Bahrain	20:15
KAC	708	Luxor	07:15	NIA	0162	Cairo	20:30
JZR	358	Kochi	07:35	FDB	058	Dubai	20:35
KAC	354	Bengaluru	07:35	KAC	301	Mumbai	20:35
FEF	241	Alexandria	07:40	KAC	353	Bengaluru	20:55
FDB	053	Dubai	07:50	JZR	401	Mumbai	20:55
KAC	384	Delhi	08:00	KAC	357	Kochi	21:00
KAC	304	Mumbai	08:20	OMA	648	Muscat	21:20
UAE	855	Dubai	08:35	DLH	624	Dammam	21:30
ETD	301	Abu Dhabi	09:05	DHX	171	Bahrain	21:50
ABY	125	Sharjah	09:05	QTR	1089	Doha	22:00
QTR	1070	Doha	09:30	ETD	308	Abu Dhabi	22:10
IGO	1753	Ahmedabad	09:40	KAC	1543	Cairo	22:15
IRA	675	Lar	09:40	KAC	205	Islamabad	22:15
FDB	055	Dubai	09:40	MEA	403	Beirut	22:20
JZR	410	Delhi	10:00	ALK	230	Colombo	22:25
SVA	512	Riyadh	10:00	GFA	220	Bahrain	22:30
KAC	624	Doha	10:40	KAC	303	Mumbai	22:30
GFA	213	Bahrain	10:40	KAC	383	Delhi	22:30
JZR	122	Dubai	11:10	ICV	675	Hong Kong	22:45
JZR	116	Doha	11:10	KLM	445	Bahrain	22:50
QTR	1074	Doha	11:35	KAC	783	Jeddah	22:55
MEA	404	Beirut	11:55	UAE	860	Dubai	23:00
KAC	614	Bahrain	12:25	KAC	411	Bangkok	23:00
SAW	701	Damascus	12:30	ETD	310	Abu Dhabi	23:05
JZR	714	Sohag	12:35	RBG	214	Sohag	23:10
UAE	871	Dubai	12:50	KAC	795	Madinah	23:15
JZR	142	Al Najaf	12:50	QTR	1083	Doha	23:25
KAC	742	Dammam	12:50				

Scientists find likely source of methane gas on Mars

PARIS: The mystery of methane on Mars may finally be solved as scientists yesterday confirmed the presence of the life-indicating gas on the Red Planet as well as where it might have come from. In the 15 years since a European probe reported traces of the gas in the Martian atmosphere, debate has raged over the accuracy of the readings showing methane, which on Earth is produced by simple life forms. Because methane gas dissipates relatively quickly - within around 12 years on Earth - and due to the difficulty of observing Mars' atmosphere, many scientists questioned previous studies that relied on a single data set.

Now an international team of experts have compared observations from two separate spacecraft, taken just one day apart in 2013, to find independent proof of methane on our neighboring planet. Furthermore, they conducted two parallel experiments to determine the most likely source of methane on Mars to be an ice sheet east of Gale Crater - itself long assumed to be a dried up lake. "This is very exciting and largely unexpected," Marco Giuranna, from Rome's National Astrophysics Institute, told AFP. "Two completely independent lines of investigation pointed to the same general area of the most likely source for the methane."

Europe's Mars Express probe measured 15.5 parts per billion in the atmosphere above the Gale Crater on June 16, 2013. The presence of methane in the vicinity was confirmed by readings taken 24 hours earlier by NASA's Curiosity rover. Using the data, Giuranna and the

team divided the region around the crater into grids of 250 by 250 sq km. One study then ran a million computer-modelled emissions scenarios for each section while another team studied images of the planet surface for features associated on Earth with the release of methane.

The most likely source was a sheet of frozen methane beneath a rock formation, which the team believes periodically ejects the gas into the atmosphere. Giuranna said that while methane is a sign of life on Earth, its presence on Mars doesn't necessarily constitute evidence of something similar on the Red Planet. "Methane is important because it could be an indicator of microbial life," he said. "But life is not required to explain these detections because methane can be produced by abiotic processes. Though not a direct biosignature of life, methane can add to the habitability of martian settings, as certain types of microbes can use methane as a source of carbon and energy," he added.

Though there is no liquid water on Mars, the European Space Agency said in February its imaging equipment had shown further evidence of dried up river beds, suggesting the Red Planet may once have been home to simple organisms. Giuranna said that further research was needed to determine the extent of the methane ice sheet near Gale Crater. If founded to be extensive, the methane it contains "could support a sustained human presence" on Mars as a possible source of fuel for industrial processes and a propellant for returning manned missions to Earth, he said. — AFP

Erdogan's AKP suffers upset in...

Continued from Page 1

"We have a long period ahead where we will carry out economic reforms without compromising on the rules of the free-market economy," he told reporters.

The loss in Istanbul, analysts said, would be especially sensitive for Erdogan, who grew up in the city's working-class Kasimpasa neighborhood, and liked to tell AKP rank-and-file that victory in the city was like winning all of Turkey. "Istanbul is his heart, it's really important for him, it is the first place they (AKP) started winning," said Ayse Ayata, political science professor at Middle East Technical University in Ankara. "They have retained their 51 percent majority in total, which is very important. Had they not, this would lead into a questioning of their legitimacy."

For his supporters, Erdogan remains the strong leader they believe Turkey needs and they tout the

country's economic development over the years he and the AKP have been in power. Rallying his base among more religiously conservative Turks, Erdogan had presented his opponents as enemies of the state, tarnishing them as tied to Kurdish militants of the Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK) who have fought a decades-long insurgency. Rights activists and Turkey's Western allies say that democracy has been eroded under Erdogan's leadership, particularly after a failed 2016 coup that led to tens of thousands of people being arrested.

The AKP built its ballot box success on Erdogan's perceived economic prowess, but before the vote, the Turkish lira was sliding again, provoking memories of a 2018 crisis that saw the currency fall 30 percent and badly hurt Turkish households. How he manages the economy will be key for the party's success before the next presidential and general election in 2023. Turkey has increasingly come under scrutiny as markets have grown wary of Erdogan's policies. Inflation is in double digits, and foreign currency debt payments are high.

The Turkish leader told supporters yesterday that economic reforms will be a focus. His finance minister has already said economic reforms will be announced next week. — Agencies

Aramco world's most profitable...

Continued from Page 1

"Saudi Aramco has many characteristics of a Aaa-rated corporate (top rating), with minimal debt relative to cash flows, large scale of production, market leadership and access in Saudi Arabia to one of the world's largest hydrocarbon reserves," said Rehan Akbar, vice president at Moody's.

The first-ever ratings for Aramco come as it prepares to sell bonds to finance the purchase announced last week of a majority stake in SABIC. "International bond issuance by Aramco would be a landmark event," M.R. Raghu, research head at the Kuwait Financial Centre, said. It would help test investor interest and appetite before the potential listing of the firm, Raghu told AFP. The SABIC deal follows long delays in a proposed sale of Aramco shares to raise up to \$100 billion to finance Prince Mohammed's Vision 2030 reform program.

The murder of Saudi journalist Jamal Khashoggi inside the kingdom's Istanbul consulate last year, coupled with a sweeping crackdown against dissent,

unnerved many investors. Fitch said that based on information received from Aramco, the planned sale of up to five percent of Aramco through an initial public offering (IPO) still stands and is likely to take place in 2021. Saudi Arabia already has around \$500 billion of assets managed by its central bank.

But even so, the SABIC deal will give the Public Investment Fund, one of the kingdom's sovereign wealth funds, much-needed cash to carry out Vision 2030. The PIF, which aims to control more than \$2 trillion by 2030, is leading efforts to transform the petrostate to a tech-focused economy. The fund has major global investments including a stake in ride-hailing app Uber. Moody's said that considering Aramco has a substantial cash flow generation capacity, it can fund the SABIC deal without the need to borrow.

"This acquisition will strengthen the company's business profile given that downstream assets typically provide countercyclical cash flow benefits," it said in reference to the volatility of oil prices. Moody's said Aramco's average daily crude oil production last year was 10.3 million barrels, around 1.7 million barrels below its maximum sustainable output capacity. Aramco estimates its proven oil reserves at 227 billion barrels and its total hydrocarbon reserves at 257 billion barrels of oil equivalent, which implies a reserve life of 52 years - a comfortable level by international standards, Fitch said. — AFP

Bouteflika to quit 'before mandate...

Continued from Page 1

resign "before April 28, 2019", after "important decisions" are taken, the presidency said in a statement, without specifying when these moves would occur.

He would take "steps to ensure state institutions continue to function during the transition period", the statement carried by the official APS news agency said. Algeria has been rocked by huge protests since the veteran president announced in February that he was seeking a fifth term in office. Bouteflika said last month he would pull out of the race and postponed April elections, in moves that angered demonstrators who saw it as a ploy to extend his two decades in power.

As the anger failed to subside, a number of high-profile loyalists have deserted the president. Last Tuesday, armed forces chief of staff General Ahmed Gaid Salah, who was appointed by Bouteflika in 2004, said the president should either resign or be declared medically unfit to govern by parliament using its constitutional powers. And on Wednesday, key coalition ally the National Rally for Democracy (RND) headed by recently sacked prime minister Ahmed Ouyahia called for Bouteflika's resignation "with the aim of smoothing the period of transition".

Under the constitution, once his resignation is tendered, the speaker of Algeria's upper house of parliament, Abdelkader Bensalah, would act as interim leader for up to 90 days during which a presidential election must be organized. As rumors swirl of frantic behind-the-scenes maneuvering, prosecutors yesterday said they had

banned corruption suspects from leaving Algeria after launching graft probes against unnamed individuals.

The authorities did not say who was being targeted by the new investigations into corruption and illegal money transfers abroad, but they followed the arrest of the president's key backer, businessman Ali Haddad. Haddad, who Forbes magazine describes as one of Algeria's wealthiest entrepreneurs, was detained overnight Saturday to Sunday at a border post with neighboring Tunisia, a security source said, without giving reasons for the arrest. On Sunday, the Algerian authorities also banned all private aircraft from taking off and landing until the end of the month.

The announcement of Bouteflika's impending resignation came after he named a new government made up mainly of technocrats under recently appointed premier Noureddine Bedoui. The administration unveiled Sunday - which was supposed to steward the country towards a transition - included Gaid Salah remaining in his position as deputy defense minister. The appointments failed to curb calls for Bouteflika to leave, as hundreds of people in Algiers demonstrated overnight against the announcement.

Algerian media outlets were awash with speculation that the announcement of the new government would pave the way for Bouteflika's resignation. The news website TSA described the administration as a "result of compromise between the army command and the presidency". The El Moudjahid daily, traditionally viewed as close to power, ran a headline reading "The Beginning of the End?" and said the army's proposal for Bouteflika to go "is the only one that offers a clear and convincing way out". The idea of Bouteflika's inner circle retaining their grip on power through a substitute leader has drawn short shrift from protesters dealing with high unemployment and economic hardships. Young people have made up a key part of the demonstrations in a country where half the population is under 30. —AFP

Facebook reveals how it ranks items in the news feed

LONDON: Facebook is lifting the lid on the algorithm that decides which posts appear in its news feed, as part of a drive to be more transparent and offer greater control to users. The feature "Why Am I seeing this post?", being rolled out from yesterday offers some insight into the tens of thousands of inputs used by the social network to rank stories, photos and video in the news feed, the foundation of the platform.

"The basic thing that this tool does is let people see why they are seeing a particular post in their news feed, and it helps them access the actions they might want to take if they want to change that," Facebook's Head of News Feed John Hegeman told reporters yesterday. After a series of privacy scandals, Facebook needs to regain users' trust as it prepares to roll out a single messaging service combining Facebook messenger, WhatsApp and Instagram that could make it even more central to users' communications.

The new news feed feature will show users the data

that connect them to a particular type of post, Hegeman said, for example that they are friends with the poster and they've liked their posts more than others, they've frequently commented on that type of post before, or that the post is popular with users with the same interests. It will detail some of the interactions that lead the algorithm to reach its conclusion, he said, although it will not show all of the thousands of inputs that influence the decision. "We've tried to really focus on the signals that are most important and play the biggest role in what causes people to see a post or not," Hegeman said. "We don't think this is going to solve everything on the theme of transparency but we think this is an important step."

Facebook developed the new tool with research groups in New York, Denver, Paris and Berlin, he said, and as a result of feedback Facebook has made it easy for users to access tools to control what is in the news feed themselves. Facebook is also updating its "Why Am I Seeing this Ad?" feature launched a few years ago with additional details, Hegeman said, such as explaining how ads work that target customers using email lists. The company shifted its strategy for its centerpiece news feed in early 2018 when it decided to prioritize posts from family and friends and downgrade non-advertising content from publishers and brands. — Reuters

Indian rocket puts satellites...

Continued from Page 1

Sivan, who previously told media the "three-in-one" launch would help cut costs, said the agency aimed to complete 30 more missions this year, including India's second lunar exploration program known as the Chandrayaan-2. Among the satellites in Monday's launch are 20 earth-imaging satellites of Planet Labs Inc, a private satellite operator based in San Francisco.

Two of the satellites, one from Lithuania and another

from Switzerland, will be used for the "Internet of Things", or connecting physical devices to the Web, the agency added. Prime Minister Narendra Modi congratulated the agency on the launch and said his government was working on raising citizens' interest in science and their respect for scientists. ISRO wants companies such as state-owned Hindustan Aeronautics Ltd and Mumbai-based conglomerate Larsen & Toubro to build its rockets in future.

Last year India said it expected to spend less than 100 billion rupees on its first manned space mission to be launched by 2022, suggesting it is likely to be cheaper than similar projects by the United States and China. India's 2014 launch of an unmanned Mars mission cost \$74 million, just a fraction of the \$671 million spent by US space agency NASA on its MAVEN Mars mission. — Reuters

Reiwa: A new imperial era...

Continued from Page 1

Eight-year-old Manato Nagayama also managed to get his hands on a copy of the extra edition but admitted: "I cannot yet write those two kanji." His father told AFP it was a "historic" moment. "That's why I brought my son here so he could get a special edition. It's an experience that only comes along very rarely. He is only eight and is already seeing two eras." The 85-year-old Emperor Akihito will step down on April 30 in favor of Crown Prince Naruhito, who will take the throne the next day.

It may appear esoteric to outsiders, but the announcement of a new era name is a massive event in Japan, marked with calligraphy shows and public festivities. Although the Gregorian calendar is widely used in the world's third-largest economy, Japan is the only country still using Chinese-style imperial calendars for private and public documents as well as computer records. The new name therefore has a huge impact on daily life and people tend to recall major events in public and private life by when they fell in a certain era.

A highly secretive nine-member panel including a Nobel Prize winner whittled down various options for the new name in closed-door talks.

The era name must adhere to strict guidelines. It should consist of only two "kanji" or characters, be easy to read and write, and not employ common names or the first character of any of the last four eras: Heisei, Showa, Taisho and Meiji. Company names are excluded

as well as the most popular choices in private guessing competitions, amid widespread speculation online as to what the new name could be.

To prevent leaks, the panel were locked away in a special room in the prime minister's office, swept for bugs, and their phones confiscated. No official translation was immediately available but Ryan Shaldjian Morrison, a lecturer at Nagoya University of Foreign Studies and Japanese literature expert, told AFP: "To my mind, 'venerable harmony' is the most appropriate English translation."

Japan is marking the announcement of the new era in a wide variety of ways, some less serious than others. A sake company offered a vintage bottle from the first year of the Heisei era (1989) to anyone who correctly guessed the new name, while a grand hotel is marking the occasion with a three-kilo wagyu beef burger served between gold-dusted buns for an eye-watering \$900. Less politically correctly, a sea lion in Yokohama "wrote" out the new era name with a brush in its mouth for assembled journalists and visitors.

Japan has had nearly 250 eras or "gengo" since adopting the system in the 7th century, and in recent times, one era has run the entire length of a monarch's rule. But the announcement of a new era is a real headache for calendar publishers featuring both Western and imperial dates, while central and local governments must scramble to change dates on official documents. The tech sector is also bracing for the transition, amid fears there could be a computer glitch similar to the "Y2K" bug that sparked concerns ahead of the year 2000. To general bemusement, the name caused an unexpected rush of traffic to the website reiwa.com, home of the Real Estate Institute of Western Australia. — AFP



YOKOHAMA: Sea lion 'Leo' poses after writing the characters for the new era name "Reiwa" during a performance for assembled journalists and park visitors at Hakkeijima Sea Paradise yesterday. — AFP

Sports

Bryce Harper homers again as Phillies sweep Atlanta Braves

Machado delivers Padres series a win over Giants

PHILADELPHIA: Bryce Harper reached base four times and hit a solo home run in the seventh inning as the Philadelphia Phillies completed a three-game sweep of the visiting Atlanta Braves with a 5-1 win on Sunday night. The Phillies are 3-0 for the first time since 2011. Philadelphia starting pitcher Jake Arrieta (1-0) gave up one run on three hits in six innings. He struck out six, but he also walked six while throwing 104 pitches. Andrew McCutchen also hit a solo home run and scored twice for the Phillies. Rhys Hoskins walked three times and was hit by a pitch to reach base in all four plate appearances. He was plunked after Harper's home run, and Braves reliever Shane Bieber was ejected immediately afterward.

NATIONALS 6, METS 5

Trea Turner hit a solo homer on a full count with one out in the bottom of the ninth as host Washington beat New York, avoiding a three-game series sweep. It was the second homer of the game for Turner, who hit a three-run shot in the third inning. Victor Robles had two doubles and Adam Eaton had three hits for the Nationals. Free agent pitcher Patrick Corbin, signed after last season by the Nationals, gave up two runs on seven hits while pitching six innings in his first start of the season.

PADRES 3, GIANTS 1

Manny Machado drove in his first game-winning run as a Padre as host San Diego took advantage of a strategic misfire by San Francisco. After Eric Hosmer was walked intentionally to load the bases in the bottom of the seventh, Hunter Renfroe scored on Machado's bases-loaded, one-out fielder's choice to break a 1-1 tie and give the Padres their third win in their season-opening four-game series against the Giants at Petco Park. In his major league debut, Padres starter Chris Paddack dueled with San Francisco starter Jeff Samardzija, with both pitchers giving up a run in the fifth.

ORIOLES 7, YANKEES 5

Renato Nunez hit a three-run homer, Trey Mancini added a solo shot, Joey Rickard hit a two-run blast and John Means recorded his first career win as Baltimore waited out a lengthy rain delay and claimed another series win at Yankee Stadium. Nunez hit Baltimore's first homer of the season when he slugged a 2-2 fastball from J.A. Happ (0-1) into the lower rows of the left-field bleachers four batters in to give Baltimore a 3-0 lead. Mancini gave Baltimore a 4-0 lead in the third when he drove a 2-2 fastball on to the netting above Monument Park in center field.

RANGERS 11, CUBS 10

For the second game in a row, Joey Gallo had a hand in the game-winning run, this time coming home on a wild pitch in the bottom of the ninth inning to give Texas a win over visiting Chicago. Gallo blasted a three-run homer in the eighth inning of Saturday's win. Texas took the season-opening series after getting blasted 12-4 in the opener. Gallo started off Sunday's bottom of the ninth with an opposite-field double off the left-field wall. After advancing to third on a Shin-Soo Choo groundout, Gallo came home on Pedro Strop's wild pitch. The Cubs couldn't hold leads of 4-0

and 8-5 and instead start the season 1-2.

ATHLETICS 2, ANGELS 1

Oakland rode a fourth consecutive dominant pitching performance at home and a fourth home run by Khris Davis to a victory over visiting Los Angeles. The win gave Oakland three of four over its California rival in the opening series on American soil after the A's had lost two straight to Seattle in Japan. Extending a streak of consecutive shutout innings by Oakland starters to 23 2/3 innings before surrendering a home run to Kole Calhoun in the sixth inning, right-hander Frankie Montas (1-0) carried a 2-1 lead into the seventh before giving way to the A's bullpen.

RAYS 3, ASTROS 1

Yonny Chirinos worked seven strong innings, and Tampa Bay claimed its four-game series against visiting Houston with a victory at Tropicana Field. Chirinos, making just his eighth career start after appearing in 18 games as a rookie in 2018, dominated the Astros while surrendering two hits and recording six strikeouts. Chirinos did not walk a batter. Chirinos (1-0) retired the first eight batters he faced before surrendering a game-tying solo home run to Astros center fielder Jake Marisnick with two outs in the third inning. He threw 88 pitches, 60 for strikes, to follow strong starts from fellow Rays right-handers Charlie Morton and Tyler Glasnow.

PIRATES 5, REDS 0

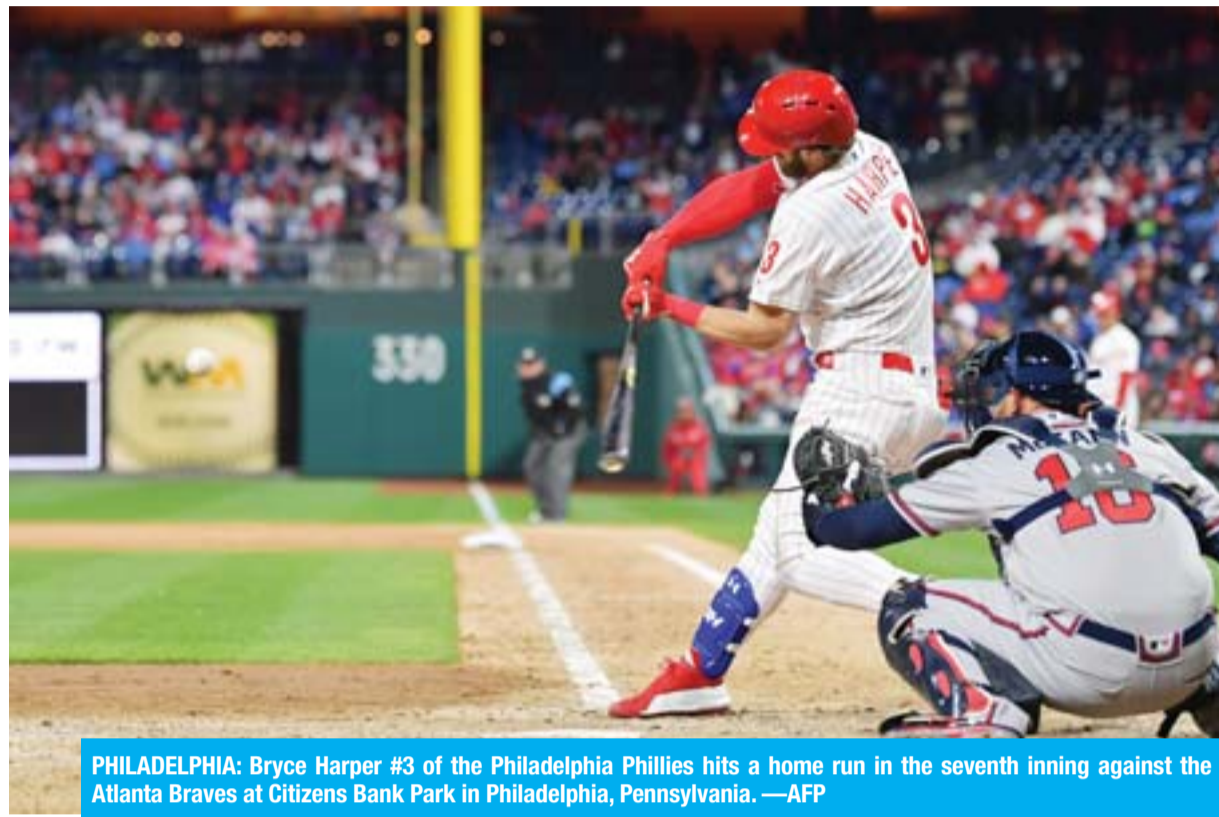
Right-hander Trevor Williams pitched six shutout innings, allowing only three hits, and drove in two runs as Pittsburgh knocked off host Cincinnati for its first win, earning a split of their rain-abbreviated season-opening series. Williams (1-0) allowed only one walk while striking out six in beating the Reds for the third straight time going back to 2018. He needed only 80 pitches, throwing 59 for strikes, to blank the Reds. Williams drove in his first run with a single down the first base line in the second inning off Cincinnati starter Sonny Gray (0-1), who struggled badly in his Reds debut. Gray went only 2 2/3 innings, allowing three runs (two earned) on five hits and four walks, with no strikeouts.

WHITE SOX 6, ROYALS 3

Lucas Giolito took a no-hit bid into the seventh inning and Jose Abreu and Yonder Alonso smacked back-to-back home runs in the fourth to propel visiting Chicago past Kansas City. The White Sox salvaged the finale of the season-opening, three-game series as Giolito continued his sterling, early-career stretch against the Royals. The right-hander entered the game with a 2.35 career ERA against Kansas City and a 3.24 ERA at spacious Kauffman Stadium. Giolito (1-0) maintained his success on Sunday, spacing two runs on three hits in 6 2/3 innings, walking one and striking out eight.

MARINERS 10, RED SOX 8

Omar Narvaez hit a three-run homer in a seven-run third inning and Seattle held on to defeat visiting Boston. Jay Bruce added a solo shot for the Mariners, who hit 11 home runs in taking three of four games from the defending World Series champions. Left fielder J.D. Martinez hit a home run and drove in four runs for the



PHILADELPHIA: Bryce Harper #3 of the Philadelphia Phillies hits a home run in the seventh inning against the Atlanta Braves at Citizens Bank Park in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania. —AFP

Red Sox, but had a costly fielding error in the third that led to five unearned runs.

TWINS 9, INDIANS 3

Nelson Cruz had three hits including a two-run homer and Williams Astudillo had two doubles and two RBIs to highlight Minnesota's 15-hit attack in a win over visiting Cleveland. Byron Buxton, Jonathan Schoop, Jorge Polanco and C.J. Cron each added two hits for the Twins, who took two out of three games in the season-opening series against the three-time defending American League Central champion Indians. Martin Perez (1-0) picked up the win in relief of Michael Pineda, allowing three runs on five hits over 3 2/3 innings. He walked three and struck out six.

TIGERS 4, BLUE JAYS 3 (11)

Jeimer Candelario had five hits, including a two-run single, Nicholas Castellanos singled home the go-ahead run in the 11th inning and visiting Detroit defeated Toronto to gain a split in the four-game series.

Grayson Greiner singled with one out in the top of the 11th against Thomas Pannone (0-1). Candelario singled with two out to put runners at the corners and Castellanos delivered his RBI single. The Blue Jays had squandered a chance in the bottom of the 10th. Richard Urena, who had three hits, doubled against Daniel Stumpf (1-0), but was out at home as he tried to score when shortstop Jordy Mercer knocked down a grounder in the hole by pinch hitter Freddy Galvis.

MARLINS 3, ROCKIES 0

Sandy Alcantara pitched eight scoreless innings and lined his first major league hit as host Miami defeated Colorado. Hitters for both teams may have been hindered by the shadows that hung over home plate in the

early innings. Miami, which also got a two-run single by Jorge Alfaró and a solo homer from JT Riddle, split its season-opening series after losing the first two to Colorado. Alcantara (1-0), a 23-year-old native of the Dominican Republic, made just his seventh major league start. His eight innings on Sunday marked the longest outing of his brief career.

BREWERS 5, CARDINALS 4

Christian Yelich tied a major league record by home-riding for the fourth straight game to open the season, then smacked a two-run walk-off double in the ninth inning as Milwaukee defeated visiting St. Louis. Ben Gamel doubled leading off the ninth and Lorenzo Cain followed with an infield single before Yelich doubled to left-center field on a 2-0 pitch from Jordan Hicks (0-1). Yelich hit a solo home run off St. Louis starter Michael Wacha in the first inning to become the sixth player to go deep in his team's first four games, joining Willie Mays (San Francisco Giants, 1971), Mark McGwire (Cardinals, 1998), Nelson Cruz (Texas Rangers, 2011), Chris Davis (Baltimore Orioles, 2013) and Trevor Story (Colorado Rockies, 2016).

DODGERS 8, DIAMONDBACKS 7

A.J. Pollock proved to be a headache for his former team, delivering a game-tying double and scoring the go-ahead run in the eighth inning as Los Angeles rallied to knock off visiting Arizona. Pollock, who left the Diamondbacks in the offseason to sign a free agent deal with the Dodgers, had two hits in the series finale after delivering a four-hit game against Arizona on Friday. Cody Bellinger hit his third home run in two days and his fourth of the season for the Dodgers, as Los Angeles scored 42 runs during its opening four games, winning three of them. — Reuters

Ooredoo concludes RoadRush sponsorship

KUWAIT: Ooredoo Kuwait concluded the sponsorship of the ninth edition of the RoadRush Racing Competition for Women which took place at Kuwait Motor Town last Friday. This sponsorship stems from the alignment with the company's core values of caring, connecting, and challenging. It further underscores the company's commitment to empowering women and giving them the opportunity to live their passions. The RoadRush Racing Competition included a number of exciting and engaging activities such as RoadRush Market, RoadRush Kid's Wonderland, a Yemeni Band performance and also a magnificent live performance by Miami band, as well as many other fun activities. Al Babtain Turnkey Solutions also participated at the event with Ooredoo by giving away prizes to participants.

The RoadRush Racing Competition focused on professional and safe practise of motorsports, with the presence of international professionals that gave the Women drivers a chance to try out the circuit at Kuwait Motor Town. With the help of Ali Alghanim & Sons Automotive Co. the attendees had a unique chance to try out the McLaren 720S Hypercar and the BMW M Power sport line-up with the guidance of one of the designated professional drivers. Furthermore some of the other highlights include a drag racing show and a drift show that wowed the audience.

Kuwait Motor Town is a 2.6 million-meter square motor town and is the meeting place for the world's most important car races, such as the FIA and FI, and our sponsorship of RoadRush is a clear translation of our commitment to bridging the gap between the private sector and public sector, especially when it comes to such important events that cater



Mijbil Alayoub



to the Kuwaiti society.

Commenting on this sponsorship, Mijbil Alayoub, Senior Director of Corporate Communications at Ooredoo Kuwait said, "We are very proud to have sponsored such an event which is aimed at promoting motor

sports to women, which are dominated by men. This event allowed women to experience the thrills of racing and provide them with the chance to pursue their passion". Alayoub further added that Ooredoo will look forward to participating in similar events in the future.

As ever, expect the unexpected in Formula One

LONDON: Formula One has been criticised for being altogether too predictable in the past but not so far this season, even if Lewis Hamilton returned to the top of the podium in Bahrain on Sunday. With two surprise winners in two races, and those cast in allegedly supporting roles acting more like leading men, it has been a case of buckle up and expect the unexpected.

Ferrari the fastest and favourites? Champions Mercedes on the back foot? Sebastian Vettel v Hamilton in a battle of champions? Valtteri Bottas and Charles Leclerc playing second fiddles? Those pre-season predictions are not necessarily wrong, there are 19 races still to go, and the same three top teams as ever have been the ones on the podium.

But things have just not panned out according to the script so far. Bottas, the Finn who could not win a race last year and went away with 'Hamilton's wingman' ringing in his ears, is leading the championship after winning in Australia (plus fastest lap) for Mercedes and finishing second in Bahrain.

Leclerc, the 21-year-old Ferrari newcomer, is ahead of four-times champion team mate Vettel in the standings and has beaten him to both a pole and a podium place. There are already some, with decades of experience to back them up, who see the Monegasque as more of a threat to Hamilton's hopes of a sixth world championship than old rival Vettel.

"There'll be moments on rainy days or challenging days when Sebastian Vettel's experience might just pay off but honestly... it won't be long before Leclerc is the main man there," said Sky Sports commentator Martin Brundle.

Ferrari arrived in Australia as the fastest team in pre-season testing but Mercedes went away as one-two winners all the same. In Bahrain on Sunday, there was no question that Ferrari were fastest after dominating every practice session and all stages of qualifying. Mercedes walked away as one-two winners again. Pole position has yet to produce a win.

YOUNG CONTENDER

For Hamilton's 74th career win to come as a surprise says much in itself but even he was stunned to take the lead after a power unit problem in the closing laps denied Leclerc a well-deserved first victory.

The arrival of a confident young contender, who is seemingly free to race his team mate, only adds depth to a championship yet to establish a clear pecking order both between teams and drivers.

The same extends further down the paddock. Renault-powered McLaren are doing better than the French manufacturers' own works team, and have 19-year-old rookie Lando Norris riding high while more experienced Spanish team mate Carlos Sainz has yet to score.

Australian Daniel Ricciardo, a double race winner with Red Bull last year, is another with a blank to his name after two races while Renault team mate Nico Hulkenberg has banked six points.

Expect that situation to change in two weeks' time in Shanghai, when Ferrari are also sure to be strong and Formula One could easily see a third different winner in three races. Whether that man is Vettel or Leclerc remains to be seen. — Reuters

Sports

Flames clinch Pacific Division, Western Conference titles

Kuemper leads Coyotes past Wild, closer to playoff spot

SAN JOSE: Three goals 75 seconds apart in the first period vaulted the Calgary Flames to a 5-3 victory over the host San Jose Sharks Sunday night, earning them their Pacific Division title since the 2005-06 season and the top spot in the Western Conference for the first time in 29 years. Mike Smith needed to make just 12 saves for the Flames (49-23-7, 105 points), who will face the second wild-card winner—a spot currently occupied by the Colorado Avalanche but well within reach of the Arizona Coyotes—in the opening round of the Stanley Cup playoffs. San Jose (44-26-9, 97 points) will finish second in the Pacific and will meet the Vegas Golden Knights in the opening round. The Sharks, who beat Vegas in an emotional game Saturday night, have just one win in nine games (1-7-1). With the Flames trailing 1-0, Sean Monahan, Mark Jankowski and Dalton Prout completed the 75-second scoring spree. Mikael Backlund and Michael Frolik also scored for Calgary, and Timo Maier, Logan Couture and Kevin Labanc tallied for San Jose.

RANGERS 3, FLYERS 0

Alexandar Georgiev made 29 saves to record his second career shutout as New York averted a season sweep at the hands of host Philadelphia. Ryan Strome collected a goal and an assist, Pavel Buchnevich scored to reach the 20-goal plateau and defenseman Brady Skjei also tallied as the Rangers snapped a six-game skid versus Philadelphia. Georgiev extended his right pad to deny James van Riemsdyk on a breakaway late in the second period to preserve New York's 2-0 lead. Rookie Carter Hart finished with 22 saves for the Flyers, who have dropped seven of their last 10 games.

RED WINGS 6, BRUINS 3

Anthony Mantha recorded his first career hat trick and five-point game, and host Detroit scored four

times in the third period to defeat Boston. Mantha scored Detroit's first three goals and assisted on the final two as Red Wings won their fifth straight game. Taro Hirose scored his first NHL goal, Dylan Larkin had a goal and an assist, and Tyler Bertuzzi notched three assists for the Red Wings. Jimmy Howard made 31 saves to win his fourth straight decision, and Jaroslav Halak stopped 22 shots for Boston, which got goals from Jake DeBrusk, Brad Marchand, and David Backes.

COYOTES 4, WILD 0

Darcy Kuemper made 39 saves to record his second shutout in three starts, and Josh Archibald had two goals and an assist as Arizona downed Minnesota in Glendale, Ariz. Alex Galchenyuk scored his team-leading 18th goal and Vinnie Hinostroza added a second empty-net tally for the Coyotes (38-33-8, 84 points), who moved within one point of Colorado for the final wild-card spot in the Western Conference. Devan Dubnyk finished with 19 saves for Minnesota (36-34-9, 81 points), which has dropped eight of its last 11 contests (3-7-1) and sits four points behind the Avalanche with three games remaining.

BLUE JACKETS 4, SABRES 0

Sergei Bobrovsky stopped all 38 shots for his league-leading ninth shutout of the season as Columbus defeated host Buffalo. It was the 36th victory of the season for Bobrovsky, putting him one behind league leader Andrei Vasilevskiy of Tampa Bay. The Blue Jackets sit in the first wild-card spot in the Eastern Conference, one point ahead of Carolina and two points up on Montreal. Pierre Luc-Dubois, Oliver Bjorkstrand, Nick Foligno and Josh Anderson scored for the Blue Jackets, who have won five straight games. Linus Ullmark stopped 32 of 36 shots as the Sabres



PHILADELPHIA: James van Riemsdyk #25 of the Philadelphia Flyers skates behind the net against Marc Staal #18, Alexandar Georgiev #40 and Neal Pionk #44 of the New York Rangers in the second period at Wells Fargo Center in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania. — AFP

lost their seventh game in a row.

PENGUINS 3, HURRICANES 1

Pittsburgh's fourth line combined for five points as host Pittsburgh topped Metropolitan Division rival Carolina. Matt Cullen had a goal and an assist, Adam Johnson had two assists for his first two NHL points, and Garrett Wilson and Patric Hornqvist also scored

for Pittsburgh, which has won four of its past five games. Goaltender Matt Murray stopped 37 of 38 Hurricanes shots. The Penguins (43-25-11, 97 points) moved to within two points of the idle second-place New York Islanders in the division. A win would have tied Carolina (43-29-7, 93 points) with the Penguins in points with 95 and leapfrogged it into third place in the division based on tiebreakers. — Reuters

Sawhney takes charge as new world cricket chief

NEW DELHI: Indian-born media executive Manu Sawhney has taken over as chief executive of the International Cricket Council, the world body said yesterday as it started a new era aiming to boost the sport's television revenues and profile.

Sawhney, who has been managing director of broadcaster ESPN Star Sports and is a non-executive director of football giants Manchester United, succeeds former South African Test wicketkeeper Dave Richardson.

Sawhney has been preparing for the transition alongside Richardson at the ICC's Dubai headquarters

for the past six weeks as cricket becomes the latest in a series of sports to turn to a business executive to lead its operations. Star Sports has in recent years become one of the key international cricket broadcasters. Sawhney said in a statement that Richardson, who will remain in charge of the organisation of the World Cup in England, which starts May 30, has "steered the sport so capably over the last seven years".

"I am pleased to say he will continue to lead the delivery of the ICC men's Cricket World Cup 2019 and there is no better person to ensure the event is the greatest celebration of cricket ever," added Sawhney, who is also a former chief executive of the Singapore Sports Hub stadium development.

Richardson joined the ICC as general manager of cricket operations, and was promoted to chief executive in 2012 after South African Haroon Lorgat quit. "I have thoroughly enjoyed my time at the ICC and I am pleased with what we have achieved in recent times particularly in creating greater context for all formats



Manu Sawhney

of the game," said Richardson.

While the ICC does not give figures for television revenues, industry sources say the world body is expecting record revenues for 2019. — AFP

Finch sounds World Cup warning as Australia confidence rockets

DUBAI: Captain Aaron Finch warned Australia will embark on their World Cup defence next month with confidence riding high after completing an ODI sweep against Pakistan on Sunday hot on the heels of a series victory in India.

Written off after a torrid 15 months which saw Australia win just three of 18 one-day internationals, Finch led the 2015 World Cup winners from 2-0 down last month to beat Virat Kohli's formidable side 3-2, Australia's first series win in India since 2009. They then romped to a 5-0 rout of a depleted Pakistan who rested six top players for the series played in the United Arab Emirates, including regular captain Sarfraz Ahmed, ahead of the World Cup which begins on May 30.

"We'll go to the World Cup with a lot of confidence now, even after a lot of people wrote us off," said Finch who was declared man of the series for his 451 runs including two hundreds and two fifties.

"Potentially we had a real focus coming here and that was our last hit-out before the World Cup so we wanted to go into that tournament with a lot of momentum," he said after inflicting a fourth white-wash on Pakistan in a bilateral series.

Winners of 2015 World Cup at home, Australia had endured a miserable time in limited-overs cricket since last year's ball-tampering controversy in South Africa.

The scandal resulted in former captain and vice-captain Steve Smith and David Warner being banned for a year, suspensions that expired only last week, and Australia were then routed 5-0 in England and dropped home series 2-1 to both South Africa and India.

Finch admitted the potential return of Warner, who has been in top form in the Indian Premier League, and Smith would mean some difficult choices when the World Cup squad is named later this month. "There will be some unlucky guys," said Finch of squad that could also see the return of fast bowlers Mitchell Starc, Jos Hazlewood and Pat Cummins after injury.

"Everyone who has an opportunity has played some great cricket. At the end of the day there will be some tough calls, but it's exciting for Australia at the same time because six months back a lot of people were slamming us."

"A lot of people were writing us off, not in just the one-day cricket but in all forms of the game. It's been really positive last couple of months and we have been building nicely."

Pakistan's head coach Mickey Arthur, who has also coached South Africa and Australia, said the defending champions were in good shape.

"All the final jigsaw pieces are coming together nicely. Australia look a very, very good side. They will be a threat at the World Cup," said Arthur. Arthur defended leaving out key players Babar Azam, Fakhar Zaman, Hasan Ali, Shaheen Shah Afridi and Sarfraz, while Mohammad Hafeez was missing injured. "All we can do is prepare as best we can," he said. "We got on the road in September last year for the Asia Cup and then went to South Africa and then had the Pakistan Super League so we had to rest them." — AFP

India win top Test rankings for third year

NEW DELHI: Virat Kohli's India have topped the international Test rankings for the third year in a row—boosted by their first ever series triumph in Australia—earning a million dollar prize for the team. India finished eight points clear of New Zealand in the contest, taking in matches up to Sunday. Kohli, who led India to their maiden series win in Australia in 71 years of trying, said the achievement would inspire the team to try harder in the inaugural world Test championship which starts this year.

"Retaining the ICC Test Championship Mace once again is something we are all really proud of," he said. "We all know of the importance of Test cricket and of how only the best can prosper in the format," he said in a statement published by the International Cricket Council.

The five-Test Ashes series between England and Australia this summer will launch the first world championship. Nine teams will play in a Test league over two years with the top two teams to square off in a June 2021 final.

In the current world rankings, South Africa are third while England and Australia take fourth and fifth spots respectively. New Zealand received \$500,000 for their second-place finish while South Africa got \$200,000.

New ICC chief executive Manu Sawhney congratulated Kohli and his team for their success and said the new world championship will provide "an undisputed conclusion to some of the most renowned cricket rivalries in the international game."

The top nine Test nations out of 12 will compete in 71 matches and 27 series to decide who reaches the final.

ICC Test Team Rankings (as of April 1 2019)	
1. India	116 points
2. New Zealand	108
3. South Africa	105
4. Australia	104
5. England	104
6. Sri Lanka	93
7. Pakistan	88
8. West Indies	77
9. Bangladesh	69
10. Zimbabwe	13. — Agencies

S Lanka captain apologises

COLOMBO: Sri Lanka's Test captain Dimuth Karunaratne apologised yesterday for his "unbecoming behaviour" after being arrested for drink-driving in an accident that left a taxi driver injured.

Karunaratne, 30, was taken before a magistrate who suspended his driving licence and fixed a trial for May 2. The cricket star was also asked to take a medical test. Police told the court that while driving under the influence of liquor, Karunaratne went through a red light and hit a taxi whose driver was hospitalised for minor injuries after the pre-dawn crash on Sunday.

"My actions were utterly unbecoming of a Sri Lankan national cricketer and I do apologise to all of you for this incident," Karunaratne said in a statement. The incident came as Sri Lanka decides who will be captain for the national team at the World Cup starting in England on May 30. Karunaratne, who led Sri Lanka to a stunning Test series victory against South Africa last month, had been one of the favourites for the position. Sri Lanka's cricket board said in a statement it would investigate the incident "in order to take necessary action." —AFP



Dimuth Karunaratne

Hataoka nabs third LPGA title at Kia Classic

LOS ANGELES: Japan's Nasa Hataoka had six birdies in a five-under par 67 on Sunday to roll to a three-stroke victory in the LPGA Kia Classic in Carlsbad, California. Hataoka, 20, notched her third LPGA title with an 18-under par total of 270.

She was three shots clear of former world number one Park In-bee, current No. 1 Park Sung-hyun, Ko Jin-young, Danielle Kang and Azahara Munoz. Hataoka had posted a third-round 64 to enter Sunday trailing Park In-bee by a stroke in the final tune-up for the year's first major, the ANA Inspiration, next week.

"Big tournament coming up next week, so I'll celebrate a little bit but get my mind refreshed and start again next week," Hataoka said. Park In-bee, chasing a 20th LPGA tour title but her first in a year, carded a

one-under par 71.

Park Sung-hyun, who had a share of the second-round lead on Friday, also signed for a 61. Spain's Munoz carded a 68 while America's Kang and South Korean Ko-winner of the Founders Cup in Phoenix last week—both shot 65.

South Korean Kim Hyo-joo equaled the tournament record with a 62 to join the group sharing seventh on 274. Hataoka was five-under for the day when she found the water on the way to a bogey at the par-four 16th that cut her lead to two strokes.

She shook off the miscue with a tap-in birdie at 17 and capped her round with a par. "I forgot about the bogey very quickly," she said. "I knew that 17 was a chance I could make a birdie, and just very relieved and felt great that I was able to actually get a birdie."

Hataoka is the sixth different winner on the LPGA tour this season—the third straight year that the first six tournaments have had six different winners. Park In-bee, who played alongside her in the final pairing, said she showed no sign of nerves.

"Didn't really look like she was feeling the pressure, especially in the way she played the last hole," Park said. "Just very smart." — AFP

Sports

Karim Benzema saves Real Madrid blushes with late Huesca winner

Valencia scrap their way to crucial win over Sevilla

MADRID: Karim Benzema stopped Real Madrid's underwhelming La Liga season going from bad to worse on Sunday after firing a last-minute winner to hand the European champions a barely-deserved 3-2 winner over bottom club Huesca.

Humbled by Ajax in the Champions League and dumped out of the Copa Del Rey by deadly rivals Barca, third-placed Real showed little signs of improvement in Zinedine Zidane's second game in charge but Benzema, subject to rumours he may leave Madrid in the summer for Manchester United, struck with a fine curling finish to snatch the three points at a sparsely populated Santiago Bernabeu.

"We are happy with him and I am going to count on him, now there are nine games left and then we will see what happens. He is a Real Madrid player and I don't think this will change," Zidane said.

"You have to accept it. If the people want to come to the Bernabeu to see us so much the better, but I understand that since we are not going to win anything fewer people come." Real move to within two points of second-placed Atletico Madrid, who hammered Champions League hopefuls Alaves 4-0 on Saturday in a match that saw Diego Costa score for the first time since November.

However Real still lag 12 points behind leaders Barcelona, who are 10 clear of Atletico and heavy favourites to retain their La Liga after Lionel Messi fired them to their sixth league win on the bounce, 2-0 at home to local rivals Espanyol on Saturday, with a brace that took the Argentine to 31 league goals this season.

Zidane's son Luca was given his second ever start between the sticks for Real but got off to the worst possible start, picking the ball out of his own net within three minutes after Cucho Hernandez lashed home

Ezequiel Avila low cross.

Isco levelled the scores in the 25th minute when he tapped home a Brahim Diaz cross after Benzema's low shot was well saved, but it was the away side-playing their first ever La Liga game at the Madrid's Santiago Bernabeu stadium—who went closer going into the break ahead.

Zidane junior had to be alert to stop Damian Musto from glancing home a header nine minutes before the break, while Avila punched the ground in frustration in first half stoppage time after flashing a power shot over from the edge of the box.

HEARTBROKEN HUESCA

Real continued to disappoint in the second half but took the lead just after the hour mark thanks to Dani Ceballos, who bundled home the second after Gareth Bale's beautiful cross was headed back across goal by Benzema.

Bale then missed a glorious opportunity to put the game beyond Huesca when he somehow put Alvaro Odriozola's low cross over the bar from just yards out. Huesca pounced on that awful miss to draw level when Xabier Etxeita powered home Moi Gomez's cross from a short corner.

However Benzema was on hand to break Huesca hearts with his 14th league goal of the season, which gives Zidane two wins from his first two matches back in charge.

Earlier Valencia maintained their hopes of a place in next season's Champions League after Daniel Parejo's penalty on the stroke of half-time gave them a vital 1-0 victory at Sevilla. Parejo's spot-kick, which came after Ever Banega brought down Jose Gaya, extended Valencia's unbeaten run to nine matches and moves them up to sixth, level on 43 points with Sevilla and just



MADRID: Real Madrid's French forward Karim Benzema (C) challenges SD Huesca's Venezuelan midfielder Yangel Herrera (R) and SD Huesca's Argentinian defender Martin Mantovani (L) during the Spanish League football match between Real Madrid CF and SD Huesca at the Santiago Bernabeu stadium in Madrid. — AFP

three back from the final Champions League spot.

That place is occupied by Getafe, who fell 2-0 at home to mid-table Leganes on Saturday and have to play the league's top three and Sevilla in their final nine games. Despite a slightly simpler league fixture

list Marcelino's Valencia however have an all-Spanish Europa League quarter-final tie with Villarreal to contend with, as well as the Copa Del Rey final against Barcelona between now and the end of the season. — AFP

Solskjaer defends United tactics after Van Gaal jibe

WOLVERHAMPTON: Ole Gunnar Solskjaer takes Manchester United back to the scene of his worst result as manager when he visits Wolves today, but criticism from Louis van Gaal won't ruffle the Norwegian.

Van Gaal made some critical comments in an interview last week in which he claimed only United's results have improved, rather than the style of play, when Solskjaer's team are compared with the group he inherited from Jose Mourinho.

It was an observation that seemed to be borne out as United laboured to an uninspiring 2-1 win over Watford on Saturday, Solskjaer's 15th victory in 20 games in charge. But it was also a result that keeps United firmly in contention for a top-four finish, a

prospect that looked nearly impossible when Solskjaer took over as caretaker for the sacked Mourinho in December.

And, as he prepared to take United back to the scene of their FA Cup quarter-final defeat to Wolves, Solskjaer was happy to launch an impassioned defence of his team's style of football. "Louis is entitled to his opinion," he said. "Some games we've pressed really high, won the ball up there and dominated."

"He is probably talking more about the PSG game, which was a game that we had to defend really well in the circumstances and counter attack. "It's about where you win the ball. You want to defend to win the ball to go forward. You have to win the ball then attack."

"If you can attack quickly as we did today, then why not? As long as when you win the ball, your intention is to attack. "The foundation in any team is to play well without the ball. If you can do that, then you've got a great chance."

"I'm very happy and grateful that I have inherited a team that has had a great education. "Most of the players here have had Mourinho, van Gaal, Moyes and Fergie. They know both sides of the game. "Of course we will have to add one or two, but they know what I

will demand and expect from them."

Since Solskjaer took over the reigns at Old Trafford, no team—not even runaway leaders Manchester City or Liverpool—has amassed more league points than United, although a top-four finish is still far from certain. United could finish as high as third or as low as sixth, with London clubs Tottenham, Chelsea and Arsenal competing with them for what appear to be two Champions League places.

"Of course we want to come third," Solskjaer added. "We want to end the season on a high. We've been the best team since just before Christmas with the amount of points we have got."

"We have played most of the teams, but by the end of the league then we will have played everyone in my reign and that's maybe a truer reflection of where we stand."

While forward Alexis Sanchez remains unavailable through injury and lack of match fitness, Solskjaer at least has a near full strength squad from which to choose. Defenders Matteo Darmian and Antonio Valencia are the only injury concerns for Solskjaer, although the pair have been unavailable for most of the calendar year. — AFP



Matches on TV (Local Timings)

ENGLISH PREMIER LEAGUE

Wolverhampton FC v Man United	21:45
beIN SPORTS HD 2	
Watford v Fulham FC	21:45
beIN SPORTS	

SPANISH LEAGUE

Atletico de Madrid v Girona	20:30
beIN SPORTS HD 3	
RCD Espanyol v Getafe CF	21:30
beIN SPORTS HD 7	
Villarreal CF v FC Barcelona	22:30
beIN SPORTS HD 3	

ITALIAN CALCIO LEAGUE

AC Milan v Udinese Calcio	20:00
beIN SPORTS HD 4	
Cagliari Calcio v Juventus FC	22:00
beIN SPORTS HD 4	

Former England boss McClaren sacked by QPR

LONDON: Former England manager Steve McClaren has been sacked by second-tier English club Queens Park Rangers, their director of football Les Ferdinand announced yesterday. The 57-year-old leaves with QPR 17th in the Championship and just eight points above the relegation zone.

McClaren—whose post will be filled on an interim basis by his assistant John Eustace—took over last summer and oversaw 46 matches in all competitions, winning 16 and losing 21. "Steve has worked incredibly hard during his time with us," said Ferdinand in a statement.

"But as we start to make plans for next year we feel this change is necessary now, rather than wait until the end of the season, or risk having to make such a decision early in the new campaign." Lee Hoos, chief executive of the club, said it had been a tough decision, especially as McClaren had had to work under straitened financial conditions.

"Making a decision such as this is never easy, particularly when you are talking about someone as professional and dedicated as Steve," said Hoos. "It is well documented that we are in a period of transition as we work hard to make the club financially stable. With that comes challenges, not least the cutting of the wage bill while aiming to remain competitive."

"As we look to the future, and taking recent results into account, we feel now is the right time to re-evaluate where we are." McClaren—famously dubbed as the 'wally with the broly' when England were beaten by Croatia at Wembley to miss out on Euro 2008 — has struggled since guiding unfashionable Twente to the 2010 Dutch title.

Spells at German outfit Wolfsburg, another at Twente, plus two at Derby County, and brief stays with Nottingham Forest and Newcastle, have failed to yield the magic he had when assistant to Alex Ferguson at Manchester United. — AFP



TOULOUSE: Paris Saint-Germain's French forward Kylian Mbappe (C) shoots the ball in front of Toulouse's Japanese defender Gen Shoji during the French L1 football match between Toulouse FC (TFC) and Paris Saint-Germain (PSG) at the municipal stadium in Toulouse, southwestern France. — AFP

Unstoppable Mbappe kills off Toulouse resistance

PARIS: Kylian Mbappe fired Paris Saint-Germain to their eighth straight Ligue 1 win with a stunning goal that earned the champions a 1-0 victory at Toulouse on Sunday and kept them miles clear at the top of the league.

The 20-year-old World Cup winner crashed home his 27th league goal of the season, his seventh in as many league games, with 16 minutes left as he continues to shine in the absence of the injured duo Neymar and Edinson Cavani.

"We had to wait, be patient and in the end we won with Kylian's speed," said PSG skipper Marquinhos. "It brought a great deal of joy to our fans, I'm sure of that." PSG now have 80 points, 20 ahead of second placed Lille with a game in hand to boot.

Coach Thomas Tuchel said he was delighted that the runaway leaders have not been tempted to take their foot off the gas. "Many of our players were away in the international break and there was a bit of fatigue in some of

them," said the German.

"It could have been tempting to relax, especially with the lead we have in the league, but nobody does it and I like that." Mbappe's goal was the highlight of a dull game which was otherwise lit up by a cheeky PSG fan sneaking onto the pitch to snap a selfie with the striker.

The video assistant referee system ruled out Marquinhos' tap-in just before half-time after Mbappe was judged offside, and the runaway league leaders threatened little other than that.

However they maintain their huge gap on second-placed Lille, who earlier on Sunday scored three quickfire second-half goals to comeback from 2-0 and snatch a vital win that kept them firm favourites for direct qualification for the Champions League.

Nantes had been finding goals hard to come by but went 2-0 up in front of a packed and raucous Stade de la Beaujoire thanks to a penalty from Valentin Eysseric and a near post header from Kalifa Coulibaly that seemed destined to drag them up to mid-table.

But three strikes in seven minutes from Rafael Leao, Nicolas Pepe from the spot and Jonathan Bamba's fired Christophe Galtier's gutsy outfit to an impressive turnaround.

There was still time for Nantes to be cast a lifeline with a late penalty, but Eysseric however sent his spot-kick flying over the bar. Lille are four ahead of Lyon, who occupy the final Champions League spot but will have to qualify for the group stage via playoff if they finish third, and 12 ahead of Marseille in fourth.—AFP

AC Milan keep Champions League hopes alive against Udinese

MILAN: AC Milan host Udinese today in the first of a crucial Serie A double-header before taking on title-holders Juventus in Turin four days later in a week which could be crucial for their Champions League ambitions.

Gennaro Gattuso's side have slumped to consecutive defeats for the first time since December 2017 with losses to Inter Milan (3-2) and Sampdoria (1-0). Milan remain fourth two points behind Inter who also fell to a 1-0 home defeat against Lazio at the weekend, with Roma dropping out of the European places with a 4-1 defeat to Napoli.

The hunt for Champions League spot is tight with just six points separating AC Milan in fourth on 51 points and Torino (45) in ninth position. In between there are Lazio, Atalanta, Roma and Sampdoria in the running.

"I'm not seeing a team that is completely off its game," insisted Gattuso. "But one fact still remains: we're standing here talking about another defeat." Lazio have a chance to move into the Champions League places as they host strugglers SPAL.

Holders Juventus travel to 13th-placed Cagliari nurturing a 15-point lead on Napoli as they warm-up for their European quarter-final clash against Ajax next week. Cristiano Ronaldo remains absent as he recovers from a thigh injury but coach Massimiliano Allegri showed he has options at his disposal with teenager Moise Kean stepping up to score the winner against Empoli at the weekend.

"Four victories remain, but today we'll go to Cagliari against a team who will try to cause an upset," said Allegri. Carlo Ancelotti's second-placed outfit travel to Empoli after their confidence-boosting win over Roma at the Stadio Olimpico, before hosting Genoa next Sunday.

New Roma boss Claudio Ranieri's dream job has quickly turned to a nightmare. Ranieri, who memorably guided outsiders Leicester City to the 2016 English Premier League title, has returned to a club which he coach for 18 months from 2009 to 2011.

But he has managed just one win, against Empoli, since taking over from Eusebio Di Francesco with defeats to SPAL as well as Napoli. "We need to isolate ourselves and focus on Fiorentina," urged Ranieri.

"When you look at the team from the outside, you understand certain things. "When you're on the inside, you understand them better and try to put things right and help the lads. —AFP

25 Bryce Harper homers again as Phillies sweep Atlanta Braves

26 Sawhney takes charge as new world cricket chief

27 Karim Benzema saves Real Madrid blishes with late Huesca winner



Warriors rout Hornets, Nuggets toppled

McGee, Rondo help Lakers dominate Pelicans



OAKLAND: Shelvin Mack #6 of the Charlotte Hornets shoots the ball against the Golden State Warriors at ORACLE Arena in Oakland, California. — AFP

OAKLAND: The Golden State Warriors vented their frustration over a controversial loss in their previous game on the playoff-hopeful Charlotte Hornets on Sunday night, using a 71-point first half to pave the way to a 137-90 blowout in Oakland, Calif. Stephen Curry (25 points) and Klay Thompson (24) combined for 11 3-pointers, helping the Warriors win a game in which DeMarcus Cousins was ejected in the second quarter for a flagrant foul. The win, coupled with Denver's surprising home loss to Washington, pushed the Warriors (52-24) one game ahead of the Nuggets (51-25) atop the Western Conference on the eve of their showdown tonight at Golden State. The Warriors improved to 18-6 this season in the first game following a loss, which on this occasion was a 131-130 overtime affair Friday night at Minnesota that featured two questionable calls against Golden State in the final five seconds of the extra session.

WIZARDS 95, NUGGETS 90

Troy Brown Jr. scored 24 points, Thomas Bryant had 20 points and 14 rebounds, and Washington dealt Denver a home loss. The Nuggets had won eight of 10 and fell one game behind Golden State for the best record in the Western Conference. Jabari Parker also had 20 points for Washington, which had lost six of seven. Bradley Beal added 17. Denver's Nikola Jokic had 23 points and 14 rebounds before being ejected after receiving two quick

technical fouls for arguing a non-foul call with 3:46 remaining. Paul Millsap had 13 points and 16 rebounds.

LAKERS 130, PELICANS 102

JaVale McGee had 23 points and 16 rebounds as visiting Los Angeles routed New Orleans in a matchup of short-handed teams. Los Angeles was playing its first game since announcing Saturday that LeBron James would not play again this season because of a groin injury. Former Pelican Rajon Rondo added 24 points and 12 assists, Alex Caruso came off the bench to score 23 points, Kentavious Caldwell-Pope added 19 points and Reggie Bullock 18 as the Lakers outscored the Pelicans 69-40 in the second half. Former Laker Julius Randle scored 17 to lead New Orleans, which lost for the 10th time in 12 games. Christian Wood added 15 points and 11 rebounds, Jahliil Okafor scored 15, Solomon Hill had 14 and Cheick Diallo had his ninth double-double with 12 points and 10 rebounds. Anthony Davis (back spasms) was held out by New Orleans.

CLIPPERS 113, GRIZZLIES 96

Danilo Gallinari scored 27 points with 15 rebounds and Montrezl Harrell added 20 points as Los Angeles moved into a tie for fifth place in the Western Conference with a victory over visiting Memphis. Lou Williams scored 17 points and JaMychal Green added 15 as the

Clippers (47-31) drew even with the Utah Jazz, six games behind the first-place Golden State Warriors, but just two games behind the fourth-place Portland Trail Blazers. Delon Wright scored 20 points and Chandler Parsons added 17 as the Grizzlies lost for the fourth time in their last six games and for the sixth time in their last nine games. Memphis has already been eliminated from playoff consideration.

KINGS 113, SPURS 106

Buddy Hield scored 26 points to lead seven players in double figures as visiting Sacramento clipped San Antonio, completing a three-game sweep of the season series. The Spurs are already guaranteed a spot in the postseason for the 22nd straight season, tying an NBA record. The Kings trailed 106-105 after San Antonio's DeMar DeRozan hit a jumper with 2:53 to play. Sacramento responded with the final eight points of the game, capped by two free throws by Hield with 16.7 seconds left, to snap a two-game losing streak. Willie Cauley-Stein added 17 points for the Kings, with Bogdan Bogdanovic and Harrison Barnes scoring 15 each, De'Aaron Fox hitting for 12 points, and Nemanja Bjelica and Yogi Ferrell pumping in 10 points apiece. Kosta Koufos led the Kings with 11 rebounds.

MAVERICKS 106, THUNDER 103

Dwight Powell's dunk with 21 seconds left gave Dallas

the lead for good as it survived a wild win over host Oklahoma City. Powell took a dish from Jalen Brunson, who hit a go-ahead basket on the Mavericks' previous possession, and slammed the ball home for the fifth lead change in a frantic final two minutes. Dennis Schroder and Paul George each missed would-be go-ahead 3-pointers on the Thunder's next trip down the floor. Trey Burke scored 25 points for the Mavericks, who snapped a two-game losing streak and won for just the fifth time in their last 23 games. Brunson scored 18 points while Devin Harris had 15 points and Dwight Powell added 11 points.

HAWKS 136, BUCKS 135

Rookie Trae Young hit the game-winning jumper at the buzzer in overtime to give Atlanta a win over visiting Milwaukee. It was the first time Atlanta beat Milwaukee in three tries this season and broke a six-game losing streak to the Bucks. Milwaukee's Sterling Brown, who scored a season-high 27, had put the Bucks ahead with 1.1 seconds remaining with a driving basket. That negated the go-ahead bucket that Young had scored with 6.8 seconds remaining on the previous possess. Atlanta got 24 points from Justin Anderson and 23 points each from John Collins and Alex Len. Anderson and Collins each had 12 rebounds. Young had 12 points and 16 assists. The Bucks were playing without Giannis Antetokounmpo (sprained ankle) and Khris Middleton (sore groin). — Reuters

Federer sweeps past Isner for 101st title

MIAMI: Roger Federer lifted the 101st title of his remarkable career on Sunday in dominating style, beating ATP Miami Open defending champion John Isner 6-1, 6-4. Federer, who has skipped the whole clay court season for the past two years, declared the triumph over the big-serving American in just 63 minutes was an ideal performance from which to launch a French Open bid.

"I will have to take baby steps going back onto the clay. I have played so little in the last few years so I don't know what to expect but what this win does is takes even more pressure off me," Federer said.

"Already just how I've been playing and moving here makes me believe just going on vacation now, a bit of a break, and then preparation, you physically I should be fine, but again, we'll see how the body is going to react.

"I am excited. It's a good challenge," added Federer of trying to dethrone Rafael Nadal at Roland Garros when the second Grand Slam of the season begins on May 26. Federer has been in brilliant form in South Florida, recovering superbly from losing the final in Indian Wells earlier this month to emphatically beat Isner, who was badly struggling with a foot problem at the end of the title match at Hard Rock Stadium.

Federer will not appear at the next Masters event in Monte Carlo but is slated to play in Madrid at the beginning of May. "Madrid will be 'let's see what happens' and then obviously I want to be ready for Paris and I hope all that hard work is going to pay off for the grass and hard court season," he said.

Against Isner, Federer seized control immediately as a break in the very first game sapped Isner's confidence and allowed Federer to aggressively gain control of a match which he never looked like losing, especially after the American's foot problem worsened.

Isner was struggling badly and was heard telling the trainer during a medical timeout that he feared he had broken his foot. Somewhere during the first set I started feeling pain on top of my foot and it didn't go away

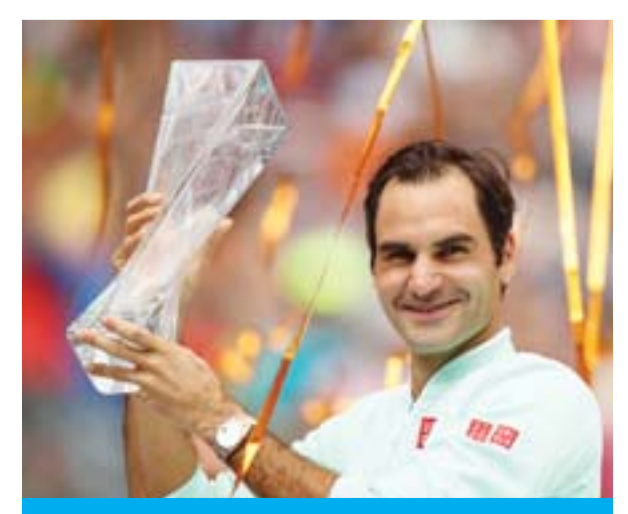
and it just got worse," Isner said.

Isner's spirit was crushed after he dropped the first set in only 23 minutes. "It's a terrible feeling, because you're on an island out there. You have no teammates to hide behind and going up against the greatest player ever, you know, playing in this incredible atmosphere, and my foot's killing me.

"I have never had a broken foot, but that's what I would imagine it would feel like. "Not that I would have won the match but I could have made for a more interesting match and one that was a little more fun."

This was Federer's 154th tour final and his 50th ATP Masters showpiece appearance. He's in the twilight of his stellar career but has no plans to hang up his racket just yet. "In terms of goals, it's about trying to win titles and trying to manage life so I stay injury-free," the former world number one said.

"Some days you just don't feel so well but this is a good phase, a good stretch for me right now. I really feel super healthy. That's why I have been able to play every day for the last four weeks. That's something that maybe hasn't always been the case for the last few years. "So you appreciate these moments." — AFP



MIAMI GARDENS: Roger Federer of Switzerland celebrates with the winner's trophy against John Isner of USA in the final during day fourteen of the Miami Open tennis in Miami Gardens, Florida. — AFP