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Oman calls on Arabs to ease Israel's 'fears for its future'

Netanyahu won't move 'even one' settler for US peace plan



KUWAIT: Lightning strikes the Liberation Tower in Kuwait City during a thunderstorm on Friday. — Photo by Yasser Al-Zayyat

SUWEIMEH, Jordan: A top Omani government official yesterday said Arabs must take initiatives to make Israel overcome "fears for its future" in the region, drawing criticism from Jordan. The remarks by Yusuf bin Alawi bin Abdullah, the minister responsible for foreign affairs in Oman, came on the sidelines of the World Economic Forum hosted by Jordan on the shores of the Dead Sea. "The West has offered Israel political, economic and military support and it now holds all the means of power... but despite that it fears for its future as a non-Arab country surrounded by 400 million Arabs," he said.

"I believe that we Arabs must be able to look into this issue and try to ease those fears that Israel has through initiatives and real deals between us and Israel," he told a panel discussing geopolitics. The panel's moderator, journalist Hadley Gamble, interrupted him to ask if the best solution to the decades-long Israeli-Palestinian conflict is "recognizing Israel and its right to exist". The minister said no. "Not recognizing, but we want them themselves to feel that there are no threats to their future."

Jordanian Foreign Minister Ayman Safadi, whose country is the only Arab nation along with Egypt to have a peace treaty with Israel, dismissed the remarks saying



Yusuf bin Alawi

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News in brief

Kuwait free of coronavirus

KUWAIT: The ministry of health stressed on Friday that all required precautions have been taken to tackle coronavirus, noting that the country is fully free of this epidemic. There is no case diagnosed with coronavirus, the ministry's assistant undersecretary for public health affairs Dr Majeda Al-Qattan told KUNA. She denied allegations on social media about coronavirus cases in the country. She added that what has been taken are mere "precautionary measures". — KUNA

Man threatens to kill Omar

NEW YORK: A 55-year-old New York man has been arrested and charged with threatening to assault and murder Democratic Representative Ilhan Omar, a Muslim US Congress member from Minnesota. Patrick Carlineo Jr of Addison, New York, faces up to 10 years in prison and a \$250,000 fine if convicted, the US Department of Justice said. Interviewed at his home by investigators, Carlineo "stated that he was a patriot, that he loves the President, and that he hates radical Muslims in our government." — Reuters

Iran orders new evacuations

TEHRAN: Iranian authorities ordered the evacuation of six cities along the Karkheh River in southwestern Khuzestan province yesterday after more rain sparked fears of new flooding, state news agency IRNA said. Six cities alongside Karkheh River in southwestern Iran "must be evacuated as soon as possible," Khuzestan governor Gholamreza Shariati told IRNA. The situation appears to be "critical", he said. — AFP

US to declare Guards terrorist group

WASHINGTON: The United States will designate Iran's Revolutionary Guards as a terrorist organization, an unprecedented move that would ramp up pressure on the elite force, The Wall Street Journal reported Friday. The newspaper said President Donald Trump's administration would announce the long-mulled decision as soon as tomorrow and that concerned defense officials were bracing for the impact. — AFP

Nine held in Saudi crackdown

DUBAI: Saudi Arabia has arrested at least nine writers and academics, including two US citizens, campaigners said Friday. Campaigners identified the US-Saudi dual nationals as writer and doctor Bader Al-Ibrahim and Salah Al-Haidar, the son of Aziza Al-Yousef - a high-profile activist. — AFP

Sudan protesters rally outside army HQ for first time

KHARTOUM: Thousands of Sudanese demonstrators marched in Khartoum yesterday, many reaching the army headquarters for the first time since deadly protests against President Omar Al-Bashir erupted in December, witnesses said. Chanting "one army, one people," the protesters rallied in the capital's streets following a call by organizers to march on the compound, which also houses Bashir's residence. The crowds chanted the movement's catch-cry "peace, justice, freedom" as they marched towards the complex where the defense

ministry is also based, onlookers said. "They were also calling on Bashir to step down," a witness said.

Taking a break from shouting anti-government slogans, protester Ghada Mohamed said the rally signalled a "bright future" for Sudan. Protester Amir Omer said the demonstrators had managed to send a message to the military. "We still haven't achieved our goal, but we have delivered our message to the army and that is: come join us," he told AFP. Protest organizers led by the Sudanese Professionals Association said earlier this week that demonstrators would march yesterday to demand the army either "take the side of the people or the dictator's".

Soon after reaching the compound, organizers called on the protesters to stand firm outside its fortified walls. "At this historic moment, we ask you to not leave the

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KHARTOUM: Sudanese protesters shout slogans in front of the military headquarters in the capital yesterday. — AFP

Defiant Haftar forces press Tripoli offensive

TRIPOLI: Forces loyal to Libyan commander Khalifa Haftar yesterday pressed on with an offensive on Tripoli, defying international calls to halt hostilities which risk plunging the country into civil war. Pro-Haftar fighters have been slowed in their advance by forces loyal to Libya's internationally-recognized Government of National Accord (GNA), which sits in the capital. For the first time, forces backing the GNA launched air strikes on Haftar's self-styled Libyan National Army (LNA) - which vowed to retaliate - around 50

km south of Tripoli.

Pro-government forces in Tripoli confirmed they had targeted Haftar's men with "intensive strikes". The air strikes came as fresh fighting flared yesterday south of Tripoli between the pro-government forces and Haftar's troops despite calls from the international community to halt the military offensive. Several European foreign ministers warned Haftar not to countenance any further military action, with France's Jean-Yves Le Drian warning "there will be no military victory".

German Foreign Minister Heiko Maas said there should be pressure on all the actors in Libya "especially general Haftar". A similar stance was taken by the UN Security Council which, following a closed-door emergency meeting Friday, said those responsible for reigniting the conflict will be held responsible.

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TRIPOLI: Forces loyal to Libya's UN-backed unity government arrive in Tajura, a coastal suburb of the Libyan capital, from their base in Misrata yesterday. — AFP

Mummified mice and more in Egypt tomb discovery

SOHAG, Egypt: Dozens of mummified mice were among the animals found in an ancient Egyptian tomb, unveiled Friday by the antiquities ministry with the aim of drawing tourists to the central Sohag province. The tomb dating back more than 2,000 years was unearthed in the city of Akhmim. The tomb was built for a man named Tutu and his wife, and is one of seven discovered in the area last October, when authorities found

smugglers digging illegally for artifacts, officials said. Its painted walls depict funeral processions and images of the owner working in the fields, as well as his family genealogy written in hieroglyphics.

"It's one of the most exciting discoveries ever in the area," said Mostafa Waziri, secretary-general of the Supreme Council of Antiquities which sits within the ministry. Two mummies, a woman aged between 35-50 and a boy aged 12-14, were on display outside the shallow burial chamber, in a desert area near the Nile about 390 km south of Cairo. Around 50 mummified animals, including mice, cats and falcons, were also recovered from the tomb, dating to the Ptolemaic era.

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AKHMIM, Egypt: An Egyptian antiquities security guard walks through the entrance of a newly-discovered tomb at the Diabat necropolis near this city in Egypt's southern Sohag province on Friday. — AFP

Local



MANAMA: National Assembly Speaker Marzouq Ali Al-Ghanem arrives in Bahrain to offer condolences over the demise of Sheikha Aisha bint Salman Al-Khalifa. — KUNA photos

Assembly Speaker arrives in Bahrain to offer condolences

MANAMA: Kuwait's National Assembly Speaker Marzouq Ali Al-Ghanem arrived in Bahrain yesterday to offer condolences over the demise of Sheikha Aisha bint Salman Al-Khalifa. Speaker Al-Ghanem visited the Prime Minister of Bahrain Prince Khalifa bin Salman Al-Khalifa, where he expressed his condolences over the demise of

the late Sheikha Aisha Bint Salman Al-Khalifa. Al-Ghanem and his accompanying delegation were received by First Deputy Speaker of Bahraini Shura Council Jamal Fakhro, Second Deputy Speaker of Bahraini National Assembly Ali Zayed and members of the Kuwaiti Embassy to Bahrain. — KUNA

IRCS hails Amir's initiative to provide urgent aid to Iran flood victims



IRBIL: Kuwait Consulate in Irbil distributes gifts to children with special needs.

TEHRAN: The Iranian Red Crescent Society (IRCS) praised the initiative of His Highness the Amir Sheikh Sabah Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah in providing urgent assistance to flood victims which recently hit a number of areas in Iran. Kuwait is the first Arab country to provide assistance to those affected by the floods, IRCS Director General for International Operations and Programs, Mehrdad Eshraghi, told KUNA yesterday.

Around 11 million people were affected by floods that swept through 23 Iranian provinces, where the IRCS have provided shelter for about 220,000 people, Eshraghi said. The most affected provinces are Lorestan and Khuzestan, he said, and about 266,000 people need an urgent help, especially as the weather is still bad amid continuous rain.

For his part, Deputy Chairman of Kuwait Red Crescent Society (KRCS) and head of the mission Anwar Al-Hasawi said in similar statement to KUNA during a meeting with IRCS team, that plans have been made to be implemented urgently to help the victims of the floods in the affected areas. Some of affected areas will be visited to assess their needs for supplies, medical equipment, foodstuffs and water pumps, Al-Hasawi added.

In related news, a planeload of relief supplies headed for the Yemeni island of Socotra yesterday to aid the population that have been suffering from harsh living conditions. Director General of Kuwait Red Crescent Society Abdulrahman Al-Aoun said in a statement to KUNA that the new consignment of assistance supplies was a follow-up to previous batches that had been dispatched to the island when it was ravaged by a severe cyclone almost a year ago. KRCS teams, during the visit to the island, will distribute fishing boats to fishermen; oversee the installment of solar energy panels for 250 houses while medics would examine patients, particularly a number of the islanders who have been suffering from various skin diseases.

Elsewhere, Kuwait Consulate General in Irbil, north Iraq, commemorating the World Autism Awareness Day (WAAD), handed out gifts to children with special needs. Speaking to KUNA in a statement on Friday, Consul General Omar Al-Kandari said, "We are keen to be with children who are suffering from autism to take part in the WAAD and make these children happy." He added that this initiative, which comes at the behest of His Highness the Amir of Kuwait Sheikh Sabah Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah in the framework of "Kuwait beside you" campaign, signals his care for this segment of the society. Kuwait's aid to Iraqi people would continue and vary to cover all segments of the Iraqi society, he noted.

Meanwhile, head of Irbil's autism center Kamal Al-Jabari thanked Kuwait and its humanitarian organization for being interested in children with special needs. There are 2,800 people suffering autism in Irbil, and they are in dire need of treatment and training, he noted. Their families need support, as their monthly income cannot afford the cost of treatment, he said, calling for more backing to these children and their families to alleviate their sufferings. — KUNA



TEHRAN: The delegations of the Iranian Red Crescent Society (IRCS) and Kuwait Red Crescent Society (KRCS) during the meeting. — KUNA photos



TEHRAN: Kuwaiti plane loaded with tons of relief supplies to help the Iranian people affected by the floods.

IPU Islamic, Arab groups reach understanding

DOHA: Arab and Islamic groups in the Inter-Parliamentary Union (IPU) have reached understanding for addressing crucial issues but unscheduled issues at the IPU conference, namely the Palestinian cause. Two members of the Kuwaiti parliament, Dr Odah Al-Ruwaiee and Mohammad Al-Dalal, disclosed yesterday that the Arab and Muslim legislators, during coordination talks, reached a "consensus for-

mula" regarding non-scheduled topics to be addressed at the IPU conference.

They have agreed on calling for protection of the Palestinian people, rejecting "Israeli sovereignty on the occupied Golan Heights" and promoting co-existence amongst nations of diverse civilization throughout the globe. The two Kuwaiti legislators were speaking after participating in the coordination meeting, held in preparation for the 140th IPU conference, due to kick off, in the Qatari capital. Dr Al-Ruwaiee has indicated that the Arab and Islamic groups agreed to address the IPU convention on combating all forms of hatred and fanaticism, against the backdrop of the recent bloody incidents in New Zealand, in addition to the plights of nations stricken with hurricanes and other catastrophes. — KUNA

Education, family key to empowering women: Hashem

DOHA: Member of the Kuwaiti Parliament Safaa Al-Hashem stressed on the importance of education and family as key points for empowering women and enhancing their role in society, especially in the Arab world. This came during her speech in the Forum of Women Parliamentarians, which was held in Doha yesterday as part of the 140th IPU Conference. Al-Hashem questioned the international parliamentary legislation and the seriousness of governments in supporting women and preparing them for the labor market, leadership positions and other challenges facing women. She noted her personal experience, as the only woman in the Kuwaiti Parliament, adding that is one of the problems that may impede the speed of legislation that advocates Kuwaiti women and their issues compared to parliaments that enjoy larger female representation. — KUNA



Safaa Al-Hashem

Next generation of Internet to move Kuwait into new era

KUWAIT: In the midst of the accelerating pace of technological innovations and developments in humanity service, new types of technological services have emerged which allow individuals and institutions easy access to the service or goods, most notably the concept of the Internet of things (IoT).

IoT means the new generation of the Internet, which allows the understanding of devices connected to each other over the Internet. These devices include various artificial intelligence tools, other instruments sensors, and remote sensing via satellite. IoT technology allows people to control devices without having to be in a specific place to deal with a particular device.

This definition transcends the traditional concept of connecting people with computers and smartphones across a single global network and through the traditional Internet. In Kuwait, the IoT Society was established in 2018, it is a public organization that seeks to strengthen the role of governmental and private institutions in the field of Internet objects and to form partnerships to support creators, programmers, application owners and investors in this field.

Kuwait IoT Society spokesperson, Hassan Al-Bahrani said yesterday that the association seeks to keep pace with the vision of the country (New Kuwait 2035) through the use of modern technology. It also aims to keep up with this intelligent approach and adapt it in the life of society to move from the traditional era to its digital counterpart, he added.

Al-Bahrani noted that the association is working on the preparation of studies to identify projects that could be addressed by IoT technology to take advantage of cost reduction by saving time and effort. He pointed out that one of the benefits offered by IoT to humans is to provide electricity cost, reduce the voltage and time required for operation, alarm and locks, especially that this technology has entered the industrial and service sectors of government agencies such as education, health and technical services institutions.

He stressed that the association is preparing a project on measuring the brain waves, monitoring the performance of the devices implanted in the human body, measuring the level of oxygen, monitoring the heartbeat and measuring the level of sugar and blood pressure using the IoT technology. The spokesperson pointed out the importance of IoT technology in smart homes, as the Internet connects all the devices of this house with a mechanism for monitoring and alarm, which contributes to saving the time and energy of the electrical devices by running programmed orders. IoT is a system of interrelated computing devices, mechanical and digital machines, objects, animals or people that are provided with unique identifiers and the ability to transfer data over a network without requiring human-to-human or human-to-computer interaction. — KUNA



Hassan Al-Bahrani

Local

World Economic Forum examines the challenges facing the Mideast

Hajraf confident on youth potentials for creativity and business leadership

DEAD SEA: The World Economic Forum on the Middle East and North Africa opened in the Jordanian capital yesterday, with heads of state and senior officials from across the region, including Kuwait, in attendance. The Kuwaiti delegation to the talks, which revolve around plans to build a more resilient economy in the Middle East and North African region, includes Finance Minister Dr Nayef Al-Hajraf and the governor of Kuwait's central bank Dr Mohammad Al-Hashel.

Jordan has paid a heavy price for "doing the right thing" in dealing with the influx of refugees, King Abdullah II told the forum, saying the Hashemite Kingdom continues to cooperate with its international partners over the matter. The Middle East and North Africa region represents one of the biggest consumer markets in the world, the Jordanian monarch emphasized, saying the talks will address some of the most pressing problems facing the region.

Issues such as a two-state solution to resolve the Israeli-Palestinian conflict and fighting climate change also feature atop the agenda, UN secretary general Antonio Guterres said. "Global challenges have become increasingly correlated," he pointed out, but the response to these challenges remains "incoherent". Guterres added, acknowledging Amman's significant contributions towards international peace and security. The two-day talks include matters from healthcare and education to gender parity and anti-corruption efforts.

Kuwaiti Minister of Finance Dr Nayef Al-Hajraf expressed his confidence in the Kuwaiti youth potentials for creativity and business leadership. The (Kuwaiti) Government believes that small and medium enterprises, mainly launched by the junior citizens, will spur the gross domestic product, said Dr Al-Hajraf in remarks to KUNA on sidelines of the World Economic Forum on the Middle East and North Africa, dubbed (Towards New Cooperation Systems).

He expressed deep satisfaction at young Kuwaitis who have succeeded in expanding their investments in small and medium enterprises, not only in Kuwait but also in the region. Also boastful, the minister noted that Kuwaiti companies have been included in a list of 100 emerging and promising companies, operating in technology, in the region. Earlier, he met with Jordanian Prime Minister Dr Omar Al-Razaz, conveying to him greetings from His Highness the Prime Minister. The Kuwaiti Ministry of Finance said in a statement that he had also held a sideline session with the Kazakh Foreign Minister, Beibut Atankulov, discussing commercial cooperation and issues.

Minister Al-Hajraf also met with the World Economic Forum, President of the World Economic Forum, Borge Brende. During the meeting, they discussed the vision of His Highness the Amir Sheikh Sabah Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah on Kuwait's transformation into a financial center attracting investment in which the private



DEAD SEA: Minister of Finance Dr Nayef Al-Hajraf participates in WEF. — KUNA

sector will lead the economic activity and encourage the spirit of competition and raising the efficiency of production in light of a supportive institutional body.

They also discussed Kuwait's desire to display its 2035 vision at the Davos 2020 forum. It said that a

number of leading personalities and decision makers in the public and private sectors from the Middle East and North Africa and a number of regional and international speakers and experts in various fields also took part. — KUNA

In my view

Thanks New Zealand!



By Jeri Al-Jeri

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The world has been shocked by a series of horrific events these past years, and it is unfortunate to say that terrorism is not going anywhere for a while. Nonetheless, the way in which world leaders address this sensitive issue differs in terms of objectivity. Some leaders tend to be extremely subjective and only allow themselves and national media outlets to attach the adjective "terrorist" to "Muslim extremists", as if a part of its definition is that the person has to be a Muslim.

This idea may sound like whining to some, or at least exaggerated to a Western reader, but the irony is that the problem with this particular stereotype is actually prevalent in Arab news media outlets and newspapers. To be exact, horrendous terrorist attacks that take place by non-Muslims are referred to as "acts of aggression" and never by what these acts truly are - "terrorism". However, Jacinda Ardern changed that.

The Prime Minister of New Zealand Jacinda Ardern officially addressed the issue as a "terrorist attack", making a long-awaited miracle finally happen, which is calling an extreme act of violence against civilians done by a non-Muslim an act of "TERRORISM". New Zealanders have sung songs of sorrow in front of the mosque, placed flowers, offered to walk Muslims to the mosque and have even given them a drive back home. They are protesting against white supremacy by carrying signs that say "This is not NZ".

As a Muslim, I have personally felt a great warmth in my heart to see how New Zealanders have emphasized with the friends and families of the victims of that horrendous terrorist attack by Brenton Tarrant, the Australian terrorist, who cowardly chose to attack during Friday prayers, in which all the worshippers' backs were turned against the front door. The white supremacist terrorist had also written on his modified gun the historical dates and names of figures relating to European Dark Age holy wars against Muslims.

The 28-year-old terrorist expressed his promise to his community that he will execute his terrorist attack on many occasions. And the world can now feel a lot safer to learn that he was stating these promises in video and textual forms using social media platforms that did not inform law enforcement about his admissions, and only deleted his account after he had all the time he needed to carry out his devilish plan and upload it fully via live stream. Needless to say, Tarrant has admitted by his own volition that the main source of his inspiration was Donald J Trump's racially insensitive, politically incorrect and hateful speeches. However, there is more to the story than what it seems, as like in all stories - there are both heroes and villains.

Abdulaziz, an Afghan Muslim who was late for Friday prayers was outside the mosque when the shooting started. In an interview with TRT World, he said: "At first I thought someone was playing with firecrackers, then I thought it was ISIS...I didn't feel any fear in me, I just wanted to save as many people as possible...I knew that shotguns had limited amount of bullets." So he courageously started following the terrorist and screamed swear words at him, then began ducking down between the cars when the attacker rushed outside with the intention to murder Abdulaziz. Brenton knew that Abdulaziz only meant to distract him. Failing to detect Abdulaziz, Brenton jumped into his car, but to his surprise, Abdulaziz showed up again, and started throwing projectiles at the car. Abdulaziz was trying to give even more time for the victims to flee and for police forces to arrive. Regardless of the fact that he was risking his life, Abdulaziz succeeded in doing so.

Road repairs: Quick but inconsistent

By Nawara Fattahova

KUWAIT: After most of Kuwait's roads were damaged due to heavy rains in November, some of them have been repaired, while others haven't. The ministry of public works, which is in charge of maintaining the roads, is currently repaving main highways and roads, but many smaller roads are still damaged.

The ministry announced a hotline number after the floods so people can report serious damages to roads. But it seems that there is inconsistency in dealing with complaints, depending on the area. Kuwait Times reported a damaged road in Salwa, and it was fixed in about 10 days. A social media influencer also showed a very quick response to his complaint, with the road



KUWAIT: A before and after image taken of one of the potholes in Salmiya block 3 that is now fixed.

repaired in just one day.

Kuwait Times visited Salmiya and Jleeb and found huge potholes in some streets, which can be very dangerous for motorists, especially at night. For some reason the hotline was not working, so Kuwait Times posted the complaint on the official webpage of the ministry of public works. And to make sure the officials in charge at the ministry deal with the complaint, the complaint was also posted on the WhatsApp number of the ministry with the full address of the locations and pictures taken by Kuwait Times.

Three locations of damaged roads were sent - two in Salmiya and one in Jleeb. The staff operating the WhatsApp emergency number responded after about two hours and wrote "the complaint was passed to the department in charge, which will deal with it soon". The complaints were sent on March 12, 2019, and till date, only one of the locations has been fixed, in Salmiya's block 3. The others in Salmiya's block 10 and Jleeb still haven't been repaired.



Kuwait participates in cultural festival in Czech Republic

KUWAIT: Kuwait has participated in the tenth cultural festival held by The University of West Bohemia in Pilsen, Czech Republic, highlighting the cultures and history of Arab nations. Director of the Kuwait Information Ministry's Department of the GCC Media Affairs Mohammad Al-Badah, who headed the delegation of the ministry participating in the festival, said in a statement yesterday, that the aim of the festival is to introduce the Arabic culture to the Czech public and university students.



Kuwait's pavilion at the cultural festival

The delegation of the ministry participating in the festival, which included Haya Buresly, worked to highlight the literary, cultural, scientific and historical aspects of Kuwait through various publications that show these aspects, he said. The festival also witnessed a number of documentary films about Kuwait, including a film about His Highness the Amir Sheikh Sabah Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah "Humanitarian Leader" and Kuwait "Humanitarian Center", he added.

For his part, Kuwait's Ambassador to the Czech Republic Rashed Al-Hajri stressed at the opening ceremony of the festival Kuwait's keenness to communicate and build bridges with Czech media and cultural institutions to identify the cultural and historical heritage of Kuwait. The opening ceremony of the festival was attended by the dean of the University of West Bohemia and Deputy Mayor of Yelzen and a number of ambassadors and academics. — KUNA



local spotlight

Brunei today



By Muna Al-Fuzal

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Brunei recently made headlines globally over decisions against adultery and gay sex. The new rules are facing criticism from media celebrities and human rights groups. I have never been to Brunei, but I would like to have the opportunity to take a closer look on what is being described as new strict sharia laws implemented in this nation.

Brunei is a rich, small country located on the island of Borneo, surrounded by Malaysia and the South China Sea with a population of 438,081 based on the latest United Nations estimates. Brunei has the second-highest human development index among Southeast Asian nations after Singapore, and is classified as a "developed country" according to the International Monetary Fund (IMF). It is ranked fifth in the world over gross domestic product per capita at purchasing power parity.

Brunei officially introduced new laws which included death by stoning for adultery and gay sex. The new penal code in the country came in a decision by Sultan Hassanal Bolkiah and includes amputation of hands and feet of thieves, making Brunei the first place in East or Southeast Asia to have a sharia penal code at the national level. Rape is also punishable by death under the code and many of the new laws, such as capital punishment for insulting Prophet Muhammad (PBUI), will apply to non-Muslims as well as Muslims.

When this news came to public attention, it sparked international condemnation. Naturally, the law was upsetting for the country's lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender (LGBT) community, although even before this law, sex between men was already illegal in Brunei and punishable with up to 10 years in jail. But the new code stipulates the death penalty by stoning as a punishment for sex between men, while women convicted of having sexual relations with other women face up to 40 strokes of the cane or a maximum of 10 years in jail.

In fact, Brunei is not the only country that has put such penalties into force, as there are some other countries that have similar laws. There are currently 70 countries that criminalize same-sex relations, according to the International Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Trans and Intersex Association (ILGA). In many places, breaking these laws is punishable by long prison sentences, fines or corporal punishment. The laws stipulate that there must be four Muslim witnesses to criminalize the act of anal sex or adultery to be prosecuted.

The United Nations called in a statement the legislation as "cruel, inhuman and degrading", and said it marked a "serious setback" for human rights. I think this decision provoked the global media because Sultan Hassanal heads the Brunei Investment Agency, which owns the Dorchester Collection, which operates several top hotels including the Dorchester in London and the Beverly Hills Hotel in Los Angeles. So it was no surprise that US actor George Clooney and other Hollywood celebrities have called for a boycott of the luxury hotels.

Commonwealth Secretary General Patricia Scotland has urged the government of Brunei to reconsider the new punishments, which she says "will potentially bring into effect cruel and inhuman punishments which contravene international human rights law and standards".

Some have wondered why this law is being implemented now. There are several theories - one of these claims that there is an interest in attracting more investment from the Muslim world, along with more Muslim tourists. So, this could be seen as one way of appealing to this market. I personally don't see how this can be true as there are many investments by Muslim nations in non-Muslim countries. I believe that time only will tell if these penalties will be carried out, because for example, Nigeria has the punishment of stoning in its Muslim-majority northern states, yet it has never been carried out. Brunei too has retained the death penalty, but has not carried out an execution since 1957.

Local

Photo of the Day



KUWAIT: An aerial view of Al Shaheed Park's Garden of Lights Festival. — KUNA

KFH hires 80 Kuwaitis in a day at recruitment event



KUWAIT: Kuwait Finance House (KFH) has organized the largest Kuwaiti youth recruitment event where it hired 80 young Kuwaitis out of a total of 150 job applications. This confirms its leadership in attracting and qualifying national youth cadres and reflects its localization efforts and the comprehensive strategy it follows to develop and provide talents with training.

During the two-day event, held at the Millennium Hotel, KFH received and assessed job applications through interviews that covered role playing, proficiency, behavioral testing, personal excellence and important skills. A dedicated KFH team comprising HR officials and region managers from the retail banking, conducted the interviews.

The recent initiative reflects KFH's keenness to strengthen its position as one of the private sector leaders in recruiting, qualifying and providing success elements for the young Kuwaitis. Since national employees comprise one of the most important elements of sustainable development, KFH also provides the opportunity to build a successful career and assume leadership positions in the future.

As a continuous strategy, Kuwaitis' recruitment and development at KFH are supported by the growth opportunities and the large market share it enjoys, which requires national cadres to achieve success in all areas. KFH participated in various public and private job fairs in Kuwait, aiming at attracting, training and qualifying the distinguished national human resources, defining the labor market, the available job opportunities, the nature of Islamic banking and private sector environment.

KFH participated in the 24th Kuwait University Career Fair, which was organized by the college of Business Administration. It also took part in the 21st Career Fair organized by the Gulf University for Science and Technology (GUST). Recently, KFH has participated as a platinum sponsor in the exhibition "because you deserve 2" which was hosted by the Manpower and Government Restructuring Program. Additionally, KFH is the only bank to launch the "Forsa" program for outstanding young Kuwaiti graduates to develop their skills and equip them with the highest standards to enter the job market.



NBK sponsors the 'Career Fair'

KUWAIT: National Bank of Kuwait (NBK) sponsored "Career Fair" aimed at connecting Kuwaiti youth with potential career opportunities in the private sector. The fair was organized by the Youth Empowerment Program (Tamkeen) at Gulf University for Science & Technology (GUST) and Kuwait University-College of Administrative Sciences. This initiative comes in line with NBK's efforts towards supporting national youth through providing the necessary development and training to acquaint them with the labor market needs, in order to equip them to embark on their professional paths.

The career fair seeks to open channels of direct communication between private sector companies and job seekers and to provide suitable job opportunities for students and fresh graduates. NBK human resources personnel were available at its booths and provided their advice and guidance to students seeking assistance with future career choices, in addition to educating them on the nature of joining the banking industry and guiding them through the required procedure to join NBK.

"NBK continues to establish its leadership among pri-

ivate sector institutions as we have consistently attracted and trained national manpower, successfully developed their skills and put them on the right path to be part of the banking sector," Mr Abdullah Al-Jassim, Head of Recruitment at NBK Group said.

Al-Jassim highlighted that the career fair is a unique event that offers NBK with an opportunity to spread its culture among students and graduates. He urged the national youth to get employed in the private sector in general, and the banking sector in particular, through providing them with training programs that equip and qualify them to embark in the professional world.

Al-Jassim also pointed out that NBK is the ideal choice for new graduates as well as those looking for a promising career as it has wealth of resources and rich development programs in line with the highest international standards, designed specifically to refine and enhance work related skills. He added that applicants are appointed to each department based on their qualifications and abilities, properly investing their talents to their benefit and to help them grow.

NBK is focused on attracting young Kuwaiti talents as part of its development and training plans that invest in Kuwaitis to build a promising banking generation. As a leading banking institution in Kuwait, NBK provides professional and academic training programs as part of its mission aimed at ensuring that young professionals receive the training programs they need to grow.



Local

Quality of higher education has deteriorated in Kuwait

By A Saleh

KUWAIT: Kuwait Society for Quality of Education stressed the quality of higher education has deteriorated in Kuwait, noting that the recent fake degrees scandal reflects on academic corruption. The society added that academic recommendations had been made to limit the number of accredited universities in Egypt to five, along with other recommendations about the quality of Jordanian universities, but these reports are still in officials' drawers without any serious steps being taken towards reform.

Shadadiya industrial area

Chairman of the parliamentary budgets and final statements committee Adnan Abdulsamad said the Public

Authority for Industry (PAI) had spent only KD 1.8 million on the new Shadadiya industrial area, while it should have spent KD 40 million according to scheduled plans for the fiscal year 2017-2018, noting that the project had been facing various obstacles.

Expat hostels

The manpower authority stressed that Kuwait has built expat hostels to protect laborers' rights and emphasize Kuwait's role in protecting human rights. The authority added that laborers desiring to move into the camps should file special applications before they are interviewed by psychiatrists and other specialists to determine if they are fit for work and the type of work they can do until legalizing their stay, transferring their residency or even departing Kuwait, noting that the hostel pays the costs in such cases.

Sabah Al-Ahmad City

The public authority for housing welfare announced that Sabah Al-Ahmad City includes special parking spaces for ministries and other government bodies, the authority's deputy director for planning and design Nasser Khoraiot said in a letter sent to the municipality. Khoraiot stressed that 2.67 acres of the city had been allocated for services including ministries, a hospital and a medical center.

Contract changes

Well-informed sources said the ministry of health had received reports from the Audit Bureau about violations concerning unauthorized contract changes, adding that those responsible are being tracked down.

Electronic archive

The Ministry of Education is currently working on an ambitious project to electronically archive its employees' files in a comprehensive database. The ministry's assistant undersecretary for educational facilities and planning Yaseen Al-Yaseen contacted his administrative sector counterpart Fahd Al-Ghais requesting special quarters in the ministry and various departments outside the main building to house the devices needed to digitalize all transactions and ending the use of paper documents.

Drug peddler

Custom inspectors arrested an Indian arriving from Iraq through the Abdaly border with 3 kg of hashish in his possession. The drugs were hidden in secret compartments in his vehicle.

National Guard receives medical delegation from US

KUWAIT: The National Guard medical services manager, Colonel Anwar Taqi Hussein recently received a medical delegation from George

Washington Hospital, USA. Both sides discussed cooperation in medical staff training, exchanging expertise and developing the medical services provided by the national guard.

Meanwhile, a delegation from the National Guard forces held talks with the French National Gendarmerie officials over prospects for broader cooperation. The talks tackled several issues of common interest, particularly boosting cooperation in training and capacity-building, and increasing reciprocal visits, Major General Fahle

Shojaa, member of the Kuwaiti delegation told KUNA on Thursday. He added that the focus of the delegation's visit to France was to exchange expertise to help develop the National Guard training and improve the efficiency of National Guard personnel. Meanwhile, Kuwait Ambassador in Paris Sami Suleiman welcomed the NG delegation and held a dinner banquet in their honor. He hailed the cooperation between Kuwait's National Guard forces and the French National Gendarmerie forces.

Boats face problems due to strong winds

By Hanan Al-Saadoun

KUWAIT: Kuwait Fire Service Directorate PR and Information said they received a call about a group of sailboat riders who were facing problems due to strong winds across from Messila beach. Most of the riders eventually returned to the beach except for one, who was found later unharmed.

Road work

The Ministry of Interior carried out an awareness campaign for citizens and expats stating that road maintenance work will continue today and tomorrow on Maghreb road across from Mansouriyah and Qadisiyah towards Kuwait City. The closure includes the right shoulder lane only. In addition to this, the Arabian Gulf road will be closed starting from the Third Ring Intersection all the way to Haroun Al-Rasheed Street towards Salmiya from midnight to noon. Work will continue during official hours only if necessary.

Municipality inspection

Head of the capital municipality inspection teams, Zaid Al-Enezi said that his teams had recently toured a number of streets noting that the campaign resulted in the filing of 27 citations including 15 for peddlers and 12 for working for others (not working for sponsors). Al-Enezi added that the campaign also resulted in confiscating loads of truffles from wandering vendors and the removal of 44 unlicensed ads.





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International

SUNDAY, APRIL 7, 2019



India didn't shoot down Pakistani F-16: US report

Bereaved families blame Boeing after the Ethiopia crash report

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This grab obtained from a video shows military convoys heading towards western Libya and Tripoli, coming from the LNA controlled territory in the east. Haftar has ordered his troops to "advance" on Tripoli, seat of the internationally-recognized unity government, after UN chief Antonio Guterres warned against a major flare-up. — AFP

Can Libya's strongman capture Tripoli?

Haftar took pro-government forces, international community by surprise

TRIPOLI: The sudden offensive against Tripoli by Libyan strongman Khalifa Haftar has taken pro-government forces and the international community by surprise. But is he really capable of seizing the Libyan capital?

Why the lightning assault?

Haftar's self-proclaimed Libyan National Army launched the assault on Thursday as UN chief Antonio Guterres visited Tripoli ahead of a planned conference later this month to hammer out a roadmap for delayed parliamentary and presidential elections. Haftar believes that "a national conference is a forum in which all the actors must... show they are willing to accept his absolute supremacy," said Jalel Harchaoui, research fellow at The Hague-based Clingendael Institute. The offensive came weeks after Haftar and key rival Fayez al-Sarraj, who heads the Tripoli-based UN-backed Government of National Accord, met in Abu Dhabi in February to discuss the creation of a new government in which he would be represented.

"Because the new government negotiated at Abu

Dhabi was not revealed, Haftar felt that Tripoli players had not submitted enough to him ahead of the national conference," added Harchaoui. "So he chose military force to change the facts on the ground." Analysts also believe Haftar wants to affirm his military clout after launching successful operations in the east and the south of the country—spurred by the fact that the international community failed to react to those past offensives.

He has been encouraged by "the silence of the international community during the previous operations, especially in the south" where he struck tribal alliances, said Tarek Megerisi, an analyst at the European Council on Foreign Relations. Timing the assault to coincide with Guterres's visit was an act of defiance. "Haftar made major mistakes. He underestimated the reaction of the foreign powers, being even so daring as to choose the day (Guterres) arrived in Tripoli to order the invasion," said Libyan analyst Kaouther Hassan.

Is he capable of seizing Tripoli

Analysts believe that Haftar over-estimates the

strength of his LNA. They say the controversial field marshal, who backs an administration rival to the GNA based in eastern Libya, was counting on a quick collapse of Tripoli militias. But pro-GNA reinforcements from around Tripoli rushed to assist in driving back his forces. Haftar's first setback took place when he seized control of a key checkpoint known as "Bridge 27" less than 30 kilometers (18.5 miles) west of Tripoli.

Pro-government forces from the coastal town of Zawiyah battled them, retook the base and captured more than 100 of Haftar's men. "Haftar is not capable of waging the battle for Tripoli," said Libyan analyst Farhat Asseid. "He has already faced a moral setback when he hastily decided to attack the checkpoint near Tripoli," he said. Megerisi agreed. "Haftar is not as strong as he appears and cannot in the end deliver stability to Libya," he said. Powerful armed groups from Libya's western city of Misrata have also said they were ready to halt Haftar's "cursed advance". "The Misrata militias are more important (in numbers) than Haftar's forces," said Ali Bensaad, an expert on Libya and professor at the French Institute of Geopolitics.

Is the LNA a real army?

The self-styled LNA is Soviet-trained and made up of former officers from the Libyan army, militiamen, fighters from allied tribes and Salafists. "Despite the effective branding, Haftar is not actually in control of an army in the traditional sense of the term," said Megerisi. "The LNA is a shaky alliance between various militias of tribal, religious and local interests around a core of more traditional forces who themselves are highly compromised by Salafist components."

"From an institutional and historical point of view... it is impossible for now to affirm that Haftar was right to present his coalition as a real army with a relatively clear discipline and a clear chain of command," said Harchaoui. For Libyan university professor Ahmad al-Messalati, Haftar "is capable of taking Tripoli but only on one condition", if he manages to form "strong and efficient alliances with certain armed groups" in Tripoli to ensure his forces can enter the capital without bloodshed. — AFP

UK issues passports without 'European Union' on the cover

LONDON: Britain has begun issuing passports with the words "European Union" removed from the front cover — despite Brexit being delayed and its political leaders deadlocked over how to extricate the country from the bloc. The interior ministry said yesterday that a longstanding decision to start introducing passports without reference to the EU had gone ahead from March 30, the day after the original date for Brexit.

Prime Minister Theresa May has delayed leaving the bloc after 46 years of membership amid stubborn opposition in parliament to the divorce deal she finalized with European leaders in November. MPs have overwhelmingly rejected the agreement three times. Ahead of an EU summit on Wednesday, she was forced to ask them for another extension, until June 30, to prevent Britain departing with no deal at the end of next week. But with EU heads growing increasingly impatient at the political paralysis in Westminster, they could offer just a shorter postponement — or a longer period of up to a year.

The other 27 members must give unanimous backing to any extension. May is trying to break the parliamentary gridlock by striking a compromise deal with the main Labor opposition. Senior ministers have spent several days negotiating with its leaders, but there were signs Friday that talks were stalling after Labor complained of no "real change or compromise". British finance minister Philip Hammond nonetheless struck an optimistic tone at a meeting yesterday of European finance ministers in Bucharest, telling reporters there were "no red lines" in the ongo-

ing discussions. "I expect we will reach some form of agreement," he predicted.

'Restore national identity'

In an apt sign of the befuddling circumstances around Brexit, Britain's interior ministry confirmed that some newly-issued passports now omit references to the EU atop the cover while others still bear the bloc's name. It said the discrepancy was due to an attempt to save public money and insisted both designs would be "equally valid for travel". "In order to use leftover stock and achieve best value for the taxpayer, passports that include the words 'European Union' will continue to be issued for a short period," a spokeswoman added. British passports have become ensnared in the country's Brexit divisions after the government announced in 2017 it would return to traditional blue passports "to restore national identity".

The travel documents had dark blue covers from 1921, but Britain switched to burgundy from 1988, in common with other passports in what was then the European Community. Brexit backers are thrilled by the highly symbolic change, while those who support remaining in the bloc have mocked their excitement. Last year it emerged that Franco-Dutch company Gemalto had won the contract to make the new blue passports, prompting fury from Brexit campaigners and more ridicule from Remainers that a British company was not chosen. The new production contract is to begin in October 2019, with the passports currently being issued without reference to the EU on them still in the burgundy color. Whether Britain will have left the bloc by then is uncertain. Many of May's Conservative colleagues are vociferously opposed to her outreach to Labor, while hardline Brexiteers remain implacably opposed to her deal. Hammond, who backed Remain in Britain's 2016 referendum and is seen as favoring as soft a Brexit as possible, urged his divided party to show flexibility. — AFP

Trump at Mexican border: US is 'full'

CALEXICO: US President Donald Trump visited the Mexican border on Friday to deliver a message to would-be illegal immigrants and asylum seekers: don't bother coming. "The system is full and we can't take you anymore... Our country is full," he said at a meeting with border patrol officers and other officials in Calexico, California. "So turn around, that's the way it is." Shortly after, Trump visited a section of recently refurbished border wall — something he wants extended across far more of the US-Mexico frontier — and said illegal immigrants had previously been "pouring" in. The California trip followed a retreat from earlier threats to close the border, which had sparked fears of serious economic damage.

Nevertheless, Trump sees his campaign against a "crisis" on the border as key to his 2020 reelection bid, and his time in Calexico was meant to keep that message in the headlines. Numbers of migrants and asylum seekers fleeing violence in Central America have risen sharply, although there are enormous political divides on whether this constitutes the "national emergency" that Trump has declared. Around 200 protesters, accompanied by a giant inflatable balloon depicting Trump as a baby, were waiting for the president in Mexicali, the town on the Mexican side of the frontier.

Waving US and Mexican flags, the protesters carried signs with messages such as "Stop separating families" and "If you build the wall, my generation will tear it down."



CALEXICO: The motorcade of US President Donald Trump arrives at the border wall between the United States and Mexico in Calexico, California. — AFP

On the US side, dozens of people lined the road that Trump's motorcade took, demonstrating support for his policies. "Build the wall," said one placard. Before leaving Washington earlier Friday, Trump said that his previous threats to shut down the border had been successful in persuading Mexican authorities to clamp down by stopping migrants on their journey north. "Mexico, I have to say, has been very, very good... over the last four days since I talked about shutting down the border," he said.

'Stay calm'

Trump reiterated that actually closing the border is not currently in the cards, but said he will instead impose 25 percent tariffs on auto imports from Mexico if illegal migration and drug smuggling are not controlled. Trump also said he could still order the bor-

der closed later. "I may shut it down at some point but I'd rather do tariffs," he said.

While sounding tough, Trump's surprise shift this week to tariffs from the previous threat to close the border is a major climb down. For days, the White House had been signaling that he was serious about the threat and there was even speculation that he might announce a closing during his Calexico trip.

However, the idea caused alarm among economists and Congress, including in Trump's Republican Party. Mexico is the third-largest US trading partner and any hold-ups at border crossings would have an immediate impact on trade. The tariffs idea is also causing confusion. On Thursday, Trump indicated there would be a one-year deadline for Mexico to improve the situation before tariffs kicked in. — AFP

International

Huge demos as Algerians urge Bouteflika allies to resign too

Tension mounts amid protests

ALGIERS: A vast crowd of protesters pushing for reforms flooded the streets of Algiers, while mass rallies were held across Algeria for the first time since algerian president Abdelaziz Bouteflika resigned. Activists chanted slogans demanding key Bouteflika loyalists follow his lead and quit, after social media calls for "joyful demonstrations" to "peacefully bring down a dictatorial regime". No official figures were immediately available on the size of the rally, but it was at least as big as those held on previous Fridays leading up to Bouteflika's departure, said AFP journalists at the scene. Rallies took place in 41 of the country's 48 provinces, according to the official APS news agency which in a first published slogans highly hostile to those in power.

Opponents of the old regime had called for a massive turnout, targeting a triumvirate they dub the "3B" - Senate speaker Abdelkader Bensalah, head of the constitutional council Tayeb Belaiz and Prime Minister Nouredine Bedoui. The veteran Bouteflika loyalists have been entrusted with overseeing the political transition after the president finally stepped down at the age of 82. Bouteflika resigned late on Tuesday after weeks of demonstrations triggered by his bid for a fifth term in office. After two decades in power, he had lost the backing of key supporters including armed forces chief Ahmed Gaid Salah.

'Mistakes made'

Bensalah, speaker of the upper house of parliament for 16 years, is to take the reins as interim president for three months until elections are organized. Belaiz, a minister for 16 years, was named by Bouteflika as head of the Constitutional Council which will regulate the elections. Before his appointment as prime minister, Bedoui had served as interior minister or "chief engineer of electoral fraud" according to the El Watan newspaper.

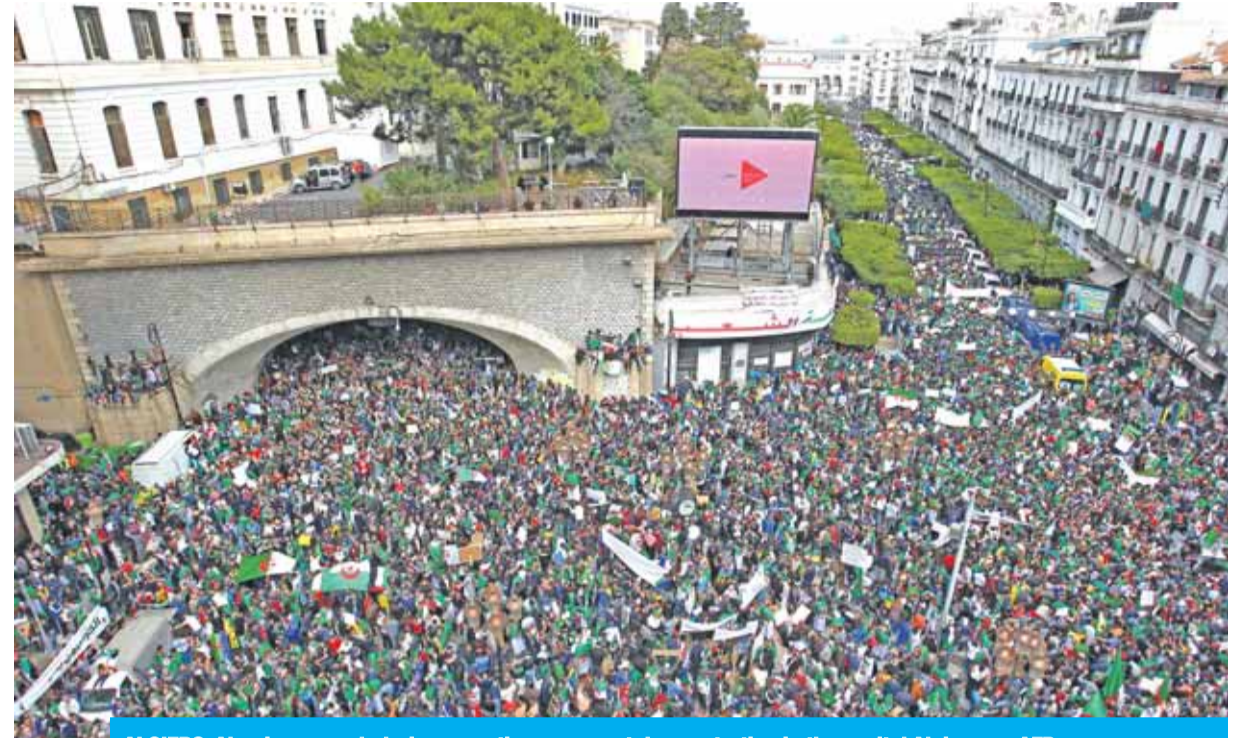
Opponents say all three are tarnished by their long years of service under Bouteflika and should follow his lead and resign. Meanwhile the country's intelligence services chief Athmane Tartag has been sacked and his duties handed to the defense ministry, the official APS news agency reported Friday. Informed sources confirmed the move to AFP that the CSS chief had been removed from office.

Even hours before the rally started, several hundred demonstrators had gathered outside the main post office in central Algiers, which has been the epicenter of the protest movement. Some shouted "we will not forgive!" in reference to an open letter Bouteflika issued after his resignation, apologizing to the Algerian people for "mistakes made". Said Wafi, a bank worker from the nearby city of Bumerdes, had arrived at 5:00 am in the hope of being "the first demonstrator against the system". "Bouteflika leaving means nothing if his men continue to run the country," the 42-year-old said.

'Victory is partial'

One of the leading voices of the protest movement, lawyer Mustapha Bouchachi, has called for the demonstrations to continue "until they have all gone". "Our victory is partial," he said in a video posted online. "Algerians will not accept that symbols of the regime... lead the interim period and organize the next elections."

But protesters expressed hope that the system would see real change. Zoubir Challal, who like many young unemployed Algerians had considered a dangerous Mediterranean crossing to seek a better life in Europe, carried a sign bearing the slogan: "For the first time, I don't want to leave you, my country." The huge rally in Algiers concluded early evening, with protesters dispersing peacefully as on previous Fridays. Demonstrators are calling for new transitional institutions to be set up to imple-



ALGIERS: Algerians march during an anti-government demonstration in the capital Algiers. — AFP

ment reforms and organize free elections. Hamza Meddeb, an independent analyst in Tunisia, said Algeria was entering "a very delicate phase, because the street and the institutions are at risk of diverging". The army's intentions are a key question, according to analysts. Despite abandoning his patron Bouteflika, who named him army chief in

2004, General Gaid Salah is still seen by protesters as a key defender of the "system". But protesters on Friday chanted: "The army and the people are brothers!" Said Zeroul, 75, said he hoped Algeria would regain "our freedom and our sovereignty". "I hope to live long enough to see democracy in my country," he said. — AFP

Morocco upholds sentences against Hirak protesters

CASABLANCA: Dozens of activists linked to the Hirak protest movement that rocked northern Morocco in 2016 and 2017 had prison sentences of up to 20 years upheld by a court of appeal on Friday. The ruling against the 42 protesters in the western city of Casablanca was met with cries of "corrupt state" from relatives. The Al-Hirak al-Shaabi, or "Popular Movement", protests took hold in the country's marginalized Rif region in October 2016. The social unrest was sparked by the death of a fisherman and escalated into a wave of demonstrations demanding more development in the neglected region and railing against corruption and unemployment.

Authorities accused the activists of having separatist aims. The sentences were first handed down in June last year, prompting further demonstrations calling for the group's release, backed by human rights organization such as Amnesty and Human Rights Watch.

"There is no hope... this trial has been unfair since the start and that is how it has ended," said defense lawyer Souad Brahmi. The movement's leader Nasser Zefzafi and three others received prison terms of 20 years for threatening the security of the state. Other sentences also confirmed on appeal ranged from one to 15 years. Eleven others were pardoned last year by King Mohammed VI.

Journalist Hamid el Mahdaoui was sentenced to three years for failing to tell police he had been offered weapons during the protests - what he called an "imaginary crime". "It's an injustice," his wife said. Zefzafi, 39, emerged as the face of the movement as a result of his rallying speeches, accusing the authorities of corruption.



CASABLANCA: Supporters of Morocco's Al-Hirak Al-Shaabi movement shout slogans calling for the release of the movement's members outside the Casablanca Court of Appeals during their trial on April 5, 2019. — AFP

Amnesty International has said the activist was held in solitary confinement and subjected to "conditions tantamount to torture". He boycotted the appeal proceedings along with 37 other defendants, after denouncing the first case as a "political trial".

In response to criticism, the Moroccan authorities have insisted the judicial process has followed international standards. The 2016 and 2017 protests led to clashes between police and demonstrators, leaving people injured

on both sides. More than 600 security forces personnel were wounded and seven million dirhams (\$730,000) of damage caused, according to Moroccan authorities. Around 450 people were arrested. "It's the politics of fear, that has been operating for some time already, telling everyone who has demands that it's better to stay quiet," said left-wing politician Nabila Mounib of Friday's ruling. Defense lawyer Mohamed Aghennaj suggested the defendants could appeal the decision. — AFP

Singapore, Malaysia reach deal to end airspace dispute

SINGAPORE: Singapore and Malaysia reached an agreement to end their months-long airspace dispute, the transport ministers of the two neighboring countries said in a joint statement yesterday. Under the deal, Singapore will halt instrument landing system procedures at its Seletar Airport, while Malaysia will open up a restricted area near the countries' border. "Singapore will withdraw the Instrument Landing System procedures for Seletar Airport and Malaysia will indefinitely suspend its permanent Restricted Area over Pasir Gudang," the statement of Malaysian Transport Minister Anthony Loke and Singapore's Transport Minister Khaw Boon Wan said.

This will allow Malaysia Airlines' subsidiary Firefly to start operations at Seletar Airport this month, the statement said. Media reports said the airline postponed its plans to fly out of Seletar Airport last year due to the dispute. In December, Malaysia said it wanted to take back control of airspace managed by the city-state since 1974, as Singapore's new instrument landing system at its small Seletar airport involved a flight path over Malaysian airspace.

The ministers also said in the joint statement that the two countries have set up a committee to review the 1974 airspace agreement. Singapore was once part of Malaysia but they separated acrimoniously in 1965, clouding diplomatic and economic dealings for years. — Reuters

Clashes in northwest Nigeria leave 50 dead

KANO: At least 50 people were killed in clashes with bandits in northwest Nigeria, which has been riven by cattle rustling and kidnapping, the state government said on Friday. The speaker of Zamfara state parliament, Sunusi Rikiji, told reporters the deaths happened on Tuesday in Sakajiki village, in the Kauran Namoda area of Zamfara state. "We received reports that members of the (civilian militia) mobilized people... and confronted the bandits in the forest, which resulted in the killing of at least 50 people," he said after returning from a visit to the area. The victims were the militia themselves and other local residents they mobilized to help them, he added, condemning the vigilante force for confronting the gangs alone.

The bandits have long been a scourge of rural communities in Zamfara, raiding villages, stealing cattle, burning homes, looting food, and kidnapping for ransom. Civilian militia groups comprising local people were formed as protection, given a lack of security personnel in hard-to-reach areas. But the vigilante forces have only exacerbated violence and tit-for-tat attacks after being accused of extrajudicial killings of suspected bandits. The state government outlawed the militia groups and deployed troops instead to curb unrest but with little success. Last December an 8,500-strong militia force was reconstituted to assist the military and police in fighting the gangs, amid wider concerns about the rise in violence.

Nigeria faces a number of security challenges, including attacks from an Islamic State-backed Boko Haram faction and renewed clashes between nomadic herders and farmers. That has left the military overstretched and seen President Muhammadu Buhari criticized for failing to protect lives and property. In Zamfara, an influential traditional chief called on the government to arm the vigilantes with assault rifles to defend themselves against the well-armed bandits. Last month motorcycle-riding bandits gunned down 32 militia members outside Kware village in the Shinkafi district of Zamfara, according to the police. — AFP

Polls see Netanyahu ahead, but many still undecided

JERUSALEM: Final authorized opinion polls published Friday just days ahead of the Israeli general elections showed Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu heading for a fifth term in office, leading a right-wing coalition. The polls revealed the rival centrist Blue and White list led by former military chief Benny Gantz was running virtually neck-and-neck with Netanyahu's Likud ahead of Tuesday's vote. But while most polls saw Gantz's list as scooping slightly more votes than Likud, neither party was predicted to win over 25 percent of seats in parliament.

And the polls were unanimous in forecasting that Likud would be able to build a viable ruling coalition to beat off Gantz's challenge. None gave a figure for undecided voters, although the number is reportedly high enough to swing the outcome. "Past polls have shown that nearly one out of every six-seven voters makes a decision only in the last two days before the elections, and it isn't clear what will be the dynamic of the coming few days," Maariv daily wrote Friday.

'Referendum on Netanyahu'

A poll by Smith Research for the Jerusalem Post published Friday showed Gantz's Blue and White, picking up 28 seats in the 120-member Knesset, with the right-wing Likud at its heels with 27. But it found that overall the right and centre-right would control 68 seats compared to 52 from the centre and left. This election is more than ever a referendum on the char-

acter of Netanyahu, 69, who has spent a cumulative 13 years in office. He is running under the shadow of probable graft indictments, although he denies all accusations. The attorney general has announced his intention to charge Netanyahu with bribery, fraud and breach of trust pending a hearing, to be held after the election.

Friday is by law the last day on which surveys can be released before the ballot boxes open on Tuesday morning. A poll published late Thursday by public broadcaster KAN gave the right a narrower, although still decisive, lead of 64 to 56. Top-selling daily Yediot Aharonot put the gap as narrower still, at 63-57. Polls have been wrong in the past, notably in 1996 when Netanyahu fought Labor leader Shimon Peres in what were then direct elections for the premiership. When voting closed on the night of May 29 Peres was seen ahead, but by morning Netanyahu had the lead. The final count handed him victory by just 30,000 votes, less than one percent.

Threshold uncertainty

Tuesday's fight, under different electoral laws than 1996, will be more complex by far. Voters no longer vote for the premier but for a party, of which there are around 40 registered to run. Less than half are expected to score the 3.25 percent threshold of total votes cast needed to enter the legislature so despite voters' stated preferences many of them will never see a seat in parliament. "All of the hair-splitting calculations about the right wing bloc versus the centre-left bloc are based on the assumption that aside from Geshet, all of the parties will pass the electoral threshold," veteran political commentator Nahum Barnea wrote in Yediot. "Nobody can be certain of that." Geshet, focused on social issues, has a single seat in the outgoing parliament which most polls see it as losing. A poll published Friday by pro-Netanyahu freesheet Israel Hayom gave the right-wing parties 64 seats and those dubbed "the left" 56. — AFP



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International

Bereaved families blame Boeing after Ethiopia jet crash report

Boeing offers condolences and software fix

ADDIS ABABA: Mourning families of Ethiopian Airlines passengers who died in last month's crash are asking awkward and angry questions of US planemaker Boeing after closely following a preliminary report into the disaster. Though Ethiopian investigators' remit was not to find blame, they implicitly pointed at Boeing by recommending it fix a faulty system and saying pilots followed pre-established procedures, before the 737 MAX crashed killing all 157 on board.

Konjit Shafi, who lost her 31-year-old brother Sintayehu, listened to the Ethiopian transport minister's press conference live on Thursday and wondered why lessons were not learned from a similar MAX disaster in Indonesia last October. "Boeing - they knew the problem already," she said, referring to an automatic anti-stall system in the MAX model that tipped the jets down in both cases due to faulty sensors.

"If they could have announced the problem to the airlines first, the accident may not have happened," she told Reuters in the Ethiopian capital Addis Ababa. Boeing has expressed condolences and promised a software fix. It will also have awkward questions of its own - over whether the Ethiopian crew correctly followed guidance not to restore power to the anti-stall system following sensor damage, and why the plane was also at unusually high thrust. For Konjit, the report's release on Thursday brought back her last words with her brother, who called after takeoff to say hello as the family lived in the flight path.

"He asked me to go outside and see the plane because he was just above our home," she said, sitting in a dimly lit front room in front of a portrait from Sintayehu's university graduation and a row of burned candles. "I called him again and asked how the network was working and he answered 'I don't know, it's just working until now' and then 'good bye'. I think it's at that time that the accident happened." Flight 302 had taken off late, at 8:38 am, and contact was lost six minutes later. It crashed into a dusty plain under still blue skies with such force that much of the wreckage was buried in the dry earth.

Profits before lives?

Among those on board were three generations of one Kenyan family - grandmother Anne Wangui Karanja, her daughter and her three young grandchildren. In the back yard of the family home in the central Kenyan town of Nakuru, bunches of white roses were wilting on a newly-built stone memorial, emblazoned with photos, dates of birth and words of remembrance. "From the report, we gather that the manufacturer is the problem," said Quindos Karanja, who lost his mother, sister, nieces and nephew. "My



US planemaker faces questions and legal action

anger comes in because they (Boeing) were putting profits before lives." The family read the crash report online as soon as it was published, and have followed news coverage with the aid of a stream of lawyers arriving at their home.

"It is good that the CEO of Boeing came out and owned up, but all we want, before these planes go back into the skies, is that they make sure everything is taken care of," Karanja said. "We don't want to have such a tragedy because it is very painful," he said. Boeing has not admitted liability, but its boss Dennis Muilenburg said on Thursday the company was working to eliminate the risk of "erroneous activation" of the so-called MCAS anti-stall system via a software update and pilot training. The 737 MAX fleet has been grounded worldwide as



BISHOFTU, Ethiopia: In this file photo, people stand near collected debris at the crash site of Ethiopia Airlines which killed 157 people near Bishoftu, a town some 60 kilometers southeast of Addis Ababa. — AFP

a precaution. If culpability is found, it could open the world's biggest planemaker to a slew of lawsuits.

Relatives of an American woman killed in the crash, Samya Stumo, filed the first lawsuit on behalf of a US victim in Chicago. The complaint targeted Boeing and Rosemount Aerospace Inc, the manufacturer of the sensor at the heart of

the inquiry. Stumo is the niece of consumer activist Ralph Nader, who has called for a boycott of the 737 MAX. "We as passengers need to demand that planes be safe so that no one else dies," said her mother Nadia Milleron. "Profits should not come before safety, and we are making this effort here to help prevent a third crash." — Reuters

News in brief

Polish millionaire arrested

MADRID: A fugitive Polish "multi-millionaire" at the heart of an eavesdropping scandal that contributed to the ruling Civic Platform liberals losing elections in 2015 has been arrested in Spain, police said yesterday. Marek Falenta was sentenced to two-and-a-half years in prison in Poland in December 2016 for setting up an eavesdropping system in swanky restaurants in Warsaw that saw waiters record conversations between business-people and politicians. That led to a major scandal that erupted in 2014 with media publishing extracts of incriminating conversations including Poland's then foreign minister who allegedly slammed Warsaw's alliance with the United States as "worthless". The scandal contributed to then prime minister Donald Tusk's Civic Platform losing in 2015 to the conservative opposition Law and Justice party now in power. While not identifying him by name, Spanish police said in a statement they and some of their Polish counterparts had arrested a "multi-millionaire" wanted by Warsaw in a luxury apartment in the eastern seaside town of Cullera. — AFP

Robbers steal \$1m in 3 mins

SILAO: A gang of armed thieves stole about 20 million pesos (\$1 million) from an armored truck that was about to load the money onto a plane at an international airport in central Mexico, authorities and reports said. The brazen robbery took place Wednesday night when an armed gang in a van evaded security at Guanajuato International Airport, the state attorney's office said. An initial report from the authorities said "armed individuals threatened cargo personnel and robbed them" of sacks of cash in a robbery that took just three minutes, although it did not confirm the amount stolen. Local reports said they made off with about 20 million pesos. In a later statement, airport operator Grupo Aeroportuario del Pacifico said the gang of hooded and armed thieves broke through the perimeter fence to carry out the robbery before escaping by knocking down a different section of the fence. — AFP

Yemen schoolchildren killed

DUBAI: Two children were killed and eight critically wounded when an unexploded bomb went off at a school in the rebel-held Yemeni capital, the UN children's agency said yesterday. A child had found the bomb and brought it to Al-Fatah school in the Hamdan district of Sanaa on Wednesday to show friends, UNICEF said in a statement. The casualties were aged between 12 and 14. Children often fall victim to unexploded ordnance, failing to fully appreciate the dangers. "It is highly likely, as we've seen in Syria, Iraq and elsewhere, that children will continue to be killed even when there's a lull in violence or the violence comes to an end," said UNICEF's regional chief of communications, Juliette Touma. — AFP

Nigeria's top judge resigns

ABUJA: Nigeria's most senior judge has resigned, his lawyer said on Friday, less than two months after he was charged with non-declaration of assets that government critics said was politically motivated. "Yes, he resigned yesterday," Chief Justice Walter Onnoghen's lawyer, Adegboyege Awomolo said without giving further details. President Muhammadu Buhari suspended Onnoghen just weeks before elections in February, prompting outrage and claims he was trying to manipulate the judiciary. As head of the Supreme Court, Onnoghen could have ruled on any disputes relating to the election, which saw Buhari, of the All Progressives Congress (APC), win a second term of office. His beaten rival, Atiku Abubakar, from the Peoples Democratic Party (PDP), has launched a legal challenge to the result, after calling the election a "sham". Onnoghen's resignation came a day after the regulatory body for judges, the National Judicial Council (NJC), recommended he should be compulsorily retired from service. — AFP

Far-right parties kick off campaigns for Europe election

BERLIN: Right-wing populist parties are gearing up to campaign for European Parliament elections next month, but policy differences and the Brexit drama threaten their dream to "unite the right". Many fear the May 26 vote will be a wake-up call for Brussels on the reality that Europe's anti-immigration and blood-and-soil patriotic forces have moved from the fringes to the mainstream.

Once considered outsiders, they could now end up with one fifth or more of the seats, allowing them to shift the tone of political discourse and make a claim for legitimacy. Key players are Marine Le Pen's National Rally (NR) in France and the Italian League of Matteo Salvini, who is hosting a meeting of like-minded right-wing groups in Milan on Monday. In the EU's top economy, the Alternative for Germany (AfD) has become the biggest opposition party by railing against Chancellor Angela Merkel and her 2015 decision to allow a mass influx of asylum seekers.

Yesterday the AfD gathered in the city of Offenburg to present its election program, which calls for "a Europe of fatherlands" and opposes the EU's immigration, financial and climate policies. On Monday

in Milan, Italian deputy PM Salvini will follow up and gather allies from across Europe to try to lay the foundations for a future hard-right grouping in the now 751-member European Parliament. Salvini and Le Pen also agreed to call another meeting in May, after they met in Paris on Friday, a NR source said. "The leaders are considering a common manifesto to close the electoral campaign and announce the start of a new Europe," said a spokesman for Salvini.

International of nationalists?

So far, Europe's right-wing nationalists have been divided into three blocs and a tangled web of alliances in the legislature that moves between seats in Brussels and the French city of Strasbourg. They are the Europe of Nations and Freedom (ENF) group, which includes the RN and League, the European Conservatives and Reformists (ECR) and the Europe of Freedom and Direct Democracy (EFDD). The dream of Salvini - and of Steve Bannon, the former advisor to US President Donald Trump - has been to unite the disparate patriotic forces and form an "international of nationalists". But so far such efforts have met with only limited success, in part because the parties' nationalist focus runs counter to a multi-national approach. Another problem for the groups has been that, despite their shared dislike for immigration, multiculturalism, the left and the EU, they remain divided on other key issues.

On economic policy, the AfD and their Scandinavian allies tend to believe in the market economy, while the French RN favors a more protectionist and statist approach. While Italy's League, Poland's

US revokes ICC prosecutor's visa over Afghan probe

THE HAGUE: The United States has revoked the visa for the chief prosecutor of the International Criminal Court, her office said Friday, over a possible investigation of American soldiers' actions in Afghanistan. Prosecutor Fatou Bensouda would continue to pursue her duties for the Hague-based court "without fear or favour" despite the ban, her office said in a statement.

The move against Bensouda, a Gambian national, comes weeks after US Secretary of State Mike Pompeo announced restrictions on ICC staff who probe US or allied personnel. "What we can confirm is that the US authorities have revoked the prosecutor's visa for entry into the US," the Office of the Prosecutor of the ICC said in a statement. Bensouda's office said that under the Rome statute governing the ICC - which Washington has declined to join since it was set up in 2002 - she had an "independent and impartial mandate".

"The prosecutor and her office will continue to undertake that statutory duty with utmost commitment and professionalism, without fear or favor," it added. The US decision was not expected to impact Bensouda if she is travelling to the United Nations in New York where she gives regular briefings to the UN Security Council on investigation, it said. There was no immediate comment on Bensouda's visa ban from Washington. Bensouda asked ICC judges in November 2017 for authorization to open an investigation into alleged war crimes in Afghanistan by the Taliban, Afghan government forces and international forces including US troops.

The court has not yet decided whether to launch a full-blown probe. However, the administration of US President Donald Trump has struck preemptively, with Pompeo warning on March 15 that the ICC was "attacking America's rule of law". Pompeo said he was "announcing a policy of US visa restrictions on those individuals directly responsible for any ICC investigation of US personnel." "If you're responsible for the proposed ICC investigation of US personnel in connection with the situation in Afghanistan you should not assume that you still have, or will get, a visa or that you will be permitted to enter the United States," Pompeo added. — AFP



Fatou Bensouda

Brexit chaos stirs bafflement in UK former colonies

HONG KONG: Across much of Britain's former Asian colonies, many are greeting the UK's impending departure from the European Union with a mixture of bafflement, apathy, amusement - and a touch of schadenfreude. Britain long justified imperial subjugation by arguing Rule Britannia brought order, stability and shared prosperity - even after its retreat from colonialism birthed a host of troubled new nations still saddled with historical grievances and legacies to this day.

Now Brits face a chaos and internal division of their own making, alongside potential isolation and years of economic hardship - particularly if the UK crashes out with no deal on April 12. "I was born and brought up in this British colony called Hong Kong and used to think that the Brits were a very sensible people," remarked Claudia Mo, a pro-democracy lawmaker in the financial hub. "I've been watching Brexit process as a former colonial person and it's almost like a farce, it's sadly funny, sadly amusing. I'm baffled as to why and how things got to where they are now. To outsiders it's almost unthinkable," she told AFP.

Mo, 62, came of age politically during a turbulent period for her birthplace sparked by Britain's colonial legacy - the 1997 handover of Hong Kong to China. Unlike Brexit, Hong Kongers had no say in their future and many were desperate to obtain British passports in case the handover unleashed chaos. Many youngsters, Mo said, are still looking for opportunities overseas given Beijing's increasingly authoritarian grip, but they may be less inclined to opt for Britain. "I think their first choices here are more likely Australia and Canada," she remarked.



PARIS: Italy's Interior Minister and deputy PM Matteo Salvini speaks during a press conference at the Ministry of Interior, Place Beauvau, in Paris. — AFP

PIs and Hungary's Fidesz highlight Europe's Christian cultural roots, the RN has shied away from taking a similar stance in a country where the majority is in favor of secularism. And even on immigration, Salvini's League favors an EU-wide redistribution of asylum seekers while others demand an outright stop to immigration. On relations with Russia, Salvini has praised President Vladimir Putin, a view not shared by Poland's governing party.

'Patriotic alliance'?

The AfD's top candidate Joerg Meuthen

said he expects big gains for nationalist parties but that they will have trouble forming a "patriotic alliance" with a common agenda. The parties "have the same or similar positions on migration policy but very different views in other areas," he told AFP. There are also strategic deliberations. Hungary's Prime Minister Viktor Orban has voiced admiration for Salvini but was considered unlikely to come to the Milan meeting given his Fidesz party still belongs to the centre-right European People's party (EPP) group, despite its temporary suspension. — AFP

'Sinking ship'

In India, Sreeram Chaulia, dean of the Jindal School of International Affairs, said many regard Brexit as the latest chapter in what has been a "sharp decline in the place Britain commands as a great power". "They are not a gold standard to look up to," he said. "We get a feeling of a sinking ship and everybody wants to leave a sinking ship." India's economy is set to overtake the UK's later this year. "The UK will then become a middle power. It is like a reversal of scale," he noted. Students at Bangladesh's Dhaka University offered mixed views on what Brexit might mean.

Syed Tahsin said he hoped the relationship between the two countries might be "more positive than ever before" given Britain has vowed to strengthen bridges with Commonwealth countries. But others fretted that the anti-immigrant sentiment which fuelled the leave vote would make Britain less welcoming to overseas visitors and the Bangladeshi community already there. "Brexit itself is a policy of white supremacists," lamented student Aishwarya Prama, adding she feared it will "just push more... immigrants (to) go back to their countries."

While Brits and Europeans may have been engrossed by the unceasing weekly drama of Brexit, many further afield admitted that they were more preoccupied by local issues. "The Brexit issue and the wider conversations about democracy seem far removed from daily life in Sri Lanka, where we are all consumed with our own dysfunctional politics," Dharisha Bastians, chief editor of the Sunday Observer newspaper said. Nationalist Sri Lankan legislator Udaya Gammanpila regarded that disinterest as a good sign. "We are no longer preoccupied with British politics. We are slowly getting over our colonial mentality," he said. Given its cultural and linguistic links, Australians have followed the Brexit drama perhaps more closely than any other former colony. Nick Miller, Europe correspondent for the Sydney Morning Herald and The Age newspapers, noted there was "immediate interest" from readers. — AFP

International

Pakistan PM accuses India of war hysteria over downed F-16 claim

India didn't shoot down Pakistani F-16: US report

KARACHI: Pakistani Prime Minister Imran Khan blamed India's ruling Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) for "whipping up war hysteria" over claims that India shot down a Pakistani F-16 during a standoff in February, saying the truth is always the best policy. US-based Foreign Policy magazine, citing US officials, said all of Pakistan's F-16 combat jets had been accounted for, contradicting an Indian air force assessment that it had shot down one of the jets.

"The truth always prevails and is always the best policy," Khan said in a Tweet. "BJP's attempt to win elections through whipping up war hysteria and false claims of downing a Pak F-16 has backfired with US Defense officials also confirming that no F-16 was missing from Pakistan's fleet." Nuclear-armed neighbors India and Pakistan engaged in an aerial battle over the disputed region of Kashmir a day after Indian jets crossed over into Pakistan to attack a suspected camp of anti-India militants. An Indian jet was brought down during the fight and its pilot captured when he ejected on the Pakistani side of the border. He was later released.

India said it too had shot down a Pakistani aircraft and the air force displayed pieces of a missile that it said had been fired by a Pakistani F-16 before it went down. Foreign Policy said in a report published on Thursday two US defense officials with direct knowledge of the matter said US personnel had done a count of Pakistan's F-16s and found none missing. Details of the India-Pakistan air engagement have not been fully provided by either side. If the US report turns out to be true, it would be a further

blow to Prime Minister Narendra Modi, who had said that India had taught Pakistan a lesson, ahead of elections next week.

The BJP is campaigning on a platform of tough national security, especially with regard to arch foe Pakistan. New Delhi blames Pakistan for stoking a 30-year revolt in Muslim-majority Kashmir but Islamabad denies any involvement. BJP spokesman Bizay Sonkar Shastri dismissed Khan's accusations. "Firstly, their (Pakistan's) habit of lying is no secret to the world. Secondly, this is absolutely clear that the roots of terrorism lie in Pakistan and terrorism is cultivated in Pakistan," he told Reuters.

The success of Indian air strikes on a camp of the Jaish-e-Mohammed militant group in northwestern Pakistan has also been thrown into doubt after satellite images showed little sign of damage. High-resolution satellite images reviewed by Reuters last month showed that a religious school run by Jaish appeared to be still standing days after India said its warplanes had hit the Islamist group's training camp on the site and killed a large number of militants. Pakistan closed its airspace amid the standoff but most commercial air traffic has since resumed and major airports have opened.

Pakistan offered to open one air route on Friday, an Indian government official said, without specifying details and declining to be named as the matter was not public. An Air India official said on condition of anonymity that Pakistan has opened one of its 11 air routes, from the southern side, adding that the

carrier began operations via this route on Friday. "Pakistan has opened one air route over India on April 4th, it is a north-west bound route," Mujtaba Baig, spokesman for Pakistan's Civil Aviation Authority said yesterday. An email sent to the Indian Directorate General of Civil Aviation was not immediately answered. Air India did not immediately respond to an email seeking comment.

360 Indian prisoners

In another development, scale back from a confrontation that prompted world powers to urge restraint. Tension has been running high since a suicide car bombing by Pakistan-based militants in Indian-controlled Kashmir killed at least 40 Indian paramilitary police on Feb 14, but the risk of conflict rose dramatically on Feb 27, when India launched an air strike on what it said was a militant training base. The following day Pakistan shot down an Indian fighter jet and captured its pilot who was later released.

"Pakistan has decided that 360 Indian prisoners - having breakup of 355 fishermen and five civilians, who have completed their term of sentence, will be released," Mohammad Faisal, spokesman for the Pakistan Foreign Office, told reporters. He said the prisoners would be released in four batches starting from April 8. Due to the rocky relations between the two sides, prisoners who have completed their jail terms often languish in each other's jails for months, if not years, afterwards. According to the lists exchanged by both sides in January, there are 347



KASHMIR: Indian paramilitary troopers patrol outside a central jail in downtown Srinagar. Riots broke out after rumors started floating that some inmates were being shifted out of the Kashmir valley. The inmates burnt a temporary shelter and tried to come to the outer cordon of the jail located in the downtown area of the city. — AFP

Pakistani prisoners in Indian jails, 249 of whom are what the spokesman described as civilians and 98 fishermen. There are 537 Indian prisoners in Pakistani jails, 483 of whom are fishermen. "We hope that India will reciprocate this," the foreign office

spokesman said. Pakistan's F-16 combat jets have all been accounted for, US-based Foreign Policy magazine said, citing US officials, contradicting an Indian air force assessment that it had shot down one of the jets in the February standoff. — Agencies

The three women hoping to upset Modi at the polls

NEW DELHI: India's alpha-male Prime Minister Narendra Modi faces three formidable women looking to spoil his chances of winning a new term in elections beginning next week. AFP profiles them here:

'Big sis'

Feisty and fiery Mamata Banerjee is the first female chief minister of the eastern state of West Bengal-home to more people than Germany-where Modi's right-wing Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) needs to do well. The diminutive 64-year-old is one of Modi's most vociferous critics and has been working to cobble together an anti-Modi alliance. "We can tell you one thing, that we are all together against the BJP government to save the nation," she says. Banerjee, whose Trinamool Congress party rules the roost in West Bengal, has succeeded in keeping the BJP at bay so far despite the growing popularity of Modi.

The former national railways minister known as "didi", or big sister, enjoys a mass following not least because of her humble upbringing and lowbrow style. "Banerjee is a very important leader. She is a struggler and a fighter to the core," Manisha Priyam, a Delhi-based political analyst said. "If she does well in the state, she will be an important player in the formation of a government." A budding poet, painter and author-Banerjee dons many hats. While her fans swear by her oil paintings and poems, critics deride her work as trash.

Lower-caste champion

Known as the "Dalit Queen", Mayawati, 63, has had a colorful career as champion of lower caste Dalits. She wields considerable influence in 200-million-strong Uttar Pradesh, India's most populous state and the election's biggest prize. Her Bahujan Samaj Party (BSP) was decimated in the 2014 polls but she has stitched up an alliance with her sworn enemy, the Samajwadi Party. Analysts blamed her 2014 rout on her penchant for extravagance-she once sent her private jet to pick up a pair of sandals according to leaked US cables-and a controversy over



SILIGURI: Chief minister of the eastern Indian state of West Bengal and the Trinamool Congress (TMC) supreme leader Mamata Banerjee (center), candidate of the Darjeeling constituency Amar Singh Rai (left), and Chairman of the semi-autonomous government body 'Gorkhaland Territorial Administration' (GTA) Bina Tamang wave to supporters during an election campaign rally, in Naxalbari. — AFP

building concrete parks full of statues of herself. But if her party performs well this time, she could once again play a pivotal role in coalition negotiations. She has hit the right notes so far, calling out the BJP for its "divide and rule communal politics" while cosying up with her once arch-rival Akhilesh Yadav who helms the Samajwadi Party. "She does have a cadre which has been built up astutely. No politics can go ahead in UP by disrespecting her. No one can afford to take her lightly," said Priyam.

Indira reborn?

The youngest scion of the famed Nehru-Gandhi dynasty, Priyanka Gandhi Vadra entered the family business of politics in January after years of steering clear-and has made a splash. And what could be a better battle-ground for the charismatic younger sister of PM-hopeful

Rahul Gandhi than Uttar Pradesh-the Hindu heartland where Modi has his core support base. Priyanka, 47, has been tasked with reviving the Congress party in the state, where it was thrashed in 2014 polls-winning just two of the 80 parliamentary seats in contrast to BJP's 71.

She seems to have taken the challenge head-on, launching her campaign in Modi's constituency of Varanasi on a motorboat that traversed the Ganges, a river revered by Hindus. The symbolism was not lost on analysts, saying her move was aimed at snuffing out criticism that her Congress party has been ignoring majority Hindu voters and appeasing India's 170 million Muslims. Her fans say her common touch, as well as her appearance, are reminiscent of Indira Gandhi, her grandmother who was India's first woman prime minister-and a divisive figure assassinated in 1984. — AFP

Fisherman held by Islamic militants drowns in escape bid

MANILA: An Indonesian fisherman held hostage for four months by Islamic militants in the Philippines has drowned, a military spokesman said yesterday, while two other captured men have been rescued. The men had been held on a remote island in a standoff for nearly six weeks after Filipino troops blockaded the island in a bid to close in on the kidnappers. The men were seized from their fishing boat in early December last year. The captors, from Islamic militant group Abu Sayyaf, fled the southern island of Simusa Friday, bringing their hostages with them, said military spokesman Lieutenant-Colonel Gerry Besana. One Indonesian fisherman, Heri Ardiansyah, was rescued as the militants tried to flee, but another - Hariadin - drowned in the escape bid.

Another hostage, Malaysian Jari Abdullah, was rescued by Filipino troops a day earlier and is now in a "stable" condition with gunshot wounds at a military hospital. Besana told AFP. "The island had been blockaded for the past 41 days. They (kidnappers) probably thought they could slip past us by swimming," he added. Three of at least seven kidnappers who were with the hostages were killed in the operations, he said. The military got wind of the hostages' location in late February and ordered the small civilian population on the island to leave, Besana said.

Abu Sayyaf is a group of self-proclaimed Islamic militants based in the southern Philippines who have engaged in bombings as well as kidnappings of Western tourists and missionaries for ransom since the early 1990s. In recent years the group has also preyed on cargo ships, tugboats and fishing vessels in poorly policed waters of the region near the sea borders with Malaysia and Indonesia. Dutch birdwatcher Ewald Horn, abducted in 2012, a Vietnamese seaman and four Filipinos are believed to be still in Abu Sayyaf captivity, Besana said. — AFP

Rising Thai star hit with sedition charge

BANGKOK: The telegenic leader of an anti-junta political party who rose to prominence in Thailand's election last month was charged with sedition yesterday, drawing hundreds of his supporters onto the streets urging him to "fight". Billionaire Thanathorn Juangroongruangkit heads the youth-oriented Future Forward Party which won more than six million votes in the March 24 poll, the first since a 2014 coup, with its message of ousting the military from politics.

It had joined an anti-junta coalition with six others claiming the right to form a government in the aftermath of the disputed vote whose full results are expected by May 9. Earlier this week he posted on Facebook that police had summoned him to appear yesterday to face a sedition charge relating to anti-junta rallies in 2015. He said the charge was "politically motivated".

Hundreds turned up yesterday morning in front of Pathumwan police station in downtown Bangkok, wearing T-shirts bearing the tycoon's face and shouting "Save Thanathorn!" while waving placards that said "Military, get out!" While inside, he and his party members tweeted photos of what was happening, showing Thanathorn affixing his fingerprints to the chargesheets and representatives from foreign embassies and the UN observing the police procedure. More than two hours later, he emerged from the station and told reporters he had been charged with "inciting unrest... helping the suspect escape... and the illegal assembly of more than 10 people" for his actions in



BANGKOK: Future Forward Party leader Thanathorn Juangroongruangkit (right) receives flowers from supporters as he arrives at Pathumwan police station to hear sedition charges brought against him by the National Council for Peace and Order (NCPO) yesterday. — AFP

2015. "We believe we are innocent. I did everything in good faith," Thanathorn said, denying the charges.

'Rogue state'

The case will be tried in a military court and the maximum sentence is seven years, said his lawyer Krisadang Nutcharut. "We oppose this because civilians should not stand trial in military court," Krisadang said. He added that Thanathorn could lose his seat in parliament if he is convicted. Before leaving the police compound, Thanathorn flashed a three-finger salute, a resistance symbol borrowed by Thailand's anti-junta movement from the Hollywood movie "The Hunger Games", as his supporters did the same while shouting "Thanathorn, fight, fight!"

The charismatic leader is already being investigated under Thailand's Computer Crimes Act for allegedly spreading false information

when he criticized the junta in a Facebook Live discussion last year. Human Rights Watch's Sunai Phasuk told AFP Future Forward's anti-military policies have made Thanathorn "an enemy of the junta" and decried the "trumped-up" charges. "By seeking to prosecute Thanathorn in a military tribunal... the junta has turned Thailand into a rogue state," Sunai said, calling this move an example of "entrenched repression". Thailand's powerful military has staged more than a dozen coups since the end of absolute monarchy, citing the need to maintain stability and curb corruption.

Junta leader Prayut Chan-O-Cha is currently tipped to return to power as a civilian premier under his military-aligned Palang Pracharat party, which won the popular vote. But the anti-junta coalition, which Future Forward is a key member of, says it has the majority of seats in the lower house. — AFP

Desperate housewives chase selfies on election trail

SRAGEN: Tears stream down Lilis Hastirini's mascara-smudged face after she waited hours to snap a selfie with Indonesia's president, only to be thwarted by a crush of other female fans with the same idea. It is a take-no-prisoners battle on the election trail in this selfie-mad nation, where few shots count more than a close up with "everyman" leader Joko Widodo, a former furniture salesman who rose from a riverside slum to high office.

Hastirini was among some 10,000 other desperate housewives, mostly aged between 20 and 50, who braved searing heat as they screamed and jostled, pushing past security guards to reach Widodo at an event in Sragen on Java island this week. "I'm sad, I couldn't get a picture with him," the 37-year-old told AFP as she sobbed and wailed. "He seems like such a nice person, kind of fatherly." The lanky, heavy-metal music-loving 57-year-old, best known as Jokowi, seems happy to oblige housewives and other key voters - including millennials who account for about one-third of the electorate - as he fights to keep a wide lead in the race for the presidency on April 17.

Some 192 million Indonesians are set to cast a ballot in the world's third-biggest democracy, with a record 245,000 candi-

dates vying for positions from the presidency and parliamentary seats all the way down to local council jobs. And garnering support on social media is essential. Indonesia is one of Instagram and Facebook's biggest markets globally, with some 62 million and 130 million users, respectively. Jokowi's sole rival is Prabowo Subianto, a retired military general and son-in-law of the late dictator Suharto, who has ditched his trademark suit and tie for a campaign-casual khaki safari suit with sunglasses.

Prabowo, as he is known, is also trying to win over women voters and fans online, balancing his strongman image with an Instagram account of him and his cuddly cat, Bobby. The 67-year-old and vice-presidential candidate Sandiaga Uno - a youthful 49-year-old business magnate - have generated online fan clubs including the Housewives Party in Support of Prabowo-Sandiaga, the Militant Housewives' Force and even the Voluptuous Housewives Who Fight for Prabowo-Sandi. Both candidates are regularly mobbed by adoring female fans - though Jokowi appears more at home performing in front of the crowds.

Back in Sragen, Hastirini almost reached Jokowi as he was exiting the arena when someone stepped on her seven-year-old daughter's foot. In leaping to help her little girl, she had missed her moment with Jokowi. Also empty-handed was high school teacher Mariana Wahyu, who said she never bothered to get a selfie with her-then neighbor Jokowi back when he was mayor of Solo city. "O Allah, had I known then that he would become president, I would have taken a lot of pictures with him," she said in Central Java's Sukoharjo city. — AFP

Analysis

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Washington Watch

Bringing back memories of nightmarish Israeli invasion of Lebanon

By Dr James J Zogby

The New York Times headline on April 4th was simple enough, "After 37-Year Search, Israel Recovers Body of a Fallen Soldier," but the memories it dredged up were both painful and complicated. Here's the simple news story that appeared this past Thursday: Four days before Israelis will go the polls to vote, the remains of Sergeant Zachary Baumel, who had gone missing in 1982 during Israel's invasion of Lebanon, were returned to his family for burial. The remains reportedly were found by Russian and Syrian troops and then sent by Russia to Israel. The entire event is being celebrated in Israel and being seen as a pre-election gift for Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu, who is currently being hounded by pending criminal charges ranging from corruption to bribery.

That might be the simple story, but for anyone with attachment to Lebanon and memories of the devastating war of the summer of 1982, this episode only served as a painful reminder of deep wounds that will never heal. It was called a war, but in reality what happened could better be termed the "barbaric rape of a country". The Israelis with their superior air power and artillery ran roughshod over the south of Lebanon and after bombarding and destroying the magnificent western side of Beirut - devastating its infrastructure and even destroying its hospitals.

Israeli troops then entered and occupied the city, plundering, looting, and terrorizing the trapped civilian population as they moved through Beirut's ruins. While some Americans recall the massacres in the Palestinian refugee camps of Sabra and Shatilla (committed by Israeli-allied Lebanese militia as Israelis stood guard at the camps' perimeters), in fact the entire war was a massacre. In just three months, over 18,000 were killed (mostly Lebanese and Palestinian civilians) and over 30,000 were wounded.

I remember this period all too well because I helped start and then ran "Save Lebanon", a project to bring severely wounded Lebanese and Palestinian children to the US for medical treatment that was unavailable to them in bombed-out West Beirut. In all 65 maimed children came to us. One little girl, Fayzeh Amin, lived with my family for six months while doctors worked to save her cluster-bomb shattered leg. I have a picture of Fayzeh and two other girls, Fatmeh and Amal, on the wall of my office. It is a constant reminder of the pain of that war. I also have a few hollowed-out Israeli cluster bomb casings I found near a Palestinian camp in the south of Lebanon. They too serve as reminders of the inhumanity of that period.

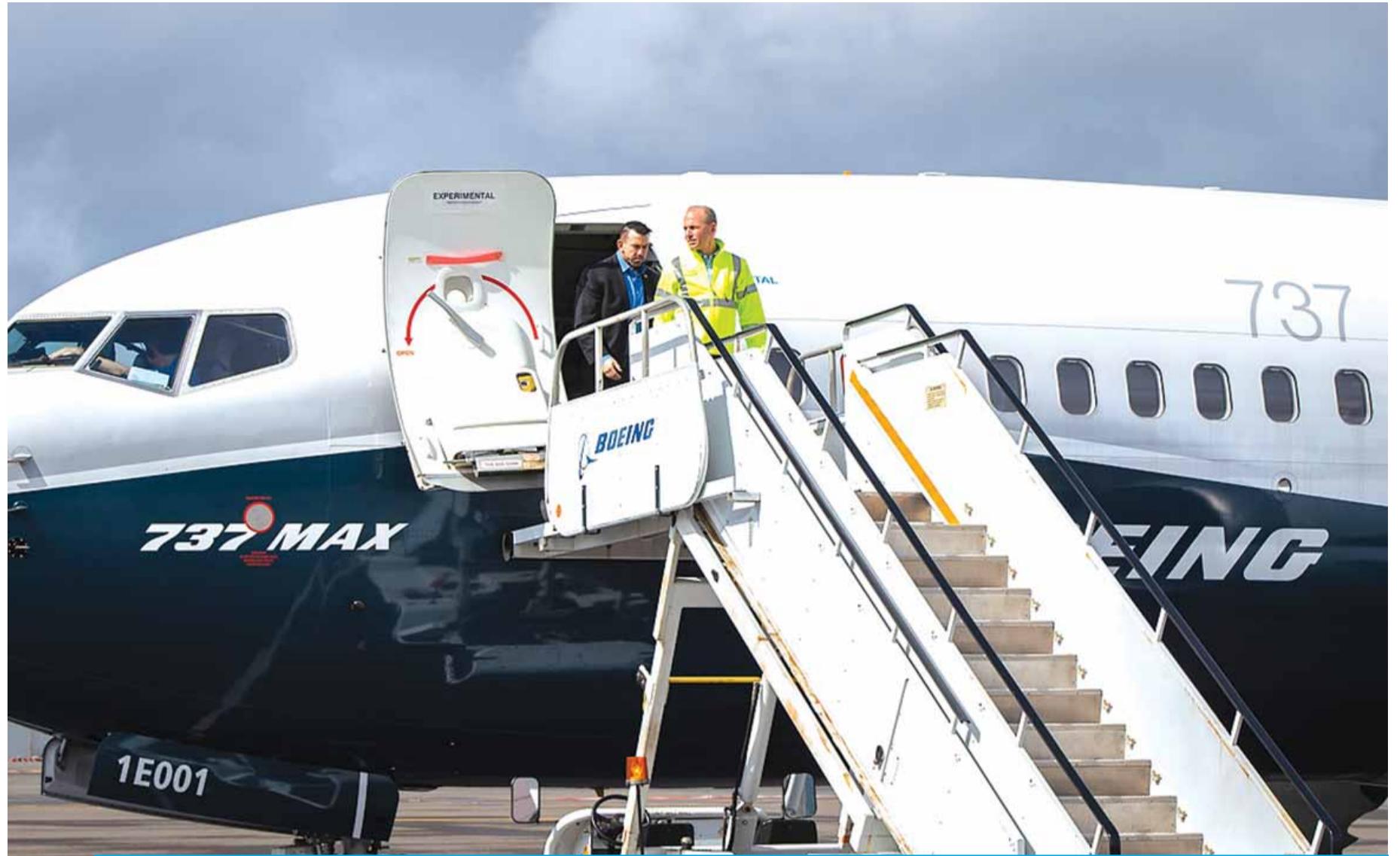
Less than a decade and a half later, I joined then Vice-President Gore at a dinner at the Israeli Knesset. I was one of the co-leaders of a project Gore had launched in the post-Oslo period to help grow the Palestinian economy. I admit to being more than a little uncomfortable at that dinner since I was the only Arab American in a room filled with the members of the Knesset, Gore, and the rest of his team. It became even more uncomfortable when a boisterous former Israeli General, now Knesset member, sat next to me and greeted me with "Ah, you are Lebanese. I've visited your country. I love its beauty."

Trying not to make a scene, I merely said to him, "I know when you were there. You weren't a visitor and I know what you did while you were there. It was too painful and I don't care to hear about it from you." As the evening went on, Gore, maybe sensing that I was uneasy, came over to rescue me and brought me to sit next to Leah Rabin, the wife of the late, assassinated Prime Minister. He told her that I had just visited my family in Lebanon and encouraged me to share my story with her.

I also recall from that night that it was the lead up to the 1996 Israeli elections and the Clinton Administration wanted nothing to do with Netanyahu, who was challenging then Prime Minister Shimon Peres (who had succeeded Rabin following the assassination); Gore appeared to make a determined effort not speak to or even acknowledge Netanyahu. Mrs Rabin noted this, at one point, and told me, her voice filled with bitterness and sadness, that she held Netanyahu responsible for the incitement that led to her husband's murder. Enough said.

These were some of the memories that came rushing to the fore as I read The New York Times article. The problem is that these memories can't just be buried and laid to rest. The maimed of Lebanon's war will be crippled for life. The families of the those who were massacred from the air or by militia at point blank range will continue to mourn their incalculable losses. Meanwhile, there are Israelis who will still gloat over having "visited" Lebanon. And Netanyahu, who was elected in 1996 on a platform promising to end the peace process, not only met his goal during his first term, but came back for three more terms. He now stands poised to win a fifth term and, as perverse as it may be, is being helped by the return of the remains of a soldier who died in the horrible invasion of the summer of 1982.

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



People line up with cans and tanks to collect water in the Petare neighborhood of Caracas on April 1, 2019. — AFP

How an Ethiopian Airlines 737 MAX was doomed

Minutes after take-off, the pilots of an Ethiopian Airlines 737 MAX were caught in a bad situation. A key sensor had been wrecked, possibly by a bird strike. As soon as they retracted the flaps and slats, it began to feed faulty data into the Maneuvering Characteristics Augmentation System (MCAS), designed to prevent stalls. Flying faster than recommended, the crew struggled with MCAS. But the high speed and the jet's forward-leaning posture made it nearly impossible to use the controls to pull the nose up.

Moments later, the Boeing Co jet hit the ground, killing all 157 people onboard after six minutes of flight. Ethiopian authorities said on Thursday that the pilots followed all the correct procedures in trying to keep MCAS from sending the plane into a fatal dive. But the full picture of what happened in the cockpit of Flight 302 on March 10 is emerging from the sparse commentary of a preliminary report and especially a newly released data plot showing how crew and technology interacted.

The airline's youngest-ever captain, a 29-year-old with an impressive 8,100 hours flying time, and his rookie 25-year-old co-pilot may have gone against procedures by leaving the engines at full take-off power, according to data and other pilots. By the end, the aircraft was travelling at 500 knots (926 kph), far beyond its design limits. That and some other potential missteps may have left them unable to fight flawed Boeing software that eventually sent the jet into an uncontrollable dive, experts said after studying the data.

"Power being left in take-off power while levelling off at that speed is not a normal procedure," said one US pilot, who declined to be named because he was not authorised to speak to the media. "I can't imagine a scenario where you'd need to do that." The Ethiopian Airlines crash, and another in Indonesia five months earlier, have left the world's largest planemaker in crisis as its top-selling jetliner is grounded worldwide, and Ethiopia scrambling to protect one of Africa's most successful companies. Boeing is working on an MCAS software fix and extra training that it says will prevent a repeat of such accidents. Chief Executive Dennis Muilenburg said on Friday that both accidents were caused by a chain of events, "with a common chain link being erroneous activation of the aircraft's MCAS function".

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Bird strike

Sources who reviewed the crash data said the problems started barely 12 seconds after take-off. A sudden data spike suggests a bird hit the plane as it was taking off and sheared away a vital airflow sensor. As with the Lion Air crash in Indonesia, the damaged 'angle of attack' sensor, which tells pilots what angle the aircraft has relative to its forward movement, may have set off a volatile chain of events. In both cases, the faulty sensor tricked the plane's computer into thinking the nose was too high and the aircraft was about to stall, or lose lift. The anti-stall MCAS software then pushed the nose down forcefully with the aircraft's "trim" system, normally used to maintain level flight. The first time the MCAS software kicked in, the Ethiopian Airlines pilots quickly countered the movement by flicking switches under their thumbs - they had recognized the movements as the same type all flight crews had been warned about after the Lion Air flight.

Safety officials say aviation accidents are rarely pinned entirely on either pilots or their technology, and a timeline showed the crew fully engaged in trying to save the aircraft. But data suggests they did not hold the buttons down long enough to fully counteract the computer's movements. At that point, they were a mere 3,000 feet above the airport, so low that a new warning - a computerized voice saying "don't sink" - sounded in the cabin.

wealth and power, including soft power - also increasingly lonely, overwhelmed and beset by internal rifts," she said, adding it risked being shaped by events, competitors and adversaries. In its one-month presidency of the UN Security Council which started on Monday, the spotlight will be on Germany if any Security Council response is needed to global crises. But with the legacy of the Nazi era and World War Two still weighing on it, Germany is wary of being seen as too assertive on the world stage. As it struggles to find a role to match its economic might, its foreign policy is deeply embedded in international bodies such as the EU, NATO and United Nations.

Credibility at stake

So why, ask critics, did SPD Finance Minister Olaf Scholz last month announce plans which mean Germany will fall even shorter of a NATO goal of spending 2 percent of economic output on defence in coming years than it was previously going to? Having previously said it would reach 1.5 percent by 2024, Scholz's plans now see a decrease to 1.25 percent of gross domestic product by 2023. "It doesn't serve German credibility if we start questioning the goal of 1.5 percent by 2024 after committing to the 2 percent goal in 2014," said Roderich Kiesewetter, a senior lawmaker in Merkel's conservative party.

It gives ammunition to Trump, who singles out Germany for "not paying its fair share". US Vice President Mike Pence said this week Germany was a top offender, pointing out it had for generations benefited from US protection of Europe. "Whether Scholz is pandering to his own pacifist wing of his party or its anti-Americanism base, or has his sights on the chancellery, Germany's credibility inside NATO is being dented," wrote Judy Dempsey, a senior fellow at Carnegie Europe.

The government insists it is committed to the 2024 goal. Maas says Germany has raised defense spending by nearly 40 percent since 2014 and the defense budget will continue to rise - but the debate exposes a classic German dilemma. "After World War Two and the Nazi era, it's in our political DNA that military solutions are almost never the answer, rather political solutions," said senior SPD lawmaker Thomas Oppermann. Another major driving force is business. Berlin has long sought to protect its powerful car industry from EU attempts to curb emissions and has also dug in its heels in over a pipeline that will secure supplies of Russian gas needed by German industry - and bypass Ukraine. Brushing aside opposition from the United States, eastern European and Baltic states who warn that Europe will become over dependent on Russian energy, Merkel has let firms, including Uniper and BASF's Winterhall unit, push ahead with NordStream 2. Even after the EU imposed sanctions on Russia for annexing Crimea in 2014, Merkel insisted it was a commercial project and only last year acknowledged it had a political element and saw the need to reassure Ukraine on transit revenues. — Reuters

When MCAS triggered again, the jetliner's trim was set to push the nose down at almost the maximum level, while the control yoke noisily vibrated with another stall warning called a "stick shaker". This time, the pilots countered MCAS more effectively. But when they turned off the system - as they were instructed to do by Boeing and the US Federal Aviation Administration (FAA) in the wake of the Lion Air disaster - the nose was still pointed downward, leaving the jetliner vulnerable. The combination of excess speed and cutting off the system while the plane was still leaning downwards meant up to 50 pounds of force would be needed to move the control column, and moving the manual trim wheels was impossible.

'Pull up, pull up'

The captain called out "pull up" three times. The co-pilot reported problems to air traffic control. In the meantime, the aircraft's speed remained abnormally high. The bird strike and loss of airflow data would have affected airspeed information too. In such cases, pilots know to turn off automatic engine settings and control thrust manually. But the report says "the throttles did not move", without elaborating. Data confirms the engines stayed at nearly full power. Other 737 pilots say that made the crew's job tougher by making the controls much harder to move.

"You would never ever have full power for the whole flight," said Hart Langer, a veteran former senior vice president for flight operations at United Airlines. He and some other experienced pilots said there was an array of stressful factors sapping the pilots' attention, which Muilenburg addressed on Thursday. "As pilots have told us, erroneous activation of the MCAS function can add to what is already a high-workload environment," Muilenburg said. "It's our responsibility to eliminate this risk. We own it and we know how to do it." — AFP

Lula fights for freedom as he marks year in jail

Since entering prison a year ago, Brazil's former president Luiz Inacio Lula da Silva has been spending his days working out in his cell and fighting to prove his innocence. The 73-year-old leftist icon, who has been sentenced to 25 years behind bars in two separate corruption cases, remains determined to challenge the "injustices" he has suffered, said Gleisi Hoffmann, head of the Workers Party that Lula founded. "From the political point of view... he remains strong," Hoffmann said as Lula prepares to mark one year in jail in the southern city of Curitiba on Sunday.

Lula has denied all the charges against him, claiming they were politically motivated with the aim of preventing him competing in elections last year that were won by Brazil's new far-right President Jair Bolsonaro. During his election campaign, Bolsonaro said he hoped Lula would "rot in prison". Lula has been allowed to leave jail twice in the past 12 months - once for the funeral of his seven-year-old grandson, whose death Hoffmann said had left the former president "shattered, very sad". The other time was to give evidence in court.

Lula, who served two terms as head of state between 2003 and 2010, also spends time reading and writing letters that his party publishes, and watching his beloved Corinthians football team from Sao Paulo on television. But the news brought to him by his lawyers on their daily visits could not be worse. Everything they have tried so far to free the popular leftist leader has failed.

On Thursday, Lula suffered another setback when the Supreme Court indefinitely delayed debate on whether a prisoner convicted of a non-violent crime should be released before the end of their appeals process, which could have potentially freed him. Lula is running out of options. He is awaiting the outcome of a second appeal to review his first conviction on bribery and money laundering charges, which put him jail in the first place for just over 12 years.

But Silvana Batini, a prosecutor and law professor at the Getulio Vargas Foundation, said his chances of success were slim. "The rates of alteration and reviews of convictions are low, statistically speaking," said Batini. — AFP

Business

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ISTANBUL: Passengers check-in at the new "Istanbul Airport" on the first day after it moved from Ataturk International airport yesterday.—AFP

Last flight leaves Istanbul's Ataturk Airport

Turkish Airlines aims to spread its wings at Istanbul's giant new airport

ISTANBUL: The last commercial passenger flight took off from Istanbul's Ataturk airport yesterday and convoys of trucks ferried thousands of tons of equipment across the city to a giant new airport which Turkey plans to make the biggest in the world.

The mammoth transfer between the two hubs, described by Turkish authorities as unprecedented in scale and speed, was already largely complete a little more than 24 hours after it began before dawn on Friday. The new Istanbul Airport, costing some \$8 billion and one of several mega-projects championed by President Tayyip Erdogan, will initially be able to handle 90 million passengers a year, close to the world's largest existing airport capacity.

Authorities plan to expand that capacity to expand to 200 million. Overnight hundreds of trucks carried equipment such as aircraft-towing vehicles and security sensors from Ataturk, on the shores of the Sea of Marmara, 20 miles (30 km) north to the new airport by the Black Sea.

By early yesterday more than 90 percent of the move was complete, Turkish Airlines executive Yahya Ustun said. Overnight the final commercial passenger flight from

Ataturk took off for Singapore, a departure which Transport Minister Mehmet Turhan described as historic.

"I am glad to send you off as the last commercial passengers of Ataturk Airport," he said moments before the plane took off at 2.44 am (2344 GMT). "Upon your return, you will land in Istanbul Airport, a monument of victory, the world's biggest airport."

The new airport, which was formally opened nearly six months ago but which has been handling less than 20 flights a day, inaugurated its new chapter yesterday afternoon with a domestic flight taking off for the capital Ankara. After three false starts and a labor protest over harsh working conditions, Turkey will fully open a new airport in Istanbul this week that will give its fast-growing flagship airline a platform to challenge Gulf rivals for regional dominance. Authorities plan to shift flights from the city's Ataturk Airport, on the edge of the Sea of Marmara, to the new airport 30 km (20 miles) north on the Black Sea shores, in a mammoth 45-hour transfer operation starting on Friday. The \$8 billion airport is one of several infrastructure mega-projects championed by President Tayyip Erdogan and will ini-

tially be able to handle 90 million passengers a year, a number which Turkey hopes to more than double by 2027.

That would make it the biggest in the world, measured against current airport operations globally.

"Istanbul Airport will rise to second place in terms of passenger numbers it serves in around five years," Transport Minister Cahit Turhan told reporters in the gleaming departure hall. "When all phases are complete, Istanbul Airport will sit in the leader's chair."

The airport is supposed to be fully operational today after authorities transport 10,000 pieces of equipment, from massive aircraft-towing vehicles to sensitive security sensors, across the city in a complex two-day operation, after which Ataturk Airport will close for passenger flights.

The move should support Turkey's ambition to make Istanbul a global aviation hub and will offer Turkish Airlines a chance to grow beyond the restrictions of Ataturk airport's limited size. After 15 years of rapid growth, the airline flies to more countries than any competitor, helped by its Istanbul base which is close to European, African and Middle Eastern destinations. That location means many cities are within a 4-5 hour flight radius which can be flown by fuel-efficient, narrow-bodied planes. The relatively low costs helped deliver profit last year of 4.05 billion lira (\$716 million).

With more slots available, the airline plans to increase its total fleet from 338 aircraft to 476 over the next four years, and analysts say it will challenge the three big regional competitors: Emirates, Qatar Airways and Etihad.

"It puts them on a level playing field with the Gulf carriers," aviation expert John Strickland said.

However there are potential risks ahead. The airport is opening just as years of strong economic growth are grinding to a halt in Turkey, and any weakness in the domestic market could prove a drag on Turkish Airlines' business.

'Huge threat'

Istanbul's opening comes a decade ahead of the expansion of Dubai's Al-Maktoum International Airport to handle 130 million passengers a year, which has been pushed back to 2030. Dubai-based Emirates will one day shift to the airport, which ultimately aims to be able to handle 260 million passengers a year. For now, Dubai plans to focus on Emirates' current hub Dubai International, which handled nearly 90 million passengers in 2018. The Gulf airlines already face testing times. Qatar Airways said last month it

would report a second consecutive annual loss this year, after losing access to 18 Middle East destinations over a dispute with Gulf neighbors. Emirates warned in November of tough times after first-half profit fell to its lowest in a decade, and Abu Dhabi has abandoned its goal of becoming a major air travel hub akin to Dubai.

Turkey's aviation sector has become a "huge threat" to Gulf airlines, a senior executive at one Middle Eastern airport said, and also to rivals in Asia and Europe. That includes Frankfurt Airport, one analyst said. It is the hub of Lufthansa, one of Europe's largest airlines, and handled 69.5 million passengers last year. It is a roughly three-hour flight from Istanbul, slightly closer than the Gulf.

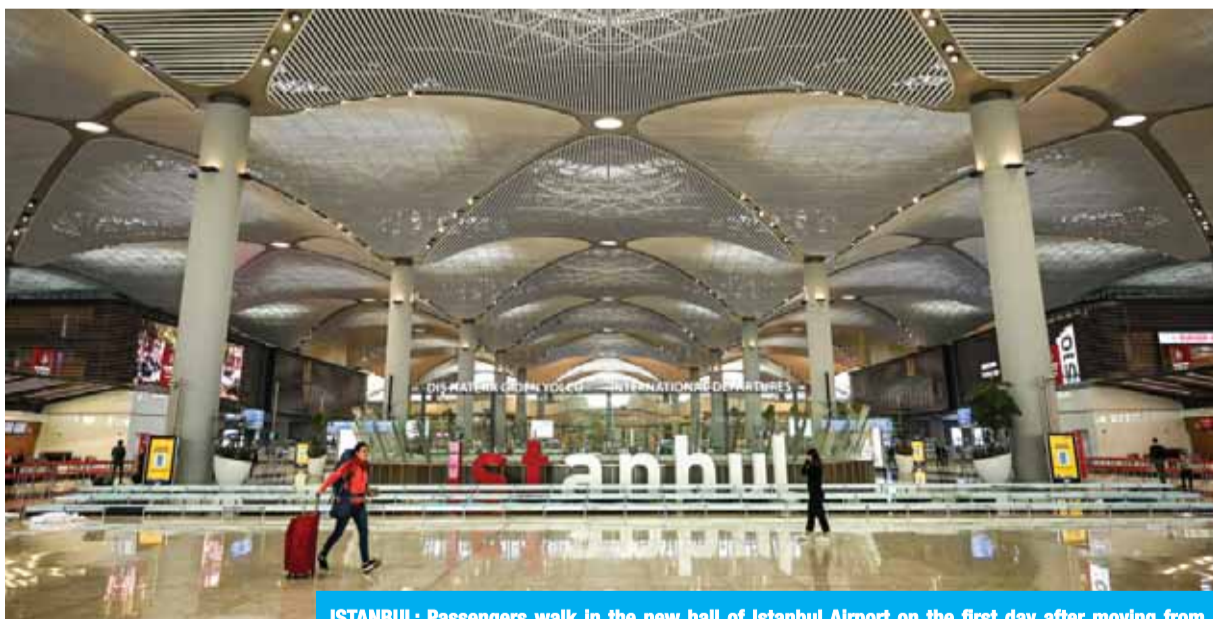
Turkish Airlines is not the only emerging rival. Ethiopia overtook Dubai last year as a conduit for long-haul passengers to Africa, highlighting the success of the state airline's drive to win back market share on routes to and from Africa which had been dominated by Turkish Airlines and Emirates. Turkish Airlines has targeted fast-growing Asian economies, signing a code share agreement with India's largest domestic carrier Indigo on December, and setting up a joint venture with China's ZTO to extend its cargo operations. "The upside of the new airport ... is its potential to tap Chinese, Indian and other emerging Asian markets," said Erdem Kayli, senior analyst at TEB Investment/BNP Paribas.

Political risks

The project has been plagued by delays and a protest last year over conditions for workers, after the government said 27 workers had died since construction started in 2015. Full operations at the new airport have already been held up three times. Formally opened by Erdogan in October, it has handled fewer than 20 daily flights as the full opening was pushed back first to January, then March and now April.

The opening comes at a time when Turkey's ties with the United States and Europe have frequently been strained. This presents another potential risk for Turkish Airlines - as Qatar's dispute with other Arab states has shown, politics can damage a country's carrier.

"There is uncertainty about Turkey's relationships with other parts of the world, not least the United States," Strickland said. "That gives uncertainty." The airport is one of the showcase projects of a 16-year construction boom under Erdogan, who has overseen the building of bridges, ports and railways that have transformed the country.—Reuters



ISTANBUL: Passengers walk in the new hall of Istanbul Airport on the first day after moving from Ataturk International airport yesterday in Istanbul.—AFP

World Bank board elects Malpass as next president

WASHINGTON: David Malpass, US President Donald Trump's nominee to lead the World Bank, won unanimous approval from the institution's executive board on Friday, continuing the 73-year tradition of an American running the world's largest development lender.

The bank said that Malpass, the US Treasury's undersecretary for international affairs, will start his new role on Tuesday as the World Bank and International Monetary Fund Spring Meetings get underway. Malpass, a former Bear Stearns and Co chief economist who advised Trump's 2016 election campaign, was the sole candidate. Previous

World Bank President Jim Yong Kim, who left in January to join a private infrastructure fund, faced two challengers, from Nigeria and Colombia, in 2012 when he was first selected.

This time around, bank board members had said there was little appetite for a challenge to a US candidate from developed economies such as Europe and Japan, and from larger emerging markets such as China and Brazil. In a phone interview with Reuters, Malpass said he would uphold the bank's commitment to reducing poverty in the poorest countries and to fight climate change, and pursue goals stated in a \$13 billion capital increase last year.

In an email to World Bank employees, Malpass emphasized the need to fight extreme poverty and "foster broad based growth for each and every borrower, and a stronger, more stable global economy for all." Since taking his job at the Treasury in 2017, Malpass had been critical of the World Bank's continued lending to China, arguing that the world's second-largest economy was too wealthy for such aid while

it was loading up some countries with unsustainable debt from its Belt and Road infrastructure program.

Those comments and Malpass' role in US-China trade negotiations caused some concern in the development community that he might try to use the bank's influence to put pressure on China.

But Malpass told Reuters that he foresees an "evolution" of the bank's relationship with China "toward one which recognizes China as the world's second-biggest economy and an important factor in global development. I expect there to be a strong relationship collaboration with China. We have a shared mission of poverty alleviation and reduction."

Malpass said he did not participate in this week's US-China trade talks and is winding down his role at the Treasury. He said he intends to make his first trip as World Bank president in late April to Africa.

World Bank Chief Executive Officer Kristalina Georgieva will attend China's second Belt and Road Forum on April 26-27, not Malpass.—Reuters



In this file photo, David Malpass speaks after US President Donald Trump announced his candidacy to lead the World Bank during an event in the Roosevelt Room of the White House in Washington, DC.—AFP

Business

Kuwait's solar energy drive moving fast: Industry experts

Global Platform interviews highlight latest developments in energy sector

KUWAIT: Kuwait's plans for increasing the contribution made by renewables to the energy mix and boosting output at its refineries were among the topics explored by five industry experts in comments they gave to Oxford Business Group's online broadcasting channel, Global Platform.

Khalid Abul, Team Leader, Major Project (I), KOC, told viewers that although the country had maintained its capital projects in recent years, the climate of fluctuating global oil prices had contributed to the decision to diversify the energy mix.

"It broadens the ideas, the expansions and the vision of the oil sector to invest in other, diversified options," he said. The drive to develop the solar segment is now accelerating, in line with Kuwait's target of obtaining 15 percent of its energy needs from renewables by 2030, according to Khaled Al-Mazeedi, Team

leader, Research and Technology, KPC.

"In terms of solar energy, we started late, but we are moving fast," he noted. The Al-Dibdibah Solar Park project is central to Kuwait's plans to harness the sun's energy; slated to be commissioned in early 2021, the plant will have the capacity to produce 1.5GW of power, making it one of the biggest projects of its kind in the world.

Mesha Al-Saeidi, Team Leader, Projects, KNPC, told Global Platform that the project will offer opportunities for both foreign investors and local manufacturers in areas such as the supply of materials and technology.

"It will consist of five solar generating units, with each estimated to generate 300 MW," he explained. "The main objective of the project is to generate 3150 GWh (GigaWatt hour) at the year 25 after commission-



ing. It's a unique model and we are really confident that the project will meet the objective."

The country's efforts to take its oil and gas industry to the next level are also gaining pace, according to Fatemah Al-Sori, Senior Controller, External Communication, KNPC. "Kuwait's refineries are being updated," she said. "Building up new units will help in reaching the capacity that we are aiming for in the future."

She added that training the next generation of Kuwaitis was seen as a key part of the country remained at the forefront of the industry in the future, a

view shared by Sahar Al-Awadhi, Team Leader, Strategic Planning, KPC. "Implementing and maintaining the world-class standards for operational excellence, to achieve sustainable leadership in oil and gas industry, is one of the KPC's common 2040 strategy directions," she told Global Platform.

Marc-André de Blois, OBG's Director of PR and Video Content, said that the collection of interviews showed that Kuwait's commitment to diversifying its energy mix and modernizing the refining segment were well on track. "Investors will be particularly keen to hear about the openings that the country's still nascent renewables segment looks set to produce in areas such as the application of systems and various technologies," he said. "I'm delighted that we've been able to share these and other significant industry developments with viewers."

US employment report points to growing economy, tame inflation

WASHINGTON: US employment growth accelerated from a 17-month low in March, assuaging fears of an abrupt slowdown in economic activity, but a moderation in wage gains supported the Federal Reserve's decision to suspend further interest rate increases this year.

Milder weather boosted hiring in sectors like construction, but worsening worker shortages and lingering effects of tighter financial market conditions at the turn of the year left job growth below 2018's brisk pace. The Labor Department's closely watched employment report on Friday also showed a small upward revision to February's meager job gains.

"This was a Goldilocks report, with a rebound in job growth to calm fears of an imminent recession, and wage growth that was solid enough without triggering inflationary concerns," said Curt Long, chief economist at the National Association of Federally-Insured Credit Unions. "The Fed will be pleased, as it supports their present stance of holding firm on rates."

The US central bank last month halted its three-year campaign to tighten monetary policy, dropping projections for any rate hikes this year after lifting borrowing costs four times in 2018. Nonfarm payrolls rose by 196,000 jobs in March. Data

for February was revised modestly up to show 33,000 jobs created instead of the previously reported 20,000. February job gains were the smallest since September 2017.

The economy has shifted into lower gear as stimulus from the Trump administration's \$1.5 trillion tax cut package as well as increased government spending fades. A trade war between Washington and Beijing, and slowing global growth have also taken a toll on the economy, which in July will celebrate 10 years of expansion, the longest on record. President Donald Trump has boasted about the economy, especially the labor market, as being one of the big wins of his first term in office. Sluggish growth, if it persists, could pose a challenge to Trump's re-election hopes next year.

Trump, who has blamed the Fed's relatively tighter monetary policy for the slowdown in economic activity, on Friday urged the central bank to cut interest rates.

"I think they should drop rates," Trump told reporters. "I think they really slowed us down."

Economists polled by Reuters had forecast payrolls increasing by 180,000 jobs last month. The pickup in job growth helped to boost US stocks. The dollar rose



MIAMI: Josey Montijo (right), from the People Ready company, speaks with Shawn Williams (left) and Diamond Smith about available job openings during a job fair put on by Miami-Dade County and other sponsors on Friday in Miami, Florida. — AFP

marginally against a basket of currencies, while US Treasury prices were mixed.

The employment report added to fairly upbeat construction spending and factory data that led Wall Street banks to boost their growth estimates for the first quarter.

Growth forecasts for the first quarter are between a 1.4 percent and 2.1 percent annualized rate. The economy grew at a 2.2 percent rate in the fourth quarter, stepping down from the July-September quarter's brisk 3.4 percent pace.

Wage gains slow

Average hourly earnings increased by 0.1 percent in March after jumping 0.4 percent in February. That lowered the

annual increase in wages to 3.2 percent from 3.4 percent in February, which was the biggest gain since April 2009. The length of the average workweek rose to 34.5 hours from 34.4 hours in February. As a result of the rebound in employment, modest wage gains and more hours worked, the aggregate weekly payrolls index, a proxy for take-home wages, increased 0.5 percent last month, which bodes well for consumer spending after it stalled in January.

"The first quarter has been challenging, but the economy has better momentum entering the second quarter," said Roiana Reid, an economist at Berenberg Capital Markets in New York. — Reuters

Indian oil giant briefly halts fuel to beleaguered Jet Airways

MUMBAI: India's largest commercial oil company briefly stopped supplying fuel to Jet Airways on Friday, in a sign that the woes of the beleaguered carrier are far from over. The Indian Oil Corporation (IOC) halted supplies to the debt-addled airline at noon on Friday for not meeting payments, an IOC spokesperson told AFP.

"If there is some payment made by Jet, we will resume our refuelling services," they said. Later the spokesperson said that deliveries had resumed, but declined to comment on whether Jet had made any payments. Jet has debts of more than \$1 billion and has been forced to ground the majority of its fleet as it struggles to pay

aircraft lessors and staff.

Thousands of customers have been stranded in recent weeks after hundreds of flights were cancelled, in some cases with little or no notice.

The Mumbai-based airline, which was until recently India's second-biggest by market share, has also defaulted on several loan payments. It was not immediately clear how dependent Jet is on the IOC for fuel but analysts said the move could signal the start of the end game for Jet.

"You can be rest assured that everyone else will follow. If that happens Jet Airways is finished," Devesh Agarwal, editor of the Bangalore Aviation website told AFP. Jet Airways was not immediately available for comment. Last month creditors injected \$218 million of "immediate funding support" into Jet as part of a debt resolution plan. The move saw a consortium of lenders, led by the State Bank of India, take control of the struggling airline from founder Naresh Goyal, who stepped down as chairman.

The consortium is starting a stake sale process on Saturday, giving prospective



bidders until Tuesday to submit expressions of interest for buying a stake. A collapse would deal a blow to Prime Minister Narendra Modi's pragmatic pro-business reputation ahead of elections starting on Thursday. Alarm bells for Jet first rang in August when it failed to report its quarterly earnings or pay staff, including pilots. It later reported a loss of \$85 million.

In February, it secured a \$1.19 billion

bailout from lenders including the State Bank of India to bridge a funding gap, but its crisis has deepened. On Monday it announced that another 15 aircraft had been grounded due to non-payment. Jet is currently operating just 26 planes from its 119-aircraft fleet. The carrier has been badly hit by fluctuating global crude prices and a weak rupee, as well as fierce competition from budget rivals. — Reuters

Wall St Week Ahead

Big banks to report Q1 results with lowered expectations

NEW YORK: Investors will focus on falling profits, a more dovish Federal Reserve and lower interest rates as major US banks kick off what analysts expect to be the first quarter of contracting corporate earnings since 2016. On Friday, April 12, JPMorgan Chase & Co and Wells Fargo & Co will post results to begin the earnings season in earnest. Citigroup Inc and Goldman Sachs Group Inc will report the following Monday, followed by Bank of America Corp and Morgan Stanley on Tuesday.

In the wake of the Federal Reserve's cautious shift due to signs of softness in the US economy and the subsequent drop in 10-year Treasury yields, S&P 500 banks are seen posting year-on-year first-quarter earnings growth of 2.3 percent, down from 8.2 percent forecast six months ago, according to Refinitiv data.

"The Fed pivoted so abruptly, which gives one pause about what they're saying about the economy," said Chuck Carlson, chief executive officer at Horizon Investment Services in Hammond, Indiana. "Flat to falling interest rates are not good news for bank interest margins. It's not surprising that analysts are taking down earnings estimates."

The central bank's change in tack put the brakes on what had been a pattern of quarterly rate hikes, amid signs of slowing economic growth. Slowdown jitters have also hit 10-year Treasury yields. The benchmark bond's yield hit a 15-month low in the first quarter, flattening the yield curve and narrowing the gap between the interest banks pay depositors and the interest they charge consumers, which is bad news for profits. "That's why the estimates are going down," Carlson added. "Analysts are fearful of interest margins for banks and there's an underlying concern about loan growth." In the first three months of the year, the S&P 500 bounced back from a sell-off in December, gaining 13.1 percent, its biggest quarterly increase since 2009. But financials underperformed the wider market, gaining 7.9 percent in the quarter as the new low-interest-rate normal that boosted other sectors was a headwind for banks.

Since October, analysts have drastically lowered their expectations for S&P 500 earnings in 2019, with first-quarter estimates dropping from 8.1 percent growth to a year-over-year decline of 2.2 percent. That would mark the first quarter of negative growth since the earnings "recession" that ended in 2016. — Reuters

EXCHANGE RATES

AL-MUZAINI EXCHANGE CO.

EUROPEAN & AMERICAN COUNTRIES

US Dollar Transfer	305.100
Euro	344.460
Sterling Pound	403.040
Canadian dollar	230.260
Turkish Lira	56.190
Swiss Franc	307.410
US Dollar Buying	303.900

ASIAN COUNTRIES

Japanese Yen	2.738
Indian Rupees	4.454
Pakistani Rupees	2.198
Sri Lankan Rupees	1.743
Nepali Rupees	2.772
Singapore Dollar	226.340
Hongkong Dollar	38.869
Bangladesh Taka	3.605
Philippine Peso	5.855
Thai Baht	9.650
Malaysian ringgit	78.031

GCC COUNTRIES

Saudi Riyal	81.414
Qatari Riyal	83.853
Omani Riyal	792.982
Bahraini Dinar	810.680
UAE Dirham	83.122

ARAB COUNTRIES

Egyptian Pound - Cash	20.700
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Egyptian Pound - Transfer	17.588
Yemen Riyal/for 1000	1.225
Tunisian Dinar	105.210
Jordanian Dinar	431.050
Lebanese Lira/for 1000	2.34
Syrian Lira	0.000
Morocco Dirham	32.423

DOLLARCO EXCHANGE CO. LTD

Rate for Transfer

Rate for Transfer	Selling Rate
US Dollar	304.740
Canadian Dollar	228.945
Sterling Pound	403.835
Euro	345.110
Swiss Frank	306.710
Bahrain Dinar	810.415
UAE Dirhams	83.370
Qatari Riyals	84.610
Saudi Riyals	82.160
Jordanian Dinar	431.105
Egyptian Pound	17.622
Sri Lankan Rupees	1.745
Indian Rupees	4.456
Pakistani Rupees	2.157
Bangladesh Taka	3.621
Philippines Peso	5.855
Cyprus pound	18.130
Japanese Yen	3.735
Syrian Pound	1.595
Nepalese Rupees	2.782
Malaysian Ringgit	75.595
Chinese Yuan Renminbi	45.860

Thai Bhat	10.576
Turkish Lira	54.465
Singapore dollars	225.437

BAHRAIN EXCHANGE COMPANY WLL

CURRENCY BUY SELL

CURRENCY	BUY	SELL
British Pound	0.391594	0.405494
Czech Korune	0.005366	0.014666
Danish Krone	0.041861	0.046861
Euro	0.335602	0.349302
Georgian Lari	0.132348	0.132348
Hungarian	0.001150	0.001340
Norwegian Krone	0.031464	0.036664
Romanian Leu	0.065420	0.082270
Russian ruble	0.004698	0.004698
Slovakia	0.009132	0.019132
Slovenia	0.028881	0.033881
Swedish Krona	0.298857	0.309857
Swiss Franc		
Australasia		
Australian Dollar	0.209189	0.221189
New Zealand Dollar	0.199622	0.209122
America		
0.222674		0.231674
0.301000		0.306300
0.301500		0.306300
Asia		
0.003061		0.003862
Bangladesh Taka		

Chinese Yuan	0.043933	0.047433
Hong Kong Dollar	0.037126	0.039876
Indian Rupee	0.003776	0.004548
Indonesian Rupiah	0.000017	0.000023
Japanese Yen	0.002648	0.002828
Korean Won	0.000258	0.000273
Malaysian Ringgit	0.070883	0.076883
Nepalese Rupee	0.002685	0.003025
Pakistan Rupee	0.001543	0.002313
Philippine Peso	0.005797	0.006097
Singapore Dollar	0.219996	0.229998
Sri Lankan Rupee	0.001367	0.001947
Taiwan	0.010184	0.010364
Thai Baht	0.009257	0.009807
Vietnamese Dong	0.00013	0.00013

Arab		
Bahraini Dinar	0.794713	0.811213
Egyptian Pound	0.017769	0.020369
Iranian Riyal	0.000084	0.000086
Iraqi Dinar	0.000210	0.000270
Jordanian Dinar	0.425422	0.434422
Kuwaiti Dinar	1.000000	1.000000
Lebanese Pound	0.000157	0.000257
Moroccan Dirhams	0.021451	0.045451
Omani Riyal	0.786149	0.791829
Qatar Riyal	0.079513	0.084453
Saudi Riyal	0.080273	0.081573
Syrian Pound	0.001294	0.001514
Tunisian Dinar	0.096806	0.104806
Turkish Lira	0.048345	0.059845
UAE Dirhams	0.081643	0.083343
Yemeni Riyal	0.000992	0.001072

Business

Another make-or-break week for Europe as Brexit summit looms

Global trade tensions weighing heavily

FRANKFURT: Europe is facing yet another make-or-break week. With an emergency EU summit over Brexit and an ECB policy meeting on the agenda, officials will be under pressure to take decisive steps to soothe concerns ahead of a set-piece gathering of the global financial elite in Washington.

But the temptation will be great to stick with the bloc's rich tradition of just kicking the can down the road. The deadline for Britain to leave the EU, seen as set in stone just days ago, is again in flux as both sides are openly discussing an extension, even if that means Britain must cross another red line by participating in May's European elections. The apparent softening of British Prime Minister Theresa May's position suggests the end game is far from imminent. Another EU summit muddle would, however, keep economic uncertainty at fever pitch, weighing on sentiment that is already dragging down growth across Europe and raising recession fears.

A long extension - and taking part in EU elections - also carries the risk of a Conservative Party mutiny, which could force an already weakened May out. "Such leadership changes are always unpredictable and, in this instance

could be brutal, with more centrist elements of the party struggling against a membership whose views on Brexit are increasingly hardline," JP Morgan economic Malcolm Barr said. But blurring the red lines suggests Britain is keen to avoid the most damaging of all outcomes - a hard Brexit. For the EU, a longer extension also carries the benefit that Britain's departure would not occur during the crucial month of the election campaign, which will determine who leads both the EU and, after Mario Draghi's term ends this autumn, the European Central Bank.

Taking a hard Brexit off the table would also allow British officials to put on a brave face at the IMF's spring meeting in Washington starting on Friday, letting the gathering focus on broader trade issues.

Narrow path

Still, the delay solves little in itself. Any concession by May to win votes on a deal from Britain's opposition Labor Party is likely to lose her Conservative MPs.

That suggests the path to any majority outcome is quite narrow, keeping the chance of an eventual no-deal Brexit uncomfortably high. "Despite the switch to a cross-

party approach, the risk of an election remains high because the path towards a successful 'meaningful vote' is treacherous, due to the deep divisions within both parties," Andrew Goodwin at Oxford Economics said. The cost of the Brexit saga is already tangible for the EU.

Global trade tensions are weighing even more heavily, and the steady flow of bad news is keeping investment and business sentiment in a negative spiral, depressing growth for the third straight quarter. The ECB, the bloc's first port of call in case of growth weakness, has already eased policy, exhausting much of its firepower during years of crisis fighting. More generally, central banks lack potent tools to offset imported economic troubles.

Having already delayed a rate hike, the ECB will sit on the sidelines for now, while economists expect more easing later in the year.

"Since the main refinancing rate is already at zero percent, such easing is likely to amount to further unconventional measures," Commerzbank said. "We therefore expect the ECB to decide in the autumn ...to postpone unchanged key rates ...until the end of 2020," it added. — Reuters



BUCHAREST: UK's Philip Hammond, Chancellor of the Exchequer arrives at the informal meeting of the Eurogroup gathering EU Finance ministers on Friday at the Palace of the Parliament in Bucharest. — AFP



SEOUL: Cars by German auto-maker BMW are displayed at the Seoul Motor Show in Goyang, northwest of Seoul. — AFP

EU accuses BMW, Daimler and VW of breaking antitrust rules

BRUSSELS: The European Union warned German car giants BMW, Daimler and Volkswagen on Friday that a preliminary inquiry has concluded they colluded to avoid competing on emission control technology.

Already reeling in the wake of the devastating "dieselgate" emissions cheating scandal that broke in 2015, the German carmakers will have to respond to the EU's findings, which could result in stiff penalties if the European Commission decides to pursue a cartel case against them.

A BMW statement said it would earmark a sum "which is likely to exceed one billion euros" (\$1.12 billion) against potential fines, while adding that it "will contest the EU Commission's allegations with all legal means if necessary."

Volkswagen's admission to manipulating 11 million vehicles worldwide to appear less polluting unleashed a wave of anger at the auto industry, and the Commission launched an in-depth cartel investigation into the three companies. On Thursday the Commission said it has concluded that BMW, Daimler and the VW group - Volkswagen, Audi and Porsche - held so-called "circle of five" meetings to rig competition in emissions technology.

"As a result, European consumers may have been denied the opportunity to buy cars with the best available technology. The three manufacturers now have an opportunity to respond to our findings," EU competition commissioner Margrethe Vestager said.

The meetings allowed them to limit the introduction of "AdBlue" or urea to diesel engine exhaust gases, reducing its effectiveness as a way to produce cleaner emissions, the statement said.

The firms also "in the Commission's preliminary view" - colluded to avoid or delay introducing filters that reduce harmful particles in petrol exhaust fumes. The findings form the basis of a "statement of objections" to which the firms will have a chance to respond before the Commission decides whether to pursue a case under competition rules banning cartel agreements.

Hefty fines

If the Commission finds there is sufficient evidence of an infringement, "it can adopt a decision prohibiting the conduct and imposing a fine of up to 10 percent of a company's annual worldwide turnover." A VW spokesman confirmed to AFP that the German automaker had received the report and would "examine the complaints and issue a statement after evaluating the investigation file as part of its cooperation".

BMW also said it would examine the "statement of objections", adding that it "regards these proceedings as an attempt to equate permissible coordination of industry positions regarding the regulatory framework with unlawful cartel agreements".

A spokeswoman from Daimler, which makes Mercedes-Benz cars, told AFP the firm was aware of the report but had already been cooperating with investigators and "does not expect to receive a fine in this matter". The Commission's statement said the investigation was "limited to an alleged violation of competition law" and is "not about possible breaches of environmental legislation".

It emphasized the investigation was also separate from other continuing probes, including those "into car manu-

facturers and the use of illegal defeat devices to cheat regulatory testing" in the dieselgate scandal. The Commission can impose heavy fine on companies that make agreements among themselves to the detriment of customers, while those that come forward and disclose cartels often get off without a fine.

Its biggest-ever fine of 2.93 billion euros was handed to Europe's top truckmakers-including Daimler-in 2016 for colluding over 14 years to fix prices and dodge the costs of stricter pollution rules. — AFP

Trump urges Fed to lower US interest rates

WASHINGTON/NEW YORK: President Donald Trump said on Friday the US Federal Reserve should lower interest rates and take other unconventional measures to ease pressure on an economy that he said they slowed down. "I think they should drop rates," Trump told reporters. "I think they really slowed us down. There's no inflation."

The U.S. president also suggested that the central bank pursue an unconventional monetary policy called "quantitative easing" that was used to nurse the economy back after the global financial crisis. The technique used from 2008 to 2014 involved buying trillions of government-sponsored bonds.

"It should actually now be quantitative easing," Trump said. Trump's repeated public attacks on Fed policy and his intention to nominate two political allies to the central bank's board of governors has led some analysts to see the economic policymaker's cherished independence as under attack. The White House has said it does not wish to undermine the central bank's independence.

The renewal of quantitative easing, Trump said, should be in addition to interest rate cuts - a likely worrying thought, at this point, for Fed officials who describe such a combination of tactics as only appropriate in a dire downturn. On Thursday, Trump said he plans to nominate his political ally Herman Cain, the former head of Godfather's Pizza, to one of two vacancies on the Fed's seven-member Board of Governors. Cain runs a political fundraising group that has spent more than half its money supporting Trump's reelection. Two weeks ago, Trump said he would nominate conservative economic commentator Stephen Moore to the other vacant seat on the Fed's board. Moore is also a longtime Trump ally who has joined him in criticizing last year's rate hikes.

The president's top economic adviser, Larry Kudlow, told Bloomberg News that both potential nominees share the view that strong growth does not necessarily cause inflation, which central bankers try to prevent by raising rates. Half a dozen Fed officials in recent days have touted the underlying strength of the American economy and argued a recent spate of weak data on business activity is more likely to prove fleeting than lasting. None said they currently back a rate cut and some have said rate hikes may eventually be necessary. — Reuters

US moves to cut off Venezuela oil, Cuba trade

WASHINGTON: The United States on Friday announced sanctions on ships of Venezuela's state oil company and companies that link it to key ally Cuba, hoping to cut off vital lifelines for President Nicolas Maduro. Vice President Mike Pence unveiled the latest measures in Washington's bid to oust Maduro, a leftist firebrand who has nonetheless held on to power for more than two months, and vowed further pressure on Cuba - a bugbear of the United States for a half-century.

"Venezuela's oil belongs to the Venezuelan people," Pence said in a speech at Rice University in Houston. "Those looking on should know this: All options are on the table. And Nicolas Maduro would do well not to test the resolve of the United States of America," he said.

"The United States will continue to exert all diplomatic and economic pressure to bring about a peaceful transition to democracy," he said.

The Treasury Department said it was designating 34 vessels of state oil company PDVSA as blocked property, meaning that the United States will prohibit all transactions with them.

It also targeted a tanker that ships crude oil from Venezuela to Cuba, the Despina Andrianna, as well as two

shipping companies that own or register the vessel. One is based in Liberia and the other in Greece, one of the sole Western nations that backs Maduro.

Pence also hinted that President Donald Trump's administration will take further action against Cuba as it considers allowing exiles to sue over property seized by the communist authorities.

"In the coming weeks, the United States will be taking even stronger action against Cuba. In this administration, I promise you, it will always be Que Viva Cuba Libre," he said, using the Spanish for "Long Live Free Cuba."

The push on Cuba is a sharp change from the previous administration of Barack Obama, who said that the long-time US effort to isolate the island had failed and re-established diplomatic relations.

A Trump administration official, speaking on condition of anonymity, said the United States estimated that Venezuela delivered 50,000 barrels a day to Cuba - a critical amount for the island, which in turn provides security, intelligence and other services for Maduro.

"By severely impacting the shipment of that oil and the ability to get that oil from Venezuela to Cuba, there is going to be a recalibration of that relationship. This is the first step in the pressure," the official said. But Maduro also still enjoys support from China, which has lent \$60 billion over the past decade to Venezuela, and Russia, which has sent military experts to Caracas and says the United States is attempting a coup.

The United States itself was a key market for Venezuelan oil through Citgo, a subsidiary of PDVSA, but Washington has forced the operator to place earnings in a blocked account. — AFP



Lulu Hypermarket felicitates winners of Food Carnival Competitions

KUWAIT: Lulu Hypermarket, the heavyweight among regional retailers, held a prize distribution ceremony on 4th April at their Al Rai outlet, to felicitate the winners of the various competitions that were organized during the 'Food Carnival 2019'. Top management at Lulu Hypermarket in Kuwait handed over the prizes in the presence of a large crowd of competition participants and shoppers.

The prize distribution ceremony saw winners of various competitions held during the 'Lulu Food Carnival', being rewarded with prizes and gift coupons. The Food Carnival, which took place from 27 March to 6 April, saw cookery competitions being held in different categories, such as Italian and Continental cuisine, Indian cuisine and Chinese cuisine, as well as in cooking desserts.

The first, second and third prize winners in each cat-

egory received gift vouchers worth KD 100, KD 75 and KD 50 respectively. In addition, prizes and gifts were presented to winners of various competitions, such as Junior Chef, Make and Eat, Kitchen Queen, Wow the Master Chef, and Taste and Win among others. Each participant who took part in the competitions was also acknowledged with consolation prizes.

Holding exciting competitions throughout the year as part of promotional campaigns, has allowed Lulu Hypermarket to constantly engage with their customers, and to reward them for their participation with amazing prizes and gifts. These customer-centric initiatives have endeared the hypermarket to shoppers in the country, who already enjoy the shopping experience at Lulu outlets for the value they deliver by providing high-quality products at very competitive prices.

Business

Eight in 10 professionals choose jobs based on management style

Bayt.com holds poll titled 'What Makes the Ideal Manager in the Middle East'

DUBAI: A new poll conducted by Bayt.com - the Middle East's #1 Job Site - titled What Makes the Ideal Manager in the Middle East, revealed that a whopping 81 percent of Middle East professionals choose jobs based on the company's management structure and style. Most respondents (80 percent) prefer working for a company with very clear organizational structure and reporting lines whilst only 16 percent prefer flexibility in management structure and style.

Although more than half of poll respondents believe that higher salary (51.3 percent) is more important than better management (12.7 percent), more than a third (34.9 percent) believe that both factors play an equal role in choosing a particular job.

Managers drive employee engagement

Given that higher employee engagement reaps rewards for the organization, it is clear that the role of a manager is highly essential. According to the Bayt.com poll respondents, the most important aspect of a manager's job is in fact "communicating vision and directing efforts" (80.3 percent),

followed by "assigning tasks and responsibilities" (10 percent), "handling more challenging projects" (5 percent) and "providing feedback and training" (3.2 percent).

When asked how to tell a good manager from a bad one during a job interview, respondents said it is based on their "communication and personality" (71 percent), and on the "questions and information shared" (17.7 percent). 7.4 percent said they can tell based on a manager's "knowledge and years of experience" while only 0.9 percent said they go with their "gut feeling".

The survey reveals that perceptions toward management are evolving. Most respondents (87.3 percent) believe that hierarchy in organizations is necessary for clarity, 8.8 percent think it may be essential in large organizations, while only 1 percent believe that hierarchical structures are unnecessary and slow things down.

"In addition to making online recruitment and job hunting more efficient and accessible to half of the region's online labor force, Bayt.com always sheds light on

the various factors that further enhance talent attraction and retention efforts", said Suhail Masri, VP of Employer Solutions at Bayt.com. "There is a direct link between a happy, engaged workforce and a successful business - a content workforce performs at a higher level than unhappy, disengaged employees. An employee's direct manager is always one of the biggest factors in how much they enjoy working for a company."

Managers' approach and character

Managing or leading people in a business requires a core set of management skills which require time and experience to develop. In the Bayt.com poll, the most important characteristic of a good manager was by far "communication and listening" (71.6 percent), followed by "decision-making" (13.6 percent), "technical skills and knowledge" (8 percent), "flexibility" (5.1 percent) and "empathy" (1.2 percent).

A substantial number of respondents (65.8 percent) believe that the manager's age matters to them as a professional whilst 32.2 percent do not have an opinion about



Suhail Masri

their manager's age group - 65.1 percent prefer having a manager who is closer to their age while only 3.9 percent prefer their manager to be much older.

It is imperative to develop a happy and trusting team to create a strong corporate culture. For managers, the development of

their employees doesn't stop with them, but expands in the valuable connections they make - the great majority (88.1 percent) of poll respondents says it is possible to foster a friendly relationship with their manager in the region as opposed to only 5.5 percent for whom it is not a possibility.

Strong managers focus on diagnosing individual employee needs and motivations - creating an environment that encourages transparency and skill sharing within their teams. When asked about their current or most recent manager, most professionals responded positively, describing their managers as "friendly and flexible" (86.2 percent) as well as "talented and knowledgeable" (87.3 percent).

Data for the Bayt.com's What Makes the Ideal Manager in the Middle East was collected online from November 21, 2018 to January 09, 2019. Results are based on a sample of 10,109 respondents. Countries assessed include UAE, KSA, Kuwait, Oman, Bahrain, Lebanon, Jordan, Iraq, Palestine, Syria, Egypt, Morocco, Algeria, Tunisia, Libya and others.

CBK outlines initiatives to digitize services

KUWAIT: The Diwaniyat Al-Yaqout & Al-Ansari radio program broadcast through Nabdh Al-Kuwait 88.8 radio station recently hosted the Commercial Bank of Kuwait, represented by the digital banking services manager, Khalil Al-Qattan who talked about the new digital services the banks offers.

Al-Qattan stressed that CBK has exerted considerable efforts to digitalize its services which was topped by the latest Tijari Pay service to transfer money amongst CBK clients using the Quick Response Code (QR) adding that on activating the service, a client receives his own QR code to use the service collect or pay money through the service.

On her part, CBK's individual banking services executive manager, Noura Kayed talked



about the 'Your Salary & More' campaign designed for Kuwaitis working in both the public and the private sector noting that the campaign would be on till December 31, 2019. On her part,

the individual banking services regional manager, Hanadi Al-Hunaidi talked about the privileges of Al-Najma account which provides the world's largest cash prize of KD 1.5 million.

Germans up in arms over 'rent insanity'

BERLIN: Michaela Franz initially thought she was spared sharp rent hikes when her new property owner scrapped plans to renovate the Berlin building she has lived in for a decade.

In fact, something worse was brewing. A few days later, she received a letter notifying her that her rental contract had been terminated and that she would have to move out by the end of May.

For the 58-year-old, the landlord's intention was clear: kick out long-time tenants and build new luxury apartments that fetch higher rents. Not only in Berlin, but across Germany, Franz's experience has been playing out. And the wave of gentrification and rising rents is provoking rising anger and leading some to even ponder radical solutions like expropriating housing from institutional landlords.

Tens of thousands of people are poised to join marches against "rental insanity" (Mietwahnsinn) yesterday in cities like Munich, Cologne and Frankfurt. The problem is most acute in the capital, where rents have doubled over the past decade, as Germany's booming job market attracts an influx of workers, putting pressure on the housing market.

Average rent prices in Berlin have pushed past 10 euros per square metre per month, according to a recent study by a real estate group CBRE Berlin and German mortgage bank Berlin Hyp AG. As property prices in Berlin traditionally lag behind those of major European capitals like Paris and London, investors have also swooped in, betting that the real estate boom was only just starting.

'Class struggle'

But a popular backlash appears to be growing, and organisers of an initiative to requisition housing from real estate groups will begin collecting signatures in their push for a referendum on the issue in Berlin. The campaign's spokesman Rouzbeh Taheri said the movement had radicalised as government measures to cool the property market have failed to work.

"Many say this is a type of class struggle. Yes that's what it is. But we did not start it. We're taking defensive measures against the class struggle from the top who has for years been fighting against tenants."

The "Expropriate Deutsche Wohnen & Co." initiative, named after the biggest private player in Berlin, targets companies with more than 3,000 apartments in their portfolios.

Of an estimated two million rental apartments in Berlin, Deutsche Wohnen owns 111,500, followed by Vonovia with 44,000.

Taheri argues that cutting them down to size



Tens of thousands of people are poised to join marches against Mietwahnsinn, or "rental insanity", in Germany yesterday. Housing rental prices have risen sharply in the country in recent years. — AFP

would strip them of the influence they wield in deciding market prices. "It's about sending a signal on which direction the city wants to go. And a signal to speculators-telling them that your capital is not safe in Berlin," said Taheri.

But critics question whether the private groups really wield that much influence. Calling the initiative "completely absurd", Harald Simons, an economist at Leipzig University, noted that 70 percent of rental apartments across Germany are owned by small landlords who each hold between two and 20 apartments.

Singling out the big groups would "mean that about five percent of Berlin tenants will suddenly not have to pay much while the rest would have to keep paying just as much," he said.

The extreme move could also scare off investors who want to move their businesses here and create new jobs, critics say. Further, taxpayers face a huge bill-Berlin authorities

have estimated the cost at 36 billion euros (\$40 billion).

"When people learn about how many billions this will cost, many would see this differently," Berlin Mayor Michael Mueller said. Deutsche Wohnen boss Michael Zahn said the organisers of the initiative were taking a "very populist tone" and warned that the public was not being given the full picture.

'Rent rebel choir'

Amid the heated debate, Franz, who suffers from depression and receives state aid, was digging her heels in. She has taken her case to the courts, arguing "hardship circumstances" under a social clause in rental laws that could halt evictions. Across town in southeastern Berlin, Hans von Maydell was also gearing up for battle, as the building he has lived in for 45 years changed ownership for the first time early this year. —AFP

Brazil's Petrobras accepts \$8.6bn bid for gas unit

RIO DE JANEIRO: Brazil's debt-laden Petrobras has accepted an \$8.6 billion offer for its natural gas pipeline unit TAG, the state oil giant said Friday, as it offloads assets to repair its finances.

The top bid from France's Engie and Canadian investment fund Caisse de Depot and Placement du Quebec for 90 percent of TAG includes \$800 million in debts, Petrobras said in a statement.

"After adjustments, the transaction, when

completed, will represent to Petrobras a total estimated value of US\$8.6 billion," it said. "We clarify that the transaction is still subject to approval by Petrobras governance and competitive defense bodies."

The deal represents Petrobras' biggest asset sale, Bloomberg reported. The company hopes to sell about \$27 billion in assets to reduce its debt and focus on oil. Petrobras, which has been at the center of the biggest corruption scandal in Brazil's history, is also trying to repair its reputation with investors.

Large construction companies had paid bribes to politicians to secure contracts with Petrobras, which knowingly overpaid on those deals.

Petrobras registered its first profit in five years in 2018. The company's debt also dropped 18 percent to \$69.4 billion. —AFP

Pension reform: Brazil's uphill battle to save 1 trillion reals

BRASILIA: Brazilian President Jair Bolsonaro is staking much of his political capital on a plan to shore up the country's costly social security system, which he hopes will kick-start the country's economy and boost investor sentiment. The government is, however, struggling to sell its proposal to the public and lawmakers. Legislation will almost certainly be watered down, and passage through both houses of Congress could be a long, drawn-out process.

What is the government proposing? Why does it matter? And why are markets so sensitive to its every twist and turn?

Government proposal

The draft bill aims to save more than 1 trillion reals (\$260 billion) over the next 10 years by changing workers' pension contributions, raising the minimum retirement age and closing loopholes.

Broadly speaking, workers will have to pay more into the system over a longer period of time, and the minimum retirement age will be raised to 65 for men and 62 for women. These changes would be phased in over period of up to 14 years. Economy Minister Paulo Guedes, an orthodox economist and former fund manager who is leading the charge on reform, insists that failure to overhaul social security will bankrupt Brazil. He has drafted an ambitious plan to streamline the system, whose scale is greater than any prior governments has proposed.

Guedes argues that the changes are progressive, with the wealthiest in society contributing more and the poorest gaining the most from the changes. The bill needs to be approved by a 60 percent majority in both houses - 308 votes in the Chamber of Deputies and 49 in the Senate - to be passed into law.

Financial weight

Brazil's spending on social security is by two measures among the highest in the world. Last year it accounted for 44 percent of the federal government's budget and 8.5 percent of gross domestic product. Without reform, the government says, outlays will climb to 17 percent of GDP by 2060.

According to Treasury projections, the pension deficit will swell to more than 314 billion reals this year. Economists widely agree that deficits of this scale are unsustainable. Indebted states and municipalities can also trace much of their financial problems directly to swollen social security bills. Brazilian states' combined deficit with the federal government stands at some 200 billion reals.

Economic, market impact

Failure to fix the system will wreck the Brazilian economy, the government warns. The language seems apocalyptic and the forecasts severe, but economists, analysts and financial market participants tend to agree the options are



Jair Bolsonaro

reform or bust. Leaving the system as it is will tip the economy into a deep, prolonged recession next year, cause interest rates to soar and push up unemployment, the Economy Ministry forecasts, while reform will boost growth, generate millions of jobs and keep inflation and interest rates under control. Successful reform will also boost investor confidence in the country and lift Brazilian assets, analysts say. The real and Brazil's stock market were among investors' most favored emerging market assets at the start of the year, but that optimism has faded as negotiations in Congress have run into political quicksand.

History

Pension reform has been the bane of every Brazilian government for the past quarter century. President Fernando Henrique Cardoso came within one Senate vote of passing reform in 1999, which would have stopped, or at least slowed, the recent surge in spending. With that narrow failure, the political will to push for ambitious reform wilted.

The last attempt at fixing the problem was made by President Michel Temer, who left office on Jan. 1 and whose most recent proposal would have generated savings of around 400 billion reals. That push ended in 2017 when a corruption scandal snared Temer, decimating his popularity and derailing his agenda.

Controversy

The most obvious challenge for Bolsonaro is convincing Brazilians, many already struggling, to give up retirement benefits, and convincing lawmakers to support policies that may cause financial hardship to large swathes of their constituents. Proposed changes to rural, disabled and elderly workers' pensions are a particularly sensitive issue. Opposition to cutting their benefits is bound to be reinforced by the fact that military personnel, police and firefighters have already been largely compensated for any pension cuts with higher pay.

Net savings from changes to military compensation will be 10.4 billion reals over the next decade, significantly down from the original target of 93 billion reals, after military personnel, police and firefighters secured pay increases of some 86 billion reals in negotiations. —Reuters

Technology & Science

Brussels boy to pee-cycle after landmark leak inquiry

New electronic monitors detect anomalous overflow

BRUSSELS: Brussels' famous landmark, the Manneken-Pis, is an insouciant celebration of going with the flow—but even carefree little boys can go too far. City authorities recently discovered that a fault in the 400-year-old statue's plumbing was causing him to pee away 2.5 tons of water a day. In 2019, such waste is an environmental no-no. A missing part in the guttering under the diminutive statue's fountain sent his public urination directly down the drain.

It may not be the most overwhelming torrent, but it was building up over time to the equivalent daily water use of five Belgian households. No-one is quite sure how long Brussels' celebrity has been suffering the leak. "We prefer to look to the future," says city engineer Regis Callens. And the future is recycling. Henceforth, the Manneken's pee will loop through a recuperation tank to be pumped back through his bronze bladder.

"So it's really a closed circuit. There's no more waste," says Callens, giving journalists a tour of the hidden pipework. Brussels was able to detect the anomalous overflow thanks to new electronic monitors dot-

ted around the municipal system. "We want to develop a real policy of limiting waste," said the city's new mayor, Benoit Hellings, from the green Ecolo party.

Peeing on a powderkeg

"We want to say to Brussels folk, to Belgians and to all Europeans: 'If the Manneken-Pis is able to stop wasting drinking water, you can too.'" The Manneken-Pis has become a responsible eco-consumer." Some accounts date the incontinent cherub's origin to the 14th century, but the best records suggest the 55-centimetre bronze nude was cast in 1619. The boy seen today at a street corner in Brussels' tourist-thronged old city is a copy, with the original now in the city museum, safe from theft or vandalism.

One legend recounts that the child saved the city from an explosion by peeing on a flame that threatened a gunpowder arsenal in the 17th century. He is now a municipal symbol and tourist draw, and plays a full role in the evolving cultural life of the Belgian capital. He is often dressed up in colorful outfits, including football kits to mark the start of the World Cup.—AFP



BRUSSELS: Brussels' energy technician Regis Callens points at the Manneken-pis landmark fountain in Brussels.—AFP

Japan probe blasts asteroid, seeking clues to life's origins

TOKYO: A Japanese probe on Friday launched an explosive device at an asteroid, aiming to blast a crater in the surface and scoop up material that could shed light on how the solar system evolved. The explosive mission is the riskiest yet attempted by the Japanese space agency's Hayabusa2 probe that aims to reveal more about the origins of life on Earth. Hayabusa2 successfully released as scheduled the so-called "small carry-on impactor"—a cone-shaped device capped with a copper bottom—as the probe hovered just 500 meters above the asteroid Ryugu.



BRUSSELS: Brussels' energy technician Regis Callens points at the Manneken-pis landmark fountain in Brussels.—AFP

The impactor was programmed to explode 40 minutes later, propelling the copper bottom towards Ryugu, where it should gouge a crater into the surface of the asteroid that spins 300 million kilometers from Earth. Hayabusa2 moved smartly away from the area to avoid being damaged by debris from the explosion or colliding with Ryugu while also releasing a camera to capture images of the event. Images from a different camera at the bottom of the probe showed the impactor was released at the right position and angle.

Yuichi Tsuda, Hayabusa2 project manager, told reporters

that the Japanese space agency (JAXA) was able to confirm the impactor hit the surface of the asteroid based on an image captured by the camera released by the probe. "I think it's a success. We could not have asked for more," he said. Takashi Kubota, an engineering researcher, said the probe's use of explosives and its "acrobatic" evasive maneuvers were "unprecedented" and he hoped the mission would give scientists a rare peek inside an asteroid.

Although the detonation was too small to move Ryugu off-orbit, JAXA scientist Makoto Yoshikawa said the ability to operate a probe to this level of precision marked "an important achievement in planetary defense" if Earth were threatened by an asteroid. It will take two weeks for the probe itself to return to its "home position" near Ryugu after the detonation and impact. The crater could be as large as 10 meters in diameter if the surface is sandy, or three meters across if it is rocky, according to JAXA scientists.

Dragon Palace

NASA's Deep Impact project succeeded in creating an artificial crater on a comet in 2005, but only for observation purposes. The aim of blasting the crater on Ryugu is to throw up "fresh" material from under the asteroid's surface that could shed light on the early stages of the solar system. The asteroid is thought to contain relatively large amounts of organic matter and water from some 4.6 billion years ago when the solar system was born.

In February, Hayabusa2 touched down briefly on Ryugu and fired a bullet into the surface to puff up dust for collection, before blasting back to its holding position. The Hayabusa2 mission, with a price tag of around 30 billion yen, was launched in December 2014 and is scheduled to return to Earth with its samples in 2020. Photos of Ryugu—which means "Dragon Palace" in Japanese and refers to a castle at the bottom of the ocean in an ancient Japanese tale—show the asteroid has a rough surface full of boulders.

Hayabusa2 observes the surface of the asteroid with its camera and sensing equipment but has also dispatched two tiny MINERVA-II rover robots as well as the French-German robot MASCOT to help surface observation. At about the size of a large fridge, Hayabusa2 is equipped with solar panels and is the successor to JAXA's first asteroid explorer, Hayabusa—Japanese for falcon. That probe returned with dust samples from a smaller, potato-shaped asteroid in 2010, despite various setbacks during its epic seven-year odyssey and was hailed as a scientific triumph.—AFP



CALIFORNIA: Bernard Kim, President of publishing at game developer Zynga, displays the game 'Tiny Royale' on his cellphone at the first annual Snap Partner Summit in West Hollywood, California.—AFP

Nintendo's "Wii Party," for example features players, brought to life with 3D Bitmojis, as they compete across four fast-paced mini-games.

"You can launch Bitmoji Party right from the chat bar, allowing you and your friends to instantly play together, no install required," Wu said. "Alphabear Hustle" is described as a fast-paced word game in which players work together to spell words, collect cute bears and build their own personal bear village. "Zombie Rescue Squad" deals with a zombie apocalypse that calls on players to "rescue survivors from the hungry hordes and gather as many supplies as you can. "But if you miss the helicopter to safety, you'll be left

Pakistan. Paleontologists have previously found partial fossils of the species in North America that were 41.2 million years old suggesting that by this time, the cetaceans had lost the ability to carry their own weight and walk the Earth.

The new specimen, described in a study published Thursday in the journal Current Biology, is 42.6 million years old and provides fresh information on the evolution of cetaceans. The fossil was found about 0.6 miles inland from Peru's Pacific coast, at Playa Media Luna. Its mandibles grazed the desert soil and during excavations, the researchers found the lower jaw, teeth, vertebrae, ribs, parts of front and back legs, and even the whale ancestor's long fingers that were likely webbed.

Clever kitty: Cats know their names

PARIS: Cats are able to distinguish their own names from other similar-sounding words, even when said by strangers, according to new research released Thursday. While dogs' ability to respond to verbal commands from humans has been known for centuries, much less is understood about how cats react to spoken cues. Researchers in Japan decided to test how well cats are able to distinguish the meanings of words that sound similar to each other.

They studied 78 cats from households and a cat cafe and found most were able to recognize their own names from other words that had the same length and stress—even when an unfamiliar person was speaking. "Many cat owners know that cats understand their own names," said Atsuko Saito, from Sophia University's Department of Psychology, told AFP. "However, there is no scientific evidence about that ability. And people who have no experience keeping cats do not know about the cats' high cognitive ability."

"They seem to associate their name to some rewards or punishments. This is a natural and general learning ability in animals," added Saito, lead author of the study published in the Nature journal Scientific Reports. In the test scenarios, Saito and her colleagues read each cat a series of like-sounding words followed by the cat's name. They then measured the cats' responsiveness to each, including ear, head or tail movement as well as movement towards the person speaking.

Both household and cafe cats showed a similar ability in differentiating their names from general words. However the cafe cats were less able to distinguish their own names from those of other cats. This might be because they frequently heard their own name alongside others, and had learned to associate all those names with reward or punishment. "There are so many studies about dog ability to communicate with humans," said Saito, who has a male cat, Okara. "We think it is important to show cats' ability. This will help to make both cat and human welfare better."—AFP

behind!" Outside developer partners of these games will be able to earn money through video advertising.

Mobile to overtake TV

In a bid to enrich its content and widen its network, Snapchat also announced it was partnering with outside developers that will be able to integrate Snapchat features into their apps. For example, Fitbit smartwatch users will be able to access Bitmojis and a Netflix subscriber will be able to directly publish a message on Snapchat about a favorite series. Users of mobile dating app Tinder for their part will be able to publish their Snapchat "story" on their profile.

Snapchat said it also plans to expand on its new original series for the messaging app that were launched in October. The shows, which run three to five minutes each, are designed for Snapchat and are shot in vertical form for smartphone viewing. They include graphics and split screens. "We're navigating a profound transformation in storytelling," said Sean Mills, the head of original content at Snap. "Mobile is now the dominant medium for telling stories and consuming. "In 2019, mobile will surpass television in time spent for US adults."

The series explore various issues, including teen love, race relations or sports. Snapchat has nearly 190 million daily active users but has struggled to boost revenue from young users. It has lost money every year since it was launched in 2011 and has even said it may never turn a profit. In the United States, Snapchat reaches nearly 75 percent of people between the ages of 13 and 34, and 90 percent of those between the ages of 13 and 24, said Evan Spiegel, the head of Snapchat. "In fact, we reach more 13-24 year-olds than Facebook or Instagram in the United States, the UK, France, Canada and Australia," he added.—AFP

Based on its anatomy, the scientists say this cetacean of about 13 feet (four meters) long could both walk and swim. "Part of the tail's vertebrae showed similarities with that of present-day semi-aquatic mammals like otters," lead author Olivier Lambert of the Royal Belgian Institute of Natural Sciences told AFP. "This would therefore have been an animal that would have started to make growing use of its tail to swim, which differentiates it from older cetaceans in India and Pakistan."

Pieces of four-legged whales were found in Egypt, Nigeria, Togo, Senegal and Western Sahara, but they were so fragmented that it was impossible to decisively conclude whether they could swim. "This is the most complete specimen ever found for a four-legged whale

Scientists set to unveil first picture of a black hole

PARIS: The world, it seems, is soon to see the first picture of a black hole. On Wednesday, astronomers across the globe will hold "six major press conferences" simultaneously to announce the first results of the Event Horizon Telescope (EHT), which was designed precisely for that purpose. It has been a long wait. Of all the forces or objects in the Universe that we cannot see—including dark energy and dark matter—none has frustrated human curiosity so much as the invisible maws that shred and swallow stars like so many specks of dust.

Astronomers began speculating about these omnivorous "dark stars" in the 1700s, and since then indirect evidence has slowly accumulated. "More than 50 years ago, scientists saw that there was something very bright at the centre of our galaxy," Paul McNamara, an astrophysicist at the European Space Agency and an expert on black holes, told AFP. "It has a gravitational pull strong enough to make stars orbit around it very quickly—as fast as 20 years."

To put that in perspective, our Solar System takes about 230 million years to circle the centre of the Milky Way. Eventually, astronomers speculated that these bright spots were in fact "black holes"—a term coined by American physicist John Archibald Wheeler in the mid-1960s—surrounded by a swirling band of white-hot gas and plasma.

At the inner edge of these luminous accretion disks, things abruptly go dark. "The event horizon"—a.k.a. the point-of-no-return—"is not a physical barrier, you couldn't stand on it," McNamara explained. "If you're on the inside of it, you can't escape because you would need infinite energy. And if you are on the other side, you can—in principle."

A golf ball on the moon

At its centre, the mass of a black hole is compressed into a single, zero-dimensional point. The distance between this so-called "singularity" and the event horizon is the radius, or half the width, of a black hole. The EHT that collected the data for the first-ever image is unlike any ever devised. "Instead of constructing a giant telescope—which would collapse under its own weight—we combined several observatories as if they were fragments of a giant mirror," Michael Bremer, an astronomer at the Institute for Millimetric Radio Astronomy in Grenoble, told AFP.

In April 2017, eight such radio telescopes scattered across the globe—in Hawaii, Arizona, Spain, Mexico, Chile, and the South Pole—were trained on two black holes in very different corners of the Universe to collect data. Studies that could be unveiled next week are likely to zoom in on one or the other. Odds-makers favor Sagittarius A*, the black hole at the centre of our own elliptical galaxy that first caught the eye of astronomers.

Sag A* has four million times the mass of our sun, which means that the black hole is generates is about 44 million kilometers across. That may sound like a big target, but for the telescope array on Earth some 26,000 light-years away, it's like trying to photograph a golf ball on the Moon.

Testing Einstein

The other candidate is a monster black hole — 1,500 times more massive even than Sag A* — in an elliptical galaxy known as M87. It's also a lot farther from Earth, but distance and size balance out, making it roughly as easy (or difficult) to pinpoint. One reason this dark horse might be the one revealed next week is light smog within the Milky Way. "We are sitting in the plain of our galaxy—you have to look through all the stars and dust to get to the centre," said McNamara.

The data collected by the far-flung telescope array still had to be collected and collated. "The imaging algorithms we developed fill the gaps of data we are missing in order to reconstruct a picture of a black hole," the team said on their website. Astrophysicists not involved in the project, including McNamara, are eagerly—perhaps anxiously—waiting to see if the findings challenge Einstein's theory of general relativity, which has never been tested on this scale.

Breakthrough observations in 2015 that earned the scientists involved a Nobel Prize used gravitational wave detectors to track two black holes smashing together. As they merged, ripples in the curvatures of time-space creating a unique, and detectable, signature. "Einstein's theory of general relativity says that this is exactly what should happen," said McNamara.

But those were tiny black holes—only 60 times more massive than the Sun—compared to either of the ones under the gaze of the EHT. "Maybe the ones that are millions of times more massive are different—we just don't know yet."—AFP

outside of India and Pakistan," said Lambert. If the whale in Peru could swim like an otter, the researchers hypothesized that it likely crossed the Atlantic from the western coast of Africa to South America. As a result of continental drift, the distance was half that of today, around 800 miles, and the east-west current of the time would have facilitated their travel.

This finding would make less likely another hypothesis according to which whales reached North America via Greenland. The Pisco Basin, off Peru's southern coast, likely holds numerous fossils, given its excellent conditions for preservation. "We have work for at least the next 50 years," said Lambert, the paleontologist.—AFP

Snapchat launches own multi-player gaming platform

LOS ANGELES: Messaging app Snapchat, which is widely popular among younger users but has struggled to turn a profit since its creation in 2011, on Thursday unveiled new features including an integrated gaming platform, an expansion of its original series and new partnerships with developers. "Friendship is more than just the things you chat about," said Will Wu, the director of product at Snapchat as he unveiled Snap Games at a Partner Summit in Los Angeles to highlight the new features for creators and app developers.

"Friendship is also about experience you have together." The six made-for-Snapchat games, including "Bitmoji Party," "Alphabear Hustle" and "Zombie Rescue Squad," will be part of a global gaming industry that saw \$77 billion in revenue last year, Wu said. "We wanted to build something that makes us feel like we're playing a board game with family over a long holiday weekend, something that makes us feel like we're sitting with friends, controllers in hand," he said.

"Unfortunately, these games are hard to find on mobile (...) it's hard to get everybody to install the same game, and it's hard to chat." The six games will be directly accessible from Snapchat's popular messaging feature Chat, offering users the possibility to play while at the same time exchanging messages. "Bitmoji Party," developed by Snapchat parent Snap and inspired by

Four-legged prehistoric whale fossil found in Peru

WASHINGTON: Paleontologists have found a well-preserved fossil of a four-legged amphibious ancestor of whales, a discovery that sheds new light on the mammals' transition from land to the ocean. The ancestors of whales and dolphins walked on Earth about 50 million years ago in the regions that now comprise India and

Health & Science

100 more die in DR Congo Ebola epidemic; death toll crosses 700

People skills at heart of long fight against Ebola

BUTEMBO, DR Congo: Some 100 people have died in the Ebola epidemic in DR Congo over the past three weeks, taking the overall death toll in the latest outbreak past 700, according to health ministry data.

Local people are now at least receiving vaccines on a large scale for the first time with more than 95,000 getting a dose of the rVSV-Zebov vaccine from Merck laboratories. The health ministry said this had enabled thousands of lives to be saved. The Democratic Republic of Congo declared its tenth outbreak of Ebola in 40 years last August in northeastern North Kivu province before it spread into the neighboring Ituri region.

The current outbreak is the second worst to date, the deadliest being a 2014 epidemic in West Africa which killed more than 10,000 people in Guinea, Liberia and Sierra Leone. "Since the start of the epidemic, overall cases are 1,117 — 1,051 confirmed and 66 probable. In total there are 702 deaths (636 confirmed and 66 probable) and 339 people who have recovered," the ministry said, quoting data up to Thursday. The ministry added late Friday that another 295 suspected cases were being examined.

The World Health Organization has warned that "the risk of national and regional spread remains very high" and said dealing with the epidemic could take another six months. Poor security owing to the presence of several armed groups, coupled with resistance of some communities to seeking treatment, has hampered the fight to stem the spread of the disease. A recent study in the central Congolese cities of Beni and Butembo found only a third trusted local authorities to help them and more than a quarter believed Ebola does not exist. Evelyne was one of the first victims of the Ebola epidemic which broke out in eastern DR Congo last August, the second deadliest in its known history. Against the odds, the nurse not only survived the haemorrhagic virus, whose outbreak has claimed nearly 700 lives, but has also returned to the fray. After

receiving a vaccination, Evelyne is now tending Ebola-affected children—part of a campaign that places social skills at the heart of the effort to roll back the dreaded disease. At an Ebola treatment centre, Evelyne (her name has been changed for the purposes of this story) cradles a seven-month-old baby girl called Sarah. She provides the infant with desperately-needed human contact—visitors are kept behind protective screens to prevent them from coming into contact with the body fluids of patients who may have the virus. "The first test was negative," Evelyne calls out. "We are waiting for the results of the second."

Collateral victims

The UN children's agency UNICEF says 30 percent of the 683 deaths registered so far are children or aged under 18 years. Many children are collateral victims, such as Luc, a five-year-old boy playing football with Consolée Katsiwa, a psychologist in a creche run by UNICEF.

His mother died of Ebola a day earlier, Katsiwa said. "We are keeping him under observation since he was in direct contact with his mother," she said, adding that he would be monitored for 21 days—the time taken for the virus to incubate. "If he shows signs of the disease... he could contaminate others in his community." At a school in Butembo, five pupils carefully take notes during an Ebola awareness program.

One of the speakers is Huguette, a 24-year-old woman who was cured after being infected following an Ebola death in January. "I would like to raise awareness among my brothers in Butembo, to tell them that the disease exists, that it is a reality and that it's not stuff that has been invented." "If you don't head for the Ebola treatment centre you will die. But if you go there at the very early stages, you will survive like me," she said.

'Appease the spirits'

Denial has been costly and bloody. Two Ebola treat-

ment centers in Butembo and the neighboring town of Katwa were attacked in February and March. A policeman died in the violence. The center at Katwa reopened last Saturday and authorities are now trying to get locals more involved in the Ebola response drive that many see as being led by foreign aid workers.

The health ministry meanwhile said sociologists and anthropologists had called for traditional chiefs to "observe rituals to appease the spirits" before the Katwa center reopened. "Confidence-building has taken place



In this file photo taken on March 9, 2019 health workers are seen inside the 'red zone' of an Ebola treatment centre, which was attacked in the early hours of the morning in Butembo. The denial of the Ebola virus takes violent forms. The two treatment centers in Butembo and the neighboring city of Katwa were attacked by armed men last February and March, killing a policeman and wounding a health worker.

between the communities and those involved in the response program in areas where the most violence was recorded," it added. Residents have asked the government and non-governmental organizations to improve the ramshackle infrastructure to provide potable water and better roads. "Ebola instils fear but people understand that it poses a danger and one must protect oneself," said Salome, a woman living near the Katwa center. According to the World Health Organization (WHO), the fight against the epidemic could take another six months. — AFP

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use. Duluth, for instance, was planned for a population of 120,000 people - something it has yet to achieve.

To show how an underutilized city such as Duluth might be repurposed, Keenan has created computer renderings of what it might look like if it becomes a major draw for climate migrants. One rendering shows downtown Duluth with new structures - represented by gray blocks wedged amid historic landmark buildings - that could help accommodate tens of thousands of new residents fleeing climate pressures. Zack Filipovich, a Duluth city councilor, worries that that influx would mean for his city's downtown ensemble of government buildings, designed about a century ago by prominent architect Daniel Burnham and listed on the National Register of Historic Places.

Utilitarian housing for new arrivals could cause the city to "lose some of our charm," he said in a telephone interview - though he said he still sees benefits from the city having a larger population.

In Buffalo, another city Keenan considers promising for climate migrants, under-used roads and public transport testify to the city's more populous heyday as a steel powerhouse. It, like Duluth, nestles along the Great Lakes, which contain 20 percent of the world's surface freshwater, a significant attraction in a potentially hotter world.

Both cities also are healthcare hubs and have nearby major economic centers - Minneapolis for Duluth and Toronto for Buffalo, Keenan said.

Promotion push

Buffalo's mayor began publicly talking about the city's future potential earlier this year.

"Based on scientific research, we know that Buffalo will be a climate refuge city for centuries to come," he said in a February speech. Brendan Mehaffy, executive director of the mayor's office of strategic planning, said top city officials had been briefed to talk positively about the city's potential appeal in a climate-changed world.

Buffalo often "takes the shots" for its reputation for heavy snow, he added. A 1977 blizzard saw parts of the city buried under 30 feet of cement-like snow.

But predictions of more clement weather could change that. "Our climate ... will be different in 20 to 30 years' time and could be very beneficial for certain types of businesses and certain types of lifestyle," he said. Climate scientist Katharine Hayhoe, co-author of a government report on the impacts of climate by region in the United States, said the report offered hints about areas that may become climate sweetspots. — Reuters

Cool US cities prepare as future 'havens' for climate migrants

NEW YORK: The lakefront Minnesota city of Duluth has some of the coldest temperatures outside Alaska in the United States, and gets more than seven feet (2 m) of snow each winter on average.

But Harvard professor Jesse Keenan thinks the frigid city may eventually prove an appealing relocation destination for Florida residents, as climate change brings increasingly unbearable heat to already warm parts of the United States. "If you're Florida ... (the predictions) should be quite unnerving," the expert in climate adaptation and design said in a telephone interview with the Thomson Reuters Foundation.

As climate change brings more stifling summers, worse flooding from storms and rising sea level, crueler droughts and ever-longer allergy seasons, what Americans consider a nice place to live may shift, along with Americans themselves. Some of the changes won't be by choice, scientists warn. As many as 13 million Americans could be displaced by rising seas alone by 2100, 6 million of them in Florida, according to estimates published in 2017 in the journal Nature Climate Change.

That, planners say, presents an opportunity for cities such as Duluth and New York's Buffalo, which are already launching efforts to rebrand themselves as destinations of the future in a climate-changed world.

Disbelief

When Duluth's mayor, Emily Larson, first heard of Keenan's proposition that her city of 86,000 could be one of the best choices for climate migrants, her reaction was "astonishment", she said. But Keenan sees some northern Rust Belt cities - which stretch from the Midwest to parts of the Northeast - as natural destinations in a hotter world.

The Rust Belt lost jobs and population starting in the 1950s as industries moved overseas, and some of its cities still have more buildings and infrastructure than they can

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Member of many prestigious surgical societies.

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- ◆ Minor surgeries (lipoma, sebaceous cyst, ingrowing nail)
- ◆ Diagnosis, treatment and follow up of all surgical emergencies
- ◆ Hemorrhoids, fistula & anal fissure surgeries
- ◆ Surgery for morbid obesity (sleeve, gastric bypass)
- ◆ Breast surgeries
- ◆ Hernia repair
- ◆ Thyroid & adrenal surgeries
- ◆ Surgery for reflux disease
- ◆ Cholecystectomy & laparoscopic appendectomy
- ◆ Liver, pancreas & bile ducts surgeries

Dr. Hani Haider
General Surgery Consultant

http://www.international-clinic.com **Tel: 1886677**

Scope of Clinical Practice:

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- ◆ Single Port Surgery
- ◆ Treatment of Colo-Rectal Diseases, Including Colorectal Cancer
- ◆ Surgical Treatment of Inflammatory Bowel Abscess
- ◆ Treatment of Perianal Fistula & Complex Perianal Fistula (complications)
- ◆ VAAFT Procedure (Treatment of Fistula through Fistuloscope)
- ◆ Treatment of Irritable Bowel Symptoms
- ◆ Colonoscopy & Gastroscopy
- ◆ Stomach Balloon Insertion & removal
- ◆ Bariatric Surgery - Lap Sleeve Gastrectomy
- ◆ Gallstones & Abdominal Hernias Surgery
- ◆ Colonic Hydrotherapy & Fecal Incontinence Treatment
- ◆ Laparoscopic mini bypass
- ◆ Transanal minimally Invasive surgery

Academic Certificates, Trainings & Fellowships:

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

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

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DR. FAHAD AL-MUKHAIZEEM
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Consultant Pediatrician-Canadian & American Board in Pediatrics-Canadian Board in Pediatric Emergency

Tel.: 22269369 - Fax: 22269368

Al-Jabriya - Block 1A - St.1 - Mazaya Building - 15th Floor - Clinic B

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

Academic Certificates - Training

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

Scope of clinical Practice.

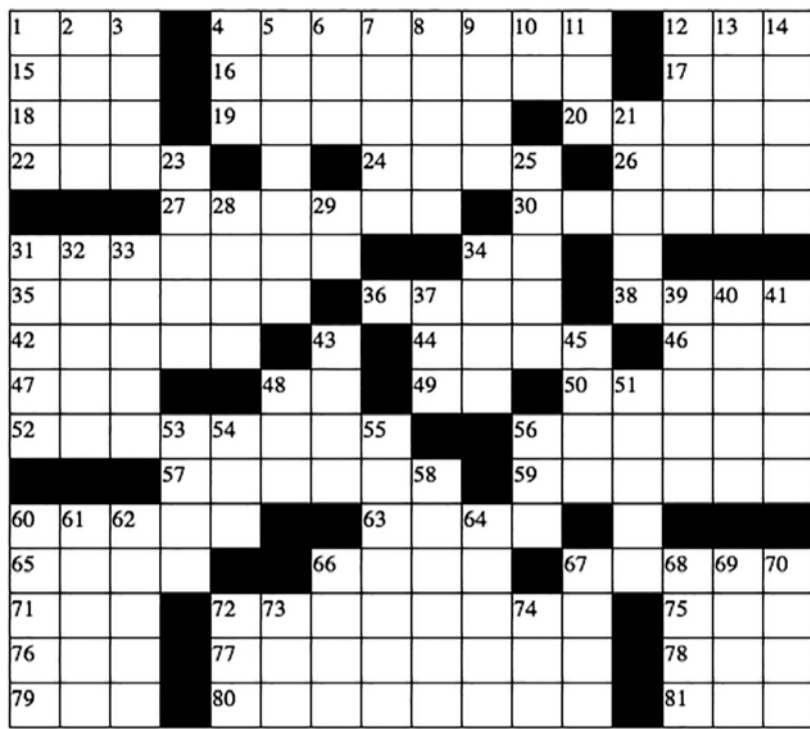
- ◆ Bariatric surgeries.
- ◆ Gallbladder stones surgeries.
- ◆ Abdominal wall and hernia surgeries.
- ◆ G.I. surgeries.
- ◆ Thyroid and para - thyroid surgeries.
- ◆ Anal surgeries.

email: wbuhaimed@gmail.com **Tel.: 965 22269411/ Mob.: 965 99212228**

Jabriya, 4th Ring Road, Block 1A Floor 9 - Clover Center Mazaya Building

Stars

CROSSWORD 2176



ACROSS

- Experiencing or showing sorrow or unhappiness.
- Of or relating to or forming or attached to a skeleton.
- Hormone produced early in pregnancy by the placenta.
- A user interface in which you type commands instead of choosing them from a menu or selecting an icon.
- A skirt consisting of a rectangle of calico or printed cotton.
- The sense organ for hearing and equilibrium.
- A legal document codifying the result of deliberations of a committee or society or legislative body.
- A medicine that induces nausea and vomiting.
- An indehiscent fruit derived from a single ovary having one or many seeds within a fleshy wall or pericarp.
- Any of numerous local fertility and nature deities worshipped by ancient Semitic peoples.
- A protocol (utilizing TCP) to transfer hypertext requests and information between servers and browsers.
- Of or relating to or characteristic of Thailand of its people.
- A large sandwich made of a long crusty roll split lengthwise and filled with meats and cheese (and tomato and onion and lettuce and condiments).
- British choreographer (1906-1988).
- That can be given a date.
- Deciduous round-headed Asiatic tree widely grown in mild climates as an ornamental for its heart-shaped leaves and fragrant yellow-green flowers followed by hanging clusters of fleshy orange-red berries.
- Not only so, but.
- Sprinkled with seed.
- The capital of Morocco.
- Any of various strong liquors distilled from the fermented sap of toddy palms or from fermented molasses.
- In favor of (an action or proposal etc.).
- Used of a single unit or thing.
- A brittle silver-white metalloid element that is related to selenium and sulfur.
- An independent ruler or chieftain (especially in Africa or Arabia).
- A nonsteroidal anti-inflammatory drug (trade name Celebrex).
- A warning against certain acts.
- United States writer of poems and plays about racial conflict (born in 1934).
- Formerly a term of respect for important white Europeans in colonial India.
- A visual presentation showing how something works.
- (Babylonian) God of storms and wind.
- Having undesirable or negative qualities.
- A river in north central Switzerland that runs northeast into the Rhine.
- Title for a civil or military leader (especially in Turkey).
- A cut of pork ribs with much of the meat trimmed off.
- A benevolent aspect of Devi.
- Goddess of the dead and queen of the underworld.
- Any of several plants of the genus Hepatica having 3-lobed leaves and white or pinkish flowers in early spring.
- A light touch or stroke.

DOWN

- Someone who works (or provides workers) during a strike.
- Type genus of the Alcidae comprising solely the razorbill.
- Evergreen tree of eastern Asia and Philippines having large leathery leaves and small green-white flowers in compact cymes.
- An inflammatory disease of connective tissue with variable features including fever and weakness and fatigability and joint pains and skin lesions on the face or neck or arms.
- The capital and largest city of Uganda on the north shore of Lake Victoria.
- (Old Testament) Adam's wife in Judeo-Christian mythology.
- Club consisting of a heavy stick (often bamboo) bound with iron.
- Selected as the best.
- Consideration in dealing with others and avoiding giving offence.
- The eleventh month of the civil year.
- A workplace for the conduct of scientific research.
- United States writer of stories and plays (1894-1946).
- Tropical American tree producing cacao beans.
- A small hard particle.
- An autonomous area in northeastern Greece that is the site of several Greek Orthodox monasteries founded in the tenth century.
- The sacred city of Lamaism.
- A civil or military authority in Turkey or Egypt.
- A notice of someone's death.
- A brittle gray crystalline element that is a semiconducting metalloid (resembling silicon) used in transistors.
- A city in southern Turkey on the Seyhan River.
- The fourth month of the civil year.
- A river in north central Switzerland that runs northeast into the Rhine.
- Take in solid food.
- A drama set to music.
- Cause to happen or to occur as a consequence.
- A small constellation in the southern hemisphere near Lupus and Ara in the Milky Way.
- (Scottish) Bluish-black or gray-blue.
- (Polynesian) An alcoholic drink made from the aromatic roots of the kava shrub.
- Being five more than one hundred fifty.
- A dark region of considerable extent on the surface of the moon.
- Harsh or corrosive in tone.
- Extremely pleasing.
- A Brazilian river.
- A dark-skinned member of a race of people living in Australia when Europeans arrived.
- The cardinal number that is the sum of one and one and one.
- A condensed but memorable saying embodying some important fact of experience that is taken as true by many people.
- Relating to the deepest parts of the ocean (below 6000 meters).
- The Oceanic language spoken by the Maori people in New Zealand.
- A device in which something (usually an animal) can be caught and penned.
- A small cake leavened with yeast.
- (computer science) A data transmission rate (bits/second) for modems.
- God of love and erotic desire.
- An Arabic speaking person who lives in Arabia or North Africa.
- A hormone secreted by the anterior pituitary gland that controls the degree of pigmentation in melanocytes.
- Any of various primates with short tails or no tail at all.
- A form of entertainment that enacts a story by a sequence of images giving the illusion of continuous movement.

Thursday's Solution

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

STAR TRACK



Aries (March 21-April 19)

Something doesn't feel quite right to you today. It's like you're waiting for the other shoe to drop. This isn't comfortable but you try to make the most of it. Work is the place that you feel most at home now. You can work to satisfy your desires for the material world. Security is a need and that means making more money. Work hard. Now is the time to get something you want. Try to enjoy your day with the knowledge that you will succeed in doing your best. Perhaps a concert or a neighborhood bar with friends is a place of celebration with you tonight.



Taurus (April 20-May 20)

You don't mind working hard to catch up today after yesterday's coaster ride. You intend to make money for your work place because you want more financial security too. You like to work alone without anyone interfering. That doesn't always happen on your job. Tonight, take the time to listen to some good music, either at home or at a local hangout. Take your love along to enjoy the music with you. You'll be glad you did even if the two of you sit silently together. Knowing you're loved means a lot to you now.



Gemini (May 21-June 20)

Sensitive issues make you walk on eggshells, at least for part of the day. This shouldn't keep occurring all day because you'd truly be uncomfortable. As it is, you're pretty clear thinking but possibly not on someone else's behalf. There could be an explosive argument that clears the air for you. You've been contemplating life and death issues for the last couple of days but just realized you were in that mode today. Investing has been uppermost in your mind. Sexual matters later today or this evening could help you blow off tension.



Cancer (June 21-July 22)

This is a great time to be with friends and your work family. You've got a knack for saying just the right thing at the right time. It works for you. You work towards the rewards from your work you seek. You realize you're getting those material gains you seek. Feeling at peace within because you're creating what you want in life for your home and family, gives you the peace you need to relax and enjoy your world, Cancer. Those who don't agree with you are thrown to your side.



Leo (July 23-August 22)

Find a place that the music you love is playing even if you do so at home. Dance with your love around the house and act like lovers do when no one is near. You're feeling more peaceful now and that could be a direct correlation to taking off yesterday and being with the one you love today. Ambition and need of work place respect is beginning to raise its head again in your thoughts. The time off was good, Leo. Finish the weekend and let whatever hits your brain pass through. You won't forget but you can make the ideas better later.



Virgo (August 23-September 22)

Emotionally you're in a peaceful place right now. You want that and the security of knowing you have a good home on which others like to look and comment. You may even be thinking of some minor changes in the home to make it more enjoyable. Perhaps a new sound system is in the works for television and to listen to your favorite music. It's okay to have needs and you do right now concerning your thoughts on domesticity. Making your home more accommodating is part of that.



Libra (September 23-October 22)

You may work with someone today who has the same thoughts about you that you have for them. It's not good. Both of you may agree to disagree. That's for the best along with staying away from each other. You're feeling at peace and see yourself making material progression on your job. You don't need someone else coming along and trying to disturb that peace or progress, Libra. Keep on keeping on. Your boss thinks your wonderful. Let that soak in and feel good about yourself. Make it a point to discuss good topics with family and friends later.



Scorpio (October 23-November 21)

Looking back and coming to grips with your past is part of the understanding you're working to achieve now. Only in doing so can you really understand and gain gratitude of your life now. Being spiritually aware imparts the satisfaction you need. But how do you use that in the mundane world, you ask. Well, you have a peace about you now that you've not had in the last little while that comes from being aware. You're working towards a more opulent future and you're also mindful of that. This stage in your life is bringing you better which you're sure of now.



Sagittarius (November 22-December 21)

Work superiors find you're just the right person for the one job they need done correctly. Being in this type limelight fills an internal need. Assisting those in authority make you feel better about your job. This is a time of making more money in order to secure your physical needs and to be able to help others when and how you like. You seem quieter than usual which is mentioned to you by your friends, Sagittarius. You do, however, enjoy being with those friends and family. That's what makes your world go around now.



Capricorn (December 22-January 19)

Today is much better than yesterday. People love you again and want to follow your lead. Aren't you happy? This is a more stable, peaceful time with items happening as they should to keep you on an even keel. You know you're free from want, something you've worked hard to achieve all your life. Music might be part of your day. As the old saying goes, it soothes the savage beast. Enjoy the melodies or country music, Capricorn. George Strait is good. You may not have the whole day to yourself because you're going to be called upon to give sound advice. You're up to it.



Aquarius (January 20- February 18)

Something happened overnight to make you glad you're as intelligent as you are and that you've got the ability to see events in a completed manner before they are. You've got a peaceful feeling that fills your soul. Perhaps it was the getting out into nature you did yesterday or maybe it's just the universe giving some additional help. At any rate, you now realize that anything you touch will bring you material wealth, Aquarius. That's a wonderful feeling as you're well aware. A very long conversation with someone in authority or offering praises will command your attention today.



Pisces (February 19-March 20)

You may be inspired to appreciate the finery and beauty of your life and that of others as well. Imagination tops your list as being a perceptive tool to use in your daily encounters such as your work ethic. You have a natural peace about you that moves others to you almost imperceptively. Right now, is the time to make money and make it last, Pisces. Work towards doing just that and be smart about it. Keep others at arm's length even though you may be helping them emotionally. Using your psychic ability to help others means you need to approach it as if it were a movie and keep it from really touching your life.

Wordsearch Puzzle

Astronomy 2 - Word Search

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

- | | | |
|---------------|-----------|-------------|
| ASTEROID | METEOR | SPACE |
| ASTRONOMER | MOON | STAR |
| AURORA | ORBIT | SUPERNOVA |
| BLACK HOLE | PARSEC | TIDES |
| CONSTELLATION | PLANET | WHITE DWARF |
| ECLIPSE | POLARIS | |
| GALAXY | QUASARS | |
| GRAVITY | SATELLITE | |

Thursday's Solution

Astronomy 1 - Solution

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

- | | | |
|--------------|------------|------------|
| APOGEE | HUBBLE | SOLAR WIND |
| ASTROLABE | LIGHT YEAR | SPACECRAFT |
| ATMOSPHERE | MILKY WAY | SUN |
| BINARY STARS | NEBULA | TELESCOPE |
| COMET | PARALLAX | UNIVERSE |
| CORONA | PERIGEE | |
| EARTH | PULSARS | |
| EQUINOX | RED GIANT | |

Daily Sudoku

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

Thursday's Solution

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

Lifestyle

SUNDAY, APRIL 7, 2019



British actress Gwendoline Christie arrives for the Game of Thrones eighth and final season premiere at Radio City Music Hall in New York city. — AFP

Film icons bring star power to India's monumental election

On a humid evening in India's south, drummers and dancers heave to Kamal Haasan's blockbuster hits, whipping a huge crowd into ecstasy just as the mustachioed megastar himself steps onto the stage. There is a red carpet, confetti and colored lights rippling over the sea of jiving fans screaming Haasan's name, but this is no concert—it's an Indian political rally worthy of a superstar. The path from celebrity to politics is well-trodden in India and Haasan an icon of Tamil Nadu cinema, or "Kollywood"—is one of many stars on the hustings ahead of the national election starting next week.

Thousands of candidates are contesting the election—the biggest in history, with 900 million eligible voters—but not all have the X-factor of Haasan and other stars on the campaign trail. The 64-year-old launched a political party in 2018 to much fanfare and excitement in Tamil Nadu, where he is a household name after decades as a leading man on the silver screen. His rallies more closely resemble movie sets from his career than the boilerplate campaign functions hosted by India's political hopefuls.

In Coimbatore city, musicians and dancers in riotous color performed energetic dance numbers from Haasan's films as fans packed the rally ground for a glimpse of the star. In the crowd, fans cradled framed images of the film icon brought from home, and wore scarves imprinted with his face, as they sang and danced along to his classics. The man himself is not even contesting the election, but is field-

ing 40 candidates to vie for seats for his party in the national parliament, far away in New Delhi.

But there is no mistaking who is the force behind the party, his face beaming down from rallies, posters and giant screens. "All the candidates are my faces, and I will be the chariot puller," he thundered at a recent rally in Coimbatore, assuring the crowd where their votes were going.

'He sounds more believable'

Parties of all persuasion seek celebrity endorsement come election time, particularly exploiting the country's devotion to film and cricket. With millions of voters and a dizzying array of candidates and parties, allying with a hugely-recognizable face works wonders, said Rasheed Kidwai, who has written a book about Bollywood's role in politics. "A prominent face that is already recognized by the masses obviously helps because of the massive size of our parliamentary constituencies," he told AFP.

"Their onscreen image also helps in creating a better connection with the masses." Prime Minister Narendra Modi's ruling Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) is fielding Hema Malini and Kirron Kher in this election, both Bollywood veterans and leading lights of the Indian film industry. Smriti Irani, a massive television star, was appointed a cabinet minister in Modi's government after the BJP stormed to power in the last election. Gautam Gambhir, who was part of India's 2011 World Cup winning side, joined the BJP in March, following in the footsteps of countless

cricketers turning star power into political capital after retiring.

Modi's chief opponents in Congress also court big names, with film star Urmila Matondkar recently throwing her weight behind Rahul Gandhi's party and fellow actors Raj Babbar and Shatrughan Sinha already on board. Vaasanthi, an author on celebrities and politics, said many actors found the reality of campaigning and governing more taxing than anticipated. "The parties want to use their glamour but it is not like standing in front of the camera and acting," the Delhi-based writer, who goes by one name, told AFP.

Some of Haasan's opponents have suggested he lacks political acumen, a jibe that rings a bit hollow in Tamil Nadu, a state governed by one celebrity leader or another for the better part of 50 years. "The opposition is asking, 'Who is this guy? He is just an actor.' Yes, I am an actor, everyone knows that. An honest actor," Haasan told a crowd to cheers recently. Among his diehard supporters, Haasan can do little wrong.

"I have been a fan for years," said Abhirami, a housewife sitting with her young daughter in the front row of the Coimbatore rally. "There is a lack of good leadership in Tamil Nadu. Now that he has joined politics, I am here to support him. He sounds more believable and honest than most politicians." —AFP



A billboard advertising the TV series on the Indian Prime Minister's life, 'Modi: A Common Man's Journey', is seen at a junction in Mumbai. — AFP

Release of Modi biopic postponed amid election propaganda battle

Film-makers on Friday postponed the scheduled release of a Bollywood biopic on Prime Minister Narendra Modi, after it failed to get a censor's certificate on time. India's main opposition Congress party had petitioned against the film's release, calling it a propaganda movie that would influence the country's national election that starts on April 11. The film's producer Sandip Singh announced on Twitter late Thursday that the movie on Modi's rise from humble origins would not come out Friday, promising an update "soon".

But the Central Board of Film Certification said that "PM Narendra Modi" had not yet been given release authorization. The film "is yet to be certified as the process is not complete at this point," Praseon Joshi, the CBFC chairman, told the Press Trust of India news agency. India's election commission was expected to announce on Friday whether it would block the film's release because of the election.

Critics have labeled the movie a blatant attempt to sway voters in the six-week election. Congress has said its release should wait until voting ends on May 19. "This is no artistic venture. It is a political venture—and that is what we have told the Election Commission—and should not be allowed," Kapil Sibal, a senior Congress leader said last week.

The first five episodes of a 10 part internet TV series on the Prime Minister's life, 'Modi: A Common Man's Journey', were released without controversy. Posters advertising the release of the last five episodes on an Indian web streaming service have been pasted across Mumbai. —AFP



In this photo, Indian actor turned politician Kamal Haasan, founder of the Makkal Needhi Mayyam party, gestures to supporters at an election rally in Coimbatore in India's southern Tamil Nadu state. — AFP photos

HBO brings down curtain on TV phenom 'Game of Thrones'



Maisie Williams

Who will win the battle for the Iron Throne? Millions will be perched on the edge of their own seats to find out as "Game of Thrones," set in a turbulent medieval fantasy world of dragons and sword fights, reveals its final political twists and action-packed turns. Bets on the ultimate ruler of the fictional continent of Westeros are well underway, according to British bookmaker William Hill, with wilful, powerful Bran Stark (Isaac Hempstead-Wright) the current favorite.

Ten days ahead of the season eight premiere, more glamorous candidates such as King in the North Jon Snow (Kit Harington) and Mother of Dragons Daenerys Targaryen (Emilia Clarke) are also very much in the conversation. In the 20 months since the last season aired, fans have debated non-stop the eventual ending of the unusually expansive, ambitious show, filmed at a cost of \$15 million an episode. The first of the new season's six episodes will air on US cable channel HBO on April 14, as well as on the network's streaming platforms.

Lauren Christison, a supply manager in her 30s who lives and works in New Jersey, said she was "beyond eager" to see what unfolds, and plans to watch with her sister, who turned her on to the program. "I am so excited that I went out and purchased the limited edition white Johnnie Walker scotch whisky—and I don't even drink whisky," she told AFP. "Game of Thrones," which has aired 67 episodes, premiered in 2011 based on George R.R. Martin's expansive "A Song of Fire and Ice" book series. The first installment, "A Game of Thrones," was published in 1996.

Well known for its record-breaking audiences across the world, the show has also proven a critical darling and an awards juggernaut, its first seven seasons garnering a staggering 47 Emmys. "I think there may have been other shows in the past that hooked people, but never like this," Christison said.

'Power, love, family, conviction'

The website Archive of Our Own counts more than 22,000 "fan fiction" entries in which devotees have produced DIY stories based on the series' universe. The 2018 "Con of Thrones" fan convention attracted around 5,000 people to celebrate the show in Nashville, according to organizer Melissa Anelli of Mischief Management, which plans to repeat the event in July. "The level of engagement is enormous," Anelli said.

Dark, complex, violent, medieval—"Game of Thrones" doesn't fit the typical profile of a cultural phenomenon, but its sweeping storylines and epic themes have pulling power beyond the geek clique. The show builds on the witty, wry and sometimes adult approach to nerd culture popularized by Disney's Marvel Cinematic Universe, which treats its audience like grown-ups and has been rewarded with \$18.5 billion in ticket sales.

"The Marvel movie franchise really made nerd mainstream," said "GoT" buff Senia Hardwick, who revealed that she met her wife at a fan gathering. For Christison, the universality of its appeal is obvious. "In the end, I think 'GoT' resonates with people because the themes of power, love, family, and conviction are woven into each of the characters as they vie for the Throne," she said.

Life after the end?

"The story arc is so vast that it can appeal to a variety of viewers at once," added Lisa Woolfork, a literature professor at the University of Virginia who teaches a "Game of Thrones" class. "Those interested in political intrigue, family drama, historical fiction, sword and sorcery, costume drama—all of these representational styles are present in 'Game of Thrones.'" Despite being fantasy, the series does an incredible job of commenting on the modern world, according to Valerie Garver, a medieval studies associate professor at Northern Illinois University.

She cited the show's iconic tagline—"Winter is coming"—an ominous warning about the harsh weather ahead, but perhaps also a portent of the end of the world—and an allegorical nod to the real-life climate change emergency, Martin has acknowledged. The motif returns in the upcoming season, with characters facing threats from the

sinister Night King and his army of frozen zombies—the frankly terrifying White Walkers.

"What do people do when there seems to be an unsolvable problem that could mean the destruction of humankind?" Garver asked. "Will they try to solve that or will they pay attention more to the things that seem more immediate?" Though some fans are pulling for another season or two, most seem to have accepted the impending conclusion and, like Christison, are "ready for the shock of who will live and ultimately who will die." For Anelli, the passion of "GoT" will live on past its final episode, airing on May 19.



British actor Isaac Hempstead Wright

The publication of Martin's much-anticipated sixth "A Song of Fire and Ice" book ought to ignite fans' devotion all over again, as has the teased possibility of a prequel series, set before Martin's first book. Anelli says a 2020 "Con of Thrones" gathering isn't yet planned, but added that "much like Harry Potter, 'Game of Thrones' fandom will continue to exist past the core content expiration."—AFP



Emilia Clarke attends the 'Game of Thrones' Season 8 Premiere in New York City. — AFP photos



Lisa Bonet and Jason Momoa



Hannah Murray



British actor John Bradley



Natalie Dormer



British actor Jerome Flynn

Lifestyle | Movies



British actress Sophie Turner and singer Nick Jonas



British actress Indira Varma



Irish actor Jack Gleeson



Gwendoline Christie, left, and British actress Nathalie Emmanuel



US actor Peter Dinklage and his wife Erica Schmidt



Rose Leslie and Kit Harington



Danish actor Nikolaj Coster-Waldau



Dutch actress Carice van Houten

'Game of Thrones' author to discover TV ending to his saga

"Game of Thrones," the fantasy epic imagined more than 20 years ago by author George R R Martin, will have its much-anticipated finale on HBO later this year. But in a strange twist never before seen in literature, Martin will himself discover the on-screen ending of his long-running masterwork before he has had a chance to conclude the fantasy on paper. "Obviously, I wished I finished these books sooner so the show hadn't gotten ahead of me," Martin said recently in an interview with Entertainment Weekly before the final season begins airing on April 14 on HBO. "I never anticipated that."

When the Emmy Award-winning television series about noble families vying for the Iron Throne was launched in 2011, the American author had only written four of the seven books that make up his "Song of Ice and Fire" saga. His fifth novel, "A Dance With Dragons," was published in July 2011, a few weeks after the end of the first season. But since then, book fans have eagerly been awaiting the last two novels—"The Winds of Winter" and "A Dream of Spring."

The plot lines for both have already been adapted to the screen based on outlines Martin discussed with

screenwriters David Benioff and Dan Weiss on how he foresaw the end of his saga. "This is simply unprecedented," Nicolas Allard, a French author who wrote a book about "Game of Thrones," told AFP. He noted that while British author JK Rowling sold the film rights for the first four "Harry Potter" books to Warner Bros., she was able to write the ending of her saga before it hit the big screen.

But in Martin's case, Allard said although the author had given "Game of Thrones" screenwriters a rough idea of how he envisioned the ending, it is unclear whether the show will stick to his story line. "I haven't read the (final season) scripts and haven't been able to visit the set because I've been working on 'Winds,'" Martin told Entertainment Weekly. "I know some of the things. But there's a lot of minor-character (arcs) they'll be coming up with on their own. "And, of course, they passed me several years ago. There may be important discrepancies."

Different ending on paper?

According to several experts interviewed by AFP, Martin is not bound by the television story line and he may well choose to depart from it. "His contract stipulates that he has to come up with the denouement for the series and provide an outline of what would happen," Allard said. "But he is free to choose a different ending on paper. "And that would be the first time this would happen in the literary world."

He said for example that Jon Snow could very well die of his stabbing wound in the next novel rather than be resuscitated as was the case on screen. For Sarah Mesle, assistant professor of writing at the University of Southern California, it's all but guaranteed that

Martin will move away from the television storyline. "Even if he sticks to the same series of events... there's no way he can be in the world and not know the way that the audience has responded to the different plot points or the way that we came to love some characters and not others," she told AFP.

"I mean he's... been very much a part of the fan culture of the show, and I think his sense of how audiences feel about his story will certainly affect his choices," Allard noted as an example that Martin was upset when, in season six of the television series, the origin of the White Walkers—formerly-human ice creatures—was revealed. "He wanted to be the one to reveal that in his novels," Allard said. "Now, it's like the television series and the novels are two separate artistic elements."

Mesle says it is clear the television series has overtaken the story line and upstaged Martin. "All of a sudden we have this TV show that has the storytelling status over a book," she said. "Whether Martin finishes the series or not, once the TV show started to surpass the novels, the novels are now going to be an adaptation of the TV show," she added. "There's no way around it."—AFP



Author Co-Executive producer George R R Martin arrives for the 'Game of Thrones' eighth and final season premiere at Radio City Music Hall in New York City.

Dubrovnik or King's Landing? Game of Thrones is 'blessing and curse'

Shepherding tourists through the arches and towers of Croatia's medieval walled city of Dubrovnik, Ivan Vukovic spends half his time leading tours of a capital that doesn't exist: the fictional King's Landing from "Game of Thrones". The two cities now rival each other for fame after Dubrovnik—already a tourist and cruise ship magnet—became a set in 2011 for the cult HBO series, whose final season starts on April 14.

Doubling as King's Landing, the capital of Westeros' Seven Kingdoms, "can be a blessing and it can be a curse" for Dubrovnik, said 38-year-old guide Vukovic. While the "Game of Thrones" stardom has been a boon for his business, it is also bringing a new inundation of visitors to a city already struggling with overcrowding. "It's an amazing thing because it brings us so many people, but now we don't know what to do with those people," said the guide, describing bottlenecks that choke the city's limestone streets in peak summer season.



Picture taken shows the old port of the city of Dubrovnik, also a set for the HBO series 'Game of Thrones' (GoT). — AFP photos

Croatia's mediaeval walled city of Dubrovnik.

More than half of his tours include landmarks from King's Landing, while the others focus on the genuine history of Dubrovnik, a UNESCO site that dates back to the 7th century and features a maze of churches, palaces and fountains perched above the shimmering Adriatic. Locals no longer bat an eyelid when tourists gather along the old town's baroque Jesuit Staircase to shout "Shame! Shame! Shame!"—a sight fans recognize as a reenactment of the GoT scene when Queen Cersei

is forced to publicly walk naked down the steps after confessing to adultery.

Overtourism

Sitting in the terrace of his pizzeria at the foot of the stairs, owner Niko Grljevic says he doesn't mind the GoT fans, though he would prefer guides urged tourists to refrain from stripping down for an even more authentic rendering of the walk of shame. "We cannot spit in the plate we eat from," says Grljevic. The bar next to his place offers a "Mojito of Shame" cocktail, while souvenir shops on the main street offer a "Game of Thrones" bottle opener for 40 euros (\$45), T-shirts for 34 euros and mugs for 20 euros.

Grljevic is a native of the city's old town and one of its last holdouts, with most locals renting out their apartments to tourists or selling them for up to 10,000 euros per square meter. From a population of 5,000 in the early 1990s, the number of residents is down to around 700

of us," he says. After Dubrovnik's debut in season two, the HBO show attracted more than 244,000 tourists—who spent some 126 million euros—to Dubrovnik between 2012 and 2015, according to the Zagreb-based Institute of Economics.

That, plus the normal influx, raised concerns of an "overtourism" crisis last year, when more than 1.2 million people descended on a city that is home to 42,000 locals. Authorities say they are regulating the timing of cruise ships and have set up cameras in the city to monitor crowd flow.

#KingsLanding

But locals are worried about how to strike the right balance. Gordan Prislac, a 70-year-old pensioner, admits "Game of Thrones" has had some positive effects in boosting the city's popularity but that overcrowding remains a serious concern. "Even the pigeons... have no place to land" in summer, he says, adding: "I'm afraid that

tourism will destroy our ancient town."

Tour guide Vukovic also remarks on how the old city has been turned into a shopping mall for tourists, whose Instagram posts often feature #KingsLanding as the second hashtag after Dubrovnik. He starts his walks by encouraging people to drink the water from a medieval fountain. "It's the only free thing here," he quips. The guide used to wear a "Dubrovnik is much more than King's Landing" T-shirt but now fears it might alienate some fans and earn him bad reviews online. "For young people, movies and social media became more important than history," he said.—AFP



These pictures show paper model makers adding finishing touches to their traditional-style paper models, used as an offering for the dead, at their workshop in New Taipei City. — AFP photos

Taiwan honors dead with lavish paper models

From a modern summer villa with an outdoor pool to a fully equipped film studio or a casino, paper model makers in Taiwan are ensuring the dead enjoy an eternity of luxury. Across the global Chinese diaspora, burning paper offerings has long been seen as a way to send ancestors gifts that they can use in the afterlife. In recent years, traditional paper incarnations of money and gold bars have given way to the more modern—paper iPads and mobile phones, washing machines, cars, televisions and credit cards.

But a handful of paper model makers in Taiwan are taking the art to a new level and crafting offerings that bestow on the dead the kind of trappings only experienced by the truly rich and famous in the land of the living. "We believe that people will move on to another world after they die," explained Taipei businessman Chen Shu-hsuan, as he attended his uncle's funeral.

Moments before, family members prayed as a detailed model of a two-storey mansion created for the deceased went up in flames, complete with working lights, paper staff and a luxury car tucked away inside an attached garage. "We hope he would live a good afterlife in that world so we prepare a paper house and a lot of paper money so he could have the means to live well," Chen said.

Complicated demands

The practice of burning offerings originated in Taoism, a leading faith in Taiwan, with the gifts primarily offered at funerals, death anniversaries and during key festivals when ancestors are honored. Chen said his family intended to burn more offerings for his uncle on Friday's Tomb

Sweeping Festival when ethnic Chinese traditionally visit and tidy the graves of their ancestors to pay respect. Model maker Lin Chien-chiang, 55, has been in the business for 30 years and says consumer demands are becoming increasingly complex.

These include miniature banks, a space shuttle, and even an entertainment complex featuring a casino and a hostess club complete with ladies dressed in figure-hugging outfits. His most popular offerings include realistic miniature gadgets such as smartphones and laptops to a "mini vault" containing a wad of US dollars, gold bars and credit cards. Lin's company is also one of a handful in Taipei that still manufacture bigger, traditional Chinese-styled houses made with paper and bamboo. But they fell out of fashion because of environmental concerns, as they used to contain styrofoam.

"We are making changes to produce smaller and more intricate models to better suit the times. And using more environmentally friendly materials," Lin said, adding that fewer than 20 percent of his orders now are for traditional houses.

Dead but not forgotten

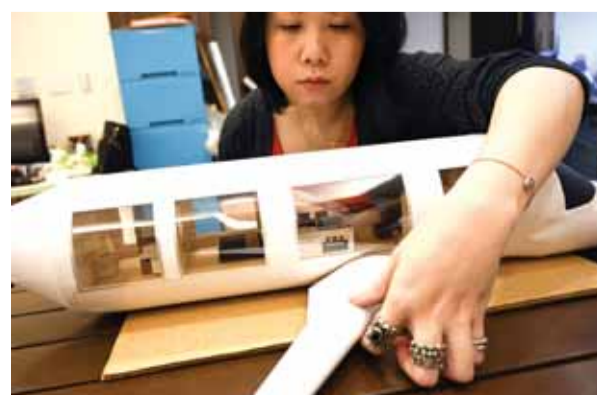
Veteran craftsman Chiang Yueh-lun, 51, recalled his most unique order: A lifesize paper double of a young man killed in a car crash to be placed on top of the badly damaged body inside his casket. "Some people think our business is ill luck because it has to do with the dead but I

believe we are accumulating good karma for the services we provide," he said. Han Yean, 40, started her business Skea (Spectacular Kind of Elysium Accessories) after she could not find an ideal paper house for her grandfather when he passed away 12 years ago.

She eventually made a paper villa with an outdoor hot spring which her grandfather had loved. Han believes that the offerings not only serve as a tribute to the deceased but also help the living cope with loss. "We can continue to express our love," Han says of the paper gifts, adding: "We are not forgetting our loved ones and they are living in our hearts." Han offers a variety of handcrafted everyday items such as paper clothes, bags and cosmetics priced from around \$100.

But at the other end of the spectrum the price tag can be steep. She once built an elaborate film-studio boasting sets from different time periods for the family of a deceased entertainment tycoon. The bill came to \$64,000. The tradition has crossed over into Taiwan's other faiths. Han estimates 20 percent of her customers are Christian.

She will display some of her designs at an exhibition on Taiwan's funeral culture in Paris from June, including a dim sum restaurant based on a product she previously made for a customer. "I hope western societies will understand our practice," she said. "Paper offerings are not something scary. I want to make beautiful items that make people feel their loved ones are living a better life in heaven." —AFP



Hollywood actresses appear in court in US college admissions bribery case

Surrounded by a mob of journalists, actresses Felicity Huffman and Lory Loughlin appeared in a Boston court on Wednesday to face charges in connection with a massive college admissions scam involving other celebrities and top industry CEOs. Huffman and Loughlin, who have remained silent since they were charged in March, arrived separately and said nothing to the reporters outside the courthouse. Huffman, known best for her role in the "Desperate Housewives" series, arrived without her equally famous husband, actor William H Macy.

Loughlin, known for her role on "Full House," smiled and waved at her fans before entering the building. The actresses were the most famous of the 50 people indicted in a scam to help children of the American elite gain entry into top US colleges. The ringleader behind the scam, William "Rick" Singer, who authorities say was paid about \$25 million dollars to bribe coaches and university administrators, has pleaded guilty and is cooperating with authorities.

Some of the universities targeted in the elaborate cheating scam include Yale, Stanford, UCLA and Georgetown. None of the schools or the students have been charged in the case. According to prosecutors, the accused parents paid a firm run by Singer as much as \$6 million to cheat on college entrance exams for their children or to bribe coaches to help non-athletic students get scholarships. The 33 parents in the case have been charged with conspiracy to commit mail fraud, a crime punishable by five years prison.

Huffman has been accused of paying \$15,000 dollars to help her eldest daughter get better results in the SAT college entrance exam. According to the indictment, she and Macy paid for an examiner to correct their daughter's test answers through a phony donation to Singer's foundation. They reportedly agreed in 2018 to repeat the scam for their youngest daughter, although this did not happen.

Loughlin and her husband are accused of paying \$500,000 in 2016 and 2017 to Singer's foundation so that their two daughters could pose as rowers and join the University of Southern California (USC) crew team. Thanks to Singer's cooperation, investigators have recordings of telephone conversations and e-mails exchanges with the actresses about the cheating. No parent has yet pleaded guilty in the case.

There is plenty of speculation about ongoing negotiations between attorneys representing the defendants and the Massachusetts federal prosecutor, which could lead to plea agreements. Such agreements are common in the US legal system: when investigators have evidence they believe is enough to get a jury to obtain a conviction, defendants are encouraged to at least partially recognize their guilt to avoid an expensive court case that they could lose, with the promise of a more lenient sentence.—AFP

Classifieds

Sunday, April 7, 2019

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Expected Weather for the Next 24 Hours

BY DAY: Relatively hot and Partly cloudy with light to moderate freshening at times south easterly wind, with speed of 15 - 40 km/h with a chance for rain that might be thundery later on.

BY NIGHT: Partly cloudy to cloudy with light to moderate freshening at times south easterly wind, with speed of 10 - 40 km/h with a chance for rain that might be thundery at times.

WEATHER WATCH			Thunder Rain	
STATION	MAX. EXP.	MIN. REC.	SFC. CHART 06/04/2019 0000 UTC	
KUWAIT CITY	30 °C	21 °C		
KUWAIT AIRPORT	31 °C	21 °C		
ABDALY	35 °C	19 °C		
BUBYAN	- °C	- °C		
JAHRA	33 °C	21 °C		
FAILAKA ISLAND	28 °C	21 °C		
SALMIYAH	27 °C	21 °C		
AHMADI	28 °C	21 °C		
NUWAISIB	30 °C	21 °C		
WAFRA	32 °C	19 °C		
SALMY	32 °C	18 °C		

4 DAYS FORECAST

DAY	DATE	WEATHER	Temperatures		Wind Direction	Wind Speed
			MAX.	MIN.		
Sunday	04/07	Relatively hot and Cloudy with a chance for scattered rain	30 °C	20 °C	VRB-NE	08 - 30 km/h
Monday	04/08	Relatively hot and Partly cloudy to cloudy with a chance for rain that might be thundery later on	32 °C	19 °C	NW-VRB	10 - 40 km/h
Tuesday	04/09	Cloudy to partly cloudy with a chance for rising dust with a chance for thunder rain	28 °C	20 °C	SE-SW	12 - 45 km/h
Wednesday	04/10	Relatively hot and Partly cloudy with a chance for thunder rain later on	30 °C	21 °C	SE	12 - 42 km/h

PRAYER TIMES

Fajr	04:12
Sunrise	05:32
Zuhr	11:51
Asr	15:23
Sunset	18:09
Isha	19:28

RECORDED YESTERDAY AT KUWAIT AIRPORT

MAX. Temp.	00 °C
MIN. Temp.	00 °C
MAX. RH	00 %
MIN. RH	00 %
MAX. Wind	N 00 km/h
TOTAL RAINFALL IN 24 HR.	0 mm

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Antonet Fernandes and here-in after in all my dealings and documents, I will be known by name of Michelle Antonet Fernandes. (C 5511) 4-4-2019

CHANGE OF NAME

I, Michelle Fernandes, holder of Indian Passport No. L8354532 and civil ID No. 277110401536, change my name from Michelle Henry Fernandes to Michelle

I, NARASAPURAM NARASIMHULU holder of Indian Passport No. R8271290 & Civil ID No. 261070100176 has changed my name from NARASAPURAM NARASIMHULU to NARASAPURAM SRINIVASULU hereinafter in all my dealings and documents, I will be known by name of NARASAPURAM SRINIVASULU. (C 5510) 3-4-2019

Airlines

Kuwait Airways	171
Jazeera Airways	177
Wataniya Airways	22 066 536
Turkish Airlines	1884918
American Airlines	22087425
	22087426
	22924455
Jet Airways	22414400
FlyDubai	22423888
Qatar Airways	22425747
KLM	22418064/5/6
Royal Jordanian	22425635
British Airways	22430224
Air France	22921555
Emirates	22456700
Air India	22438185/4
Air India EXPRESS	22424444
Sri Lanka Airlines	22421578
Egypt Air	22421516
Swiss Air	22426306
Saudia	22423073
Middle East Airlines	22422493
Lufthansa	22421044
PIA	22452977/8
Bangladesh Airlines	

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DIAL161 FOR AIRPORT INFORMATION

Arrival Flights on Sunday 7/4/2019				Departure Flights on Sunday 7/4/2019			
Airlines	Flt	Route	Time	Airlines	Flt	Route	Time
IGO	1757	Kochi	00:10	JZR	213	Jeddah	12:05
JZR	254	Amman	00:20	QTR	1075	Doha	12:10
KAC	102	London	00:50	MSR	611	Cairo	12:50
DLH	625	Dammam	00:50	JZR	123	Dubai	13:10
KAC	504	Beirut	01:00	JZR	115	Doha	13:25
JZR	734	Cairo	01:00	KAC	541	Cairo	13:30
JZR	722	Alexandria	01:00	SAW	702	Damascus	13:30
UAE	853	Dubai	01:40	THY	767	Istanbul	14:00
KLM	446	Bahrain	01:45	AXB	394	Kozhikode	14:10
PGT	840	Istanbul	01:50	UAE	872	Dubai	14:15
PGT	858	Istanbul	01:50	KAC	673	Dubai	15:00
KKK	1268	Istanbul	01:55	GFA	222	Bahrain	15:00
ETH	620	Addis Ababa	02:15	JZR	103	Bahrain	15:05
GFA	211	Bahrain	02:15	FDB	060	FDB	15:05
QTR	1086	Doha	02:30	QTR	1079	Doha	15:15
KAC	414	Bangkok	02:40	SVA	501	Jeddah	15:45
PGT	860	Istanbul	02:50	KNE	530	Jeddah	15:55
ETD	305	Abu Dhabi	03:05	JZR	405	Kochi	16:00
OMA	643	Muscat	03:05	KAC	775	Riyadh	16:05
RJA	648	Amman	03:05	KAC	563	Amman	16:10
MSR	612	Cairo	03:15	KAC	615	Bahrain	16:10
KAC	418	Manila	03:20	ABY	128	Sharjah	16:15
QTR	1076	Doha	03:30	KAC	785	Jeddah	16:20
LMU	510	Cairo	04:00	ETD	304	Abu Dhabi	16:20
KAC	382	Delhi	04:05	OMA	646	Muscat	16:20
IGO	1751	Chennai	04:10	KAC	619	Doha	16:25
KAC	784	Jeddah	04:25	FEQ	442	Asyut	16:55
JZR	404	Hyderabad	04:30	KAC	675	Dubai	17:00
DHX	170	Bahrain	05:05	FDB	052	Dubai	17:10
FDB	069	Dubai	05:05	QTR	1073	Doha	17:25
JZR	402	Mumbai	05:25	KAC	503	Beirut	17:40
KAC	344	Chennai	05:30	KAC	283	Dhaka	17:40
KAC	1544	Cairo	05:45	UAE	858	Dubai	17:40
JZR	112	Doha	05:50	KAC	343	Chennai	17:50
QTR	8511	Doha	06:05	KAC	621	Doha	17:50
BAW	157	London	06:10	KAC	381	Delhi	17:55
KAC	284	Dhaka	06:15	JZR	721	Alexandria	18:15
JZR	714	Sohag	06:20	SVA	511	Riyadh	18:15
KAC	678	Dubai	06:40	JZR	127	Dubai	18:20
KAC	204	Lahore	06:45	GFA	216	Bahrain	18:20
KAC	302	Mumbai	07:05	JZR	403	Hyderabad	18:25
IGO	1755	CNN	07:10	JZR	733	Cairo	18:35
FDB	053	Dubai	07:50	JZR	501	Lahore	18:35
KAC	332	Trivandrum	08:05	IRA	664	Shiraz	18:35
KAC	358	Kochi	08:05	JZR	253	Amman	19:10
KAC	384	Delhi	08:10	KAC	345	Ahmedabad	19:20
UAE	855	Dubai	08:25	QTR	1081	Doha	19:20
JZR	708	Luxor	08:45	FDB	064	Dubai	19:50
ETD	301	Abu Dhabi	08:50	GFA	218	Bahrain	19:50
OMA	641	Muscat	09:00	ABY	124	Sharjah	20:00
ABY	125	Sharjah	09:00	RJA	641	Amman	20:05
QTR	1070	Doha	09:30	RBG	556	Alexandria	20:20
FDB	055	Dubai	09:40	JZR	401	Mumbai	20:30
IGO	1753	Ahmedabad	09:40	FDB	058	Dubai	20:30
JZR	410	Delhi	09:50	UAE	876	Dubai	20:35
SVA	512	Riyadh	10:00	KAC	351	Kochi	20:45
GFA	213	Bahrain	10:40	DLH	624	Dammam	20:55
MEA	404	Beirut	10:55	KAC	333	Trivandrum	21:05
QTR	1074	Doha	11:00	OMA	648	Muscat	21:05
SYR	341	Damascus	11:00	MEA	403	Beirut	21:15
JZR	122	Dubai	11:45	KAC	301	Mumbai	21:25
MSR	610	Cairo	11:50	QTR	1089	Doha	21:50
THY	766	Istanbul	12:30	DHX	171	Bahrain	21:50
SAW	701	Damascus	12:30	KAC	203	Lahore	22:00
KAC	614	Bahrain	12:30	KLM	445	Bahrain	22:10
UAE	871	Dubai	12:45	ETD	308	Abu Dhabi	22:15
AXB	393	Kozhikode	13:10	ALK	230	Colombo	22:20
KAC	774	Riyadh	13:35	KAC	383	Delhi	22:35
JZR	212	Jeddah	13:45	UAE	860	Dubai	22:35
KAC	672	Dubai	14:00	GFA	220	Bahrain	22:50
QTR	1078	Doha	14:10	KAC	783	Jeddah	22:55
				KAC	411	Bangkok	23:00
				KAC	1543	Cairo	23:00
				ETD	310	Abu Dhabi	23:05
				QTR	1083	Doha	23:20

IAEA asks for safeguards on first Saudi nuke reactor

WASHINGTON: The head UN nuclear inspector said Friday that his agency is asking Saudi Arabia to agree to safeguards on nuclear material that could arrive by the end of the year for its first atomic reactor. Satellite imagery recently emerged of the Argentine-built project on the outskirts of Riyadh, which comes amid controversy in Washington over President Donald Trump's approval of nuclear projects with the oil-rich kingdom.

But Yukiya Amano, director general of the International Atomic Energy Agency, said there was nothing secret about the reactor and that Saudi Arabia informed the Vienna-based UN body about its plans in 2014. He said the IAEA has encouraged Saudi Arabia to put into force a comprehensive safeguards agreement, under which the agency ensures that nuclear material is not being diverted to weapons use.

Saudi Arabia in 2005 signed with the IAEA a so-called small quantities protocol, which exempts countries from inspections if they have no or minimal nuclear programs. "We have proposed to Saudi Arabia to rescind and replace it by the full-fledged comprehensive safeguards agreement," Amano told reporters in Washington. "They didn't say no, they didn't say yes, and they are now giving thoughts. We are waiting," he said. "For now, they don't have the material, so there is no violation," he said. Amano said that Saudi Arabia may bring in nuclear material "by the end of the year," although he cautioned that nuclear projects frequently get delayed.

Saudi Arabia, the world's top crude exporter, has announced plans to spend \$80 billion to build 16 nuclear reactors over the

coming two decades as it diversifies energy. The first project, being built by Argentina's state-backed nuclear company INVAP, is a so-called low power research reactor, or LPRR, that is generally used to train technicians. "Saudi Arabia has been dragging its feet for 30 years on getting meaningful agreements in place; but the LPRR means they MUST abide by international rules," said Robert Kelley, a US Energy Department veteran and former director of nuclear inspections at the IAEA.

"Argentina is not going to supply the nuclear fuel if they don't," said Kelley, now a distinguished associate fellow at the Stockholm International Peace Research Institute. He said that the reactor, with its small size, was insignificant by itself but was "opening a can of worms", including the prospect of the Trump administration sharing sensitive technology without review.

US Energy Secretary Rick Perry told a recent Senate hearing that his department had given the go-ahead for six applications by US companies to do nuclear work in Saudi Arabia. The approvals come even though Saudi Arabia has not sought a so-called Section 123 Agreement to guarantee the peaceful use of nuclear technology, which is required under US law before any transfer of sensitive material.

Pompeo, in an interview Friday with CBS, signaled that the United States would ensure that Saudi Arabia does not develop nuclear weapons. "We will not permit that to happen anywhere in the world. The president understands the threat of proliferation," he said. Saudi Arabia's powerful crown prince,



WASHINGTON: US Secretary of State Mike Pompeo meets Director General of the International Atomic Energy Agency Yukiya Amano at the US Department of State on April 3, 2019. — AFP

Mohammed bin Salman, has warned that the kingdom would seek nuclear weapons if its archrival Iran obtains one.

The Trump administration has allied itself

closely with both Saudi Arabia and Israel and withdrawn from an international accord with Iran under which Tehran drastically curbed its nuclear program. Amano, who met with

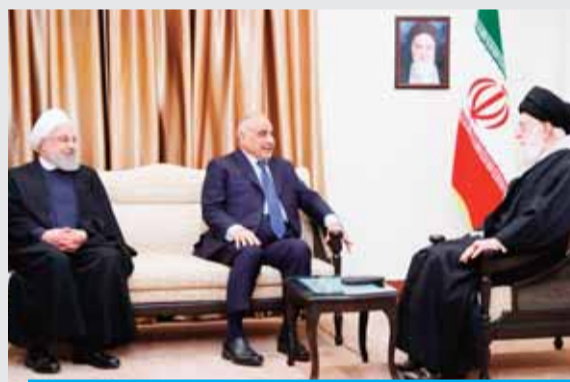
Pompeo in Washington, reiterated that the IAEA has verified that Iran remains in compliance with the agreement, which is strongly backed by the Europeans. — AFP

Rouhani: Iran ready to expand power, gas trade with Iraq

DUBAI: President Hassan Rouhani called yesterday for Iran and neighboring Iraq to expand their gas and electricity dealings and boost bilateral trade to \$20 billion, state TV reported, despite difficulties caused by US sanctions against Tehran. "The plans to export electricity and gas and hopefully oil continue and we are ready to expand these contacts not only for the two countries but also for other countries in the region," Rouhani said after a meeting with visiting Iraqi Prime Minister Adel Abdul Mahdi, in remarks carried by state television.

In March, the United States granted Iraq a 90-day waiver exempting it from sanctions to buy energy from Iran, the latest extension allowing Baghdad to keep purchasing electricity from its neighbor. "We hope that our plans to expand trade volume to \$20 billion will be realized within the next few months or years," Rouhani said. Iranian media reports have put the current level of trade at about \$12 billion.

Rouhani expressed hope that work on building a railway linking the two countries, would begin within the next few months. The railway project was part of deals reached during Rouhani's March visit to Baghdad, meant to underline that Tehran still plays a dominant role in Iraq despite US efforts to isolate



TEHRAN: Iran's Supreme Leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei meets Iraqi Prime Minister Adel Abdul Mahdi in the presence of Iranian President Hassan Rouhani yesterday. — AFP

Iran, Iran and Iraq fought a devastating 1980-88 war but the 2003 US-led invasion of Iraq that ousted Saddam Hussein prompted a long insurgency during which Iran's regional sway rose at the expense of the United States.

Iraq yesterday closed its Sheeb border crossing with Iran to travellers and trade until further notice, Iraqi security sources said, as flooding continues to submerge villages in southwestern Iran. US President Donald Trump reimposed sanctions on Iran's energy exports in November, citing its nuclear program and meddling in the Middle East, but has granted waivers to several buyers to meet consumer energy needs. Iraq relies heavily on Iranian gas to feed its power stations, importing roughly 1.5 billion standard cubic feet per day via pipelines in the south and east. — Reuters

intractability to a new focus of pragmatism".

Meanwhile, Netanyahu said he has told US President Donald Trump that Israel would not remove "even one person" from a settlement as part of a future peace plan. "I said there shouldn't be the removal of even one settlement" from the occupied West Bank, Netanyahu told Israel's Channel 13 television in an interview broadcast Friday. Washington is expected to unveil proposals for Israeli-Palestinian peace sometime after Tuesday's Israeli election in which Netanyahu is seeking a fifth term.

The Israeli prime minister was asked if he was familiar with the details of the US plan, replying he knew "what should be in it". Along with settlements, "our ongoing control of all the territory west of the Jordan River was a further condition set by the Israeli premier for any US-led peace initiative. Netanyahu said he informed Trump not "even one person" would be evicted from a settlement, telling Channel 13 he doubted such a request would be made. If such a measure is tabled, Israel would pull out of Washington's plan according to Netanyahu.

Settlements built on land occupied by Israel in the 1967 Six-Day War are deemed illegal by the international community and their ongoing construction is seen as a major barrier to peace. More than 400,000 Israelis live in West Bank settlements, while a further 200,000 live in settlements in occupied east Jerusalem. While Netanyahu has a close relationship with the US president, Palestinian president Mahmoud Abbas cut off relations with Washington after Trump declared the disputed city of Jerusalem Israel's capital in December 2017.

The Palestinians say the US government's pro-Israel bias meant it could no longer lead peace negotiations between them and Israel, while US officials argue their plan will be fair. Israeli-Palestinian peace efforts have been at a standstill since 2014, when a drive for a deal by Barack Obama's administration collapsed. Netanyahu said Friday his position on settlers had also been relayed to the former US president. — Agencies

Mummified mice and more in Egypt...

Continued from Page 1

"The tomb is made up of a central lobby, and a burial room with two stone coffins. The lobby is divided in two", Waziri said. "It shows images of the owner of the burial room, Tutu, giving and receiving gifts before different gods and goddesses. We see the same thing for his wife, Ta-Shirit-Iziz, with the difference that (we see) verses from a book, the book of the afterlife", he added.

Defiant Haftar forces press...

Continued from Page 1

Libya has struggled to counter unrest since the 2011 overthrow of dictator Muammar Gaddafi, leaving dozens of militia to fill the void and ally with either the GNA or the rival administration in the east backed by Haftar. At least one armed group from Misrata - whose forces are mostly loyal to the UN-backed government - arrived yesterday in eastern Tripoli to join the counter-offensive, according to an AFP photographer. "We are waiting for orders to repel any advance by the enemy towards Tripoli," said the group's spokesman Khaled Abu Jazia. Dozens of armed vehicles mounted with anti-aircraft guns were gathered in Tajura, in the suburbs east of the capital.

Tripoli residents have expressed concern that large-scale fighting could break out and began stocking up on food and petrol. Yesterday, large queues formed at petrol stations and supermarkets, an AFP journalist said. "We must store everything we need for the family, just in case, especially those with young children," said Farida, a

Ptolemaic rule spanned about three centuries until the Roman conquest in 30 BC.

Egypt's tourism industry has been struggling in recent years and the antiquities ministry said Friday's presentation was intended to "draw the world's attention to the civilization and antiquities of Egypt". The country's plethora of heritage sites is a major draw for tourists and the ministry described Sohag as "one of the most historically rich cities in Egypt", where a museum opened last year. Political instability and deadly attacks since the 2011 revolution have led to a drop in visitor numbers, although there has been a slight recovery in recent years. Authorities regularly celebrate new discoveries, but Egypt is often accused of negligence regarding its cultural heritage and a lack of scientific rigor. — Agencies

mother pushing a full shopping cart. "You never know how long it will last," she added.

Haftar's forces were driven back by a few kilometers on Friday evening after briefly seizing Tripoli's international airport, which was destroyed in 2014. On Friday they were pushed back from a key checkpoint west of the capital, less than 24 hours after seizing it during their lightning offensive towards Tripoli. The latest escalation in the conflict-wracked country comes just days ahead of a UN-backed conference intended to unite Libya's rivals and pave the way for elections.

Russia's top diplomat yesterday called for Libyans to "decide their future themselves" through "inclusive" dialogue. "Without any sort of artificial dates that some are trying to force upon them from outside," Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov said during a visit to Cairo.

Despite the Tripoli flare-up, UN envoy Ghassan Salame insisted the April 14-16 talks in the Libyan city of Ghadames would go ahead. "We are determined" to hold the talks "as scheduled" unless prevented by serious obstacles, Salame told a press conference. "We want to reassure Libyans that we will stay alongside the Libyan people to make the political process a success without resorting to escalation." Libya's unity government was created at UN-backed talks in 2015 but it has struggled to assert control, while a number of international initiatives since have failed to unite the country. — AFP

Oman calls on Arabs to ease Israel's...

Continued from Page 1

"the issue is that there is an occupation" of Arab land. "The Arab world has recognized Israel's right to exist. The Palestinians themselves recognized the Israeli right to exist... that is not the issue," Safadi told the panel. "The issue is that there is an occupation. Is this occupation going to end or not?"

Israel, Safadi said, must "withdraw from Arab lands occupied since 1967 and allow" the creation of a Palestinian state. "This is the issue," he said. "If they (Israel) say they are not comfortable, that is not my problem," said Safadi. "The problem is not with Arabs giving assurances... the problem is with Israel doing what is right for peace," he added. "Israel... is not doing the right thing. Actually it is doing more of the wrong things by suffocating Palestinians," the Jordanian foreign minister said, referring to the Israeli-blockaded Gaza Strip. "Gaza, is probably as you heard many times, the world's largest prison," he added.

In recent months, Israel has been courting Gulf Arab states. In February, Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu met one-on-one with Bin Alawi at an international conference in Warsaw, attended by officials from Saudi Arabia, Bahrain and the United Arab Emirates. In October last year, Netanyahu held surprise talks with Oman's Sultan Qaboos in Muscat - raising Palestinian fears of a normalization of ties.

Last year bin Alawi told a regional conference in Bahrain it might be "time for Israel to be treated the same (as states in the Middle East) and also bear the same obligations". Bahrain endorsed the remarks which at the time were said to be aimed at moving the Israeli-Palestinian "narrative from

Sudan protesters rally outside army...

Continued from Page 1

army headquarters and hold a sit-in in the nearby streets," the organizers said in a statement. "We appreciate that the army did not touch the protesters and we hope that it will take the side of the people."

Since the protests erupted, security agents and riot police have cracked down on demonstrators but the army has not intervened. After a few hours, dozens of vehicles full of riot police converged near the compound and fired tear gas at protesters in a bid to disperse them, witnesses said, adding that some demonstrators threw rocks at the police officers. In a separate demonstration yesterday, protesters reached the army office in the town of Madani southeast of the capital, witnesses told AFP by telephone.

Protests have rocked the east African country since December, with angry crowds accusing Bashir's government of mismanaging the economy that has led to soaring food prices and regular shortages of fuel and foreign currency. Demonstrations first erupted on Dec 19 after a government decision to triple the price of bread. But they quickly escalated into nationwide rallies against Bashir's rule, with protesters calling on him to step down.

On Feb 22, the veteran leader imposed a nationwide state of emergency to quell the protests after an initial crackdown failed to rein in the rallies. Since emergency rule came into effect, the demonstrations have been

largely confined to the capital and its twin city of Omdurman, but organizers had called for widespread rallies and a march on the army headquarters yesterday. April 6 was chosen for the nationwide rallies as it was the day of a 1985 uprising that toppled the then regime of president Jaafar Nimeiri.

Before the protests began, security forces deployed in large numbers in key Khartoum squares and in Omdurman, across the Nile. "There's a heavy security deployment where the protesters were to gather for the march, but they still came out and are chanting anti-government slogans," a witness in Khartoum told AFP, without revealing his name for security reasons. Security agents were preventing passers-by from reaching downtown areas of the capital and ordered shops and markets in the area to close, witnesses said. "Those walking in groups were immediately detained or asked to return to their homes by security forces," another onlooker said.

Activists in recent days have been circulating leaflets in Khartoum and Omdurman urging residents to participate in Saturday's march, residents said. The protest movement was initially led by the Sudanese Professionals Association, but later several political parties including the main opposition National Umma Party threw their support behind it. Analysts say the movement has emerged as the biggest challenge yet to Bashir's three-decade rule. But the veteran leader has remained defiant, introducing tough measures that have seen protesters, opposition leaders, activists and journalists arrested. Officials say 31 people have been killed in protest related violence so far, but Human Rights Watch has put the death toll at 51 including children and medics. — AFP

Sports

Santana homer gives Indians walk-off win over Blue Jays

Hoskins helps power Phillies past Twins

CLEVELAND: Carlos Santana belted a walk-off solo homer with one out in the ninth inning as the Cleveland Indians beat the visiting Toronto Blue Jays 3-2 Friday. After Jake Bauers flied out to begin the ninth inning, Santana deposited a 1-0 fastball from Joe Biagini (0-1) into the bleachers in left-center field. The blast was Santana's fifth career walk-off homer and Cleveland's first walk-off win of the season. Kevin Plawewski launched a homer to lead off the third inning and Max Moroff had an RBI double in the fifth for the Indians. Freddy Galvis belted a two-run homer in the fifth inning for the Blue Jays, who mustered just three hits for the second straight night and have lost five of their past six games overall. Adam Cimber (1-0) picked up the win after pitching a scoreless top of the ninth.

PHILLIES 10, TWINS 4

Rhys Hoskins had three hits and drove in four runs, and Odubel Herrera also had three hits as host Philadelphia overcame a five-hit cycle by Minnesota's Jorge Polanco. Polanco tripled in the first, singled in the third, lined a homer in the fifth and then doubled to left in the seventh for the 11th cycle in Twins' history and the first since Michael Cuddyer did it on May 22, 2009. Polanco also singled in the ninth to finish 5-for-5 for the second five-hit cycle in franchise history, joining Joe Cronin, who did it on Sept. 2, 1929, with the Washington Senators. Maikel Franco doubled and drove in two runs, and Jean Segura had two hits, scored twice and also drove in a run for the Phillies, who also took advantage of nine walks and two hit batters by Minnesota pitchers.

ANGELS 3, RANGERS 1

Mike Trout's leadoff home run in the sixth inning snapped a tie, and two innings later he added another homer, lifting Los Angeles past Texas in Anaheim, Calif. Trout's home runs, his third in the past two nights, marked the 15th multi-homer game of his career. The first came on a 2-0 fastball from Rangers starter Lance Lynn, who otherwise pitched a solid game. Lynn (0-1) gave up two runs on five hits in seven innings. He struck out five and walked one. Trout gave Angels closer Cody Allen a little extra cushion with his homer off Jesse Chavez in the eighth. Allen pitched a 1-2-3 ninth for his first save. Angels reliever Justin Anderson (1-0) earned the victory with 1 1/3 scoreless innings.

BREWERS 13, CUBS 10

Ryan Braun finished with four RBIs and was one of five Milwaukee batters to homer, and the Brewers held on for a win over visiting Chicago. Hernan Perez, Yasmani Grandal, Orlando Arcia and Eric Thames also belted homers for the Brewers, who scored the first eight runs. Milwaukee increased its win-

ning streak to six games. Daniel Descalso, Willson Contreras and Jason Heyward homered for Chicago, which has dropped six in a row since winning its season opener. The Cubs have given up 55 runs during their skid—an average of 9.2 runs per game.

BRAVES 4, MARLINS 0

Ronald Acuna Jr. hit his second homer of the season to start a four-run fourth-inning rally, and Atlanta defeated visiting Miami for its fourth consecutive win. Acuna, the 2018 National League Rookie of the Year, now has eight home runs in 20 career games against the Marlins. The left fielder is hitting .337 (26-for-77) with 20 RBIs against Miami. The winning pitcher was Kevin Gausman (1-0), who made his season debut after dealing with some shoulder inflammation in spring training. He worked efficiently, throwing only 88 pitches in seven shutout innings and retiring 13 straight Marlins at one point.

DIAMONDBACKS 15, RED SOX 8

Ketel Marte hit two home runs, including a grand slam, and Adam Jones, Ildemaro Vargas and Alex Avila also belted homers in Arizona's win over Boston at Phoenix. Arizona thrilled its fans with five home runs in its home opener after going 3-4 in its first seven games at the Los Angeles Dodgers and San Diego. The Red Sox are 2-7 in their 11-game West Coast road trip to start the season. Marte's home run in the fourth inning off Boston starter Rick Porcello (0-2) started a four-run rally, and his first career grand slam, off Brian Johnson, was part of a seven-run outburst in the sixth for the Diamondbacks.

DODGERS 10, ROCKIES 6

Cody Bellinger and Max Muncy each homered and drove in three runs, Russell Martin also homered, and hot-hitting Los Angeles beat Colorado in Denver. Corey Seager had two of the Dodgers' 13 hits to spoil Colorado's home opener. The three home runs give Los Angeles 21 through eight games this season. Kenta Maeda (2-0) held Colorado to one run on four hits over five innings. Trevor Story homered twice, David Dahl also went deep and Charlie Blackmon had three hits for the Rockies, who have lost five of six since winning their first two games of the season.

PADRES 5, CARDINALS 3

Fernando Tatis Jr. capped a three-run seventh inning with a two-run homer, leading San Diego to a victory at St. Louis in the Cardinals' home opener. The homer by the 20-year-old rookie-whose father, Fernando Tatis, played three seasons for the Cardinals—followed a tiebreaking sacrifice fly by Franchy Cordero. Paul Goldschmidt hit his fifth homer in seven games as a Cardinal in the eighth. San Diego's Robert Stock (1-0) got credit for the win despite giving up one run in one



PHOENIX: Xander Bogaerts #2 of the Boston Red Sox bats against the Arizona Diamondbacks during the MLB game at Chase Field in Phoenix, Arizona. The Diamondbacks defeated the Red Sox 15-8. — AFP

inning. Kirby Yates picked up his fourth save after throwing a scoreless ninth.

WHITE SOX 10, MARINERS 8

Yoan Moncada had two hits and four RBIs, including a go-ahead two-run single in the seventh inning, to lead Chicago past Seattle in the White Sox's home opener. Chicago led 6-1 after two innings, but Seattle didn't yield its four-game winning streak without a fight. The Mariners scored the next seven runs to take an 8-6 lead, grabbing the advantage with a four-run sixth that included two-run home runs from Mitch Haniger and Ryon Healy. Chicago's Wellington Castillo drove in a run in the seventh when he was hit by a pitch before Moncada put the White Sox ahead 9-8 with a two-run single to center. Tim Anderson added a solo home run in the eighth to finish with three hits, three RBIs and four runs. Domingo Santana and Daniel Vogelbach also homered for Seattle.

PIRATES 2, REDS 0

Jung Ho Kang's seventh-inning RBI double broke up an intense pitchers' duel as Pittsburgh beat visiting Cincinnati, the Reds' sixth straight loss and third in a row by shutout. Adam Frazier added an RBI double in the eighth for the Pirates in support of starting right-hander Joe Musgrove (1-0), who pitched seven three-hit innings with eight strikeouts and one walk. The Pirates have won

the first two games of the four-game series, both by 2-0 scores. The Reds have not scored since the eighth inning on Tuesday.

RAYS 5, GIANTS 2

Tampa Bay scored four runs before many at San Francisco's home opener had settled in, and Tyler Glasnow pitched six innings of three-hit, shutout ball in the Rays' victory. Yandy Diaz and Kevin Kiermaier hit first-inning home runs for the Rays, who took a 4-0 lead and never looked back en route to their sixth win in eight games this season. Glasnow (2-0) walked one and struck out six.

ASTROS 3, A'S 2

Collin McHugh worked six strong innings, Carlos Correa clubbed his first home run, and Houston won its home opener, beating Oakland. McHugh (1-1) limited the Athletics to one run on three hits and three walks with four strikeouts. He relied largely on a two-pitch mix, throwing 35 sliders and 33 four-seam fastballs among his 94 pitches. After surrendering a game-tying RBI single to Ramon Laureano with two outs in the fourth inning, McHugh rebounded and retired the final seven batters he faced. Laureano recorded two of the hits against McHugh, including a leadoff double in the third, and he finished 4-for-4. — Reuters

Burgan Bank sponsors second KBA 'Night Run'

KUWAIT: Held under the umbrella of the Kuwait Banking Association, Burgan Bank, one of the leading contributors to sustainability and progress in the Kuwaiti community, is sponsoring the 5 KM "KBA Night Run" for the 2nd time in a row scheduled to take place on April 13, 2019 at 7 pm at Murooj complex. As part of Burgan Bank's ongoing commitment to encourage sports as a gateway to maintaining a healthier lifestyle, the bank encourages the participation of all families, athletes and avid runners to sign up for the much anticipated marathon.

Running under the theme of 'Ready, Set, Glow', the 5 KM run is a one of a kind event as it takes place at night accommodated by particular gear to glow in the dark, targeting both genders of all age groups at any level of fitness.

The event is aimed at enabling both adults and youth explore sports and fitness as a means to leading healthier mind-sets and overall lifestyle. In participation with other banks in Kuwait, Burgan Bank's contribution rests as part of its corporate social responsibility

towards supporting all genres of people with significant emphasis on youth empowerment and athletes' passion for running while facilitating lasting positive change on an individual and collective front.

Marathons encompass several areas of challenges that result in therapeutic benefits ranging from physical, mental and emotional developments. Participants are required to train and equip themselves with a holistic approach that involves nutritious food, mental focus, stamina, strength and endurance in order to enhance performance. Backed by the belief that better choices make for better lives in the long run, such recreational activities engage the mind and body to unite with other likeminded individuals on the same road to achieving a common goal of personal enrichment and happiness.

As a determined advocate of societal advancement and wellbeing through innovative health initiatives, Burgan Bank had previously sponsored and hosted similar nationwide sporting events namely the Burgan Bank Tri Festival, a successful celebration of sports, healthy lifestyles, fitness and fun as well as the Spark Marathon, Kuwait's biggest charity race.

To register for "KBA Night Run" visit www.kba.com.kw

Burgan Bank's support of this initiative falls under its dynamic full-fledged community program entitled 'ENGAGE' - Together to be the change. This program sheds light on important aspects affecting every segment of the society

by promoting social welfare through educational, cultural and health driven initiatives. Burgan Bank's approach to 'ENGAGE' begins with a vital principle

that as a leading Kuwaiti financial institution, its conduct and policies should be aligned with the needs and interests of the community.

Women open historic round at all-male Augusta National

AUGUSTA: Striking blows for gender equality with every swing at former men-only enclave Augusta National Golf Club, women golfers competed for a trophy for the first time yesterday at the home of the Masters.

In a club that opened in 1933 but didn't admit its first women members until 2012, LPGA legends Pak Se Ri, Annika Sorenstam, Lorena Ochoa and Nancy Lopez hit ceremonial shots off the first tee to launch the historic final round of the inaugural Augusta National Women's Amateur.

"It's just exciting to be a part of history," Lopez said.

"A day of history for us, for the amateurs that are here and for Augusta National."

A field of 72 played the first 36 holes at nearby Champions Retreat before the event moved to the famed Masters layout, with everyone having a practice round Friday but only the top 30 advancing to compete in the last 18 holes of the tournament.

"It's a dream come true. I'm so happy for them," Sorenstam said. "This has huge potential to not just inspire young girls but golfers, other women in sports and women in business."

American Anna Redding, a University of Virginia senior, was the first competitor to tee off, but she was eight strokes adrift of US leader Jennifer Kupcho. The Wake Forest University senior jedd after 36 holes on 5-under par 139 with Mexico's Maria Fassi, a University of Arkansas senior, one stroke behind.

"To play here for the first time is going to be just a great motivation and it's beautiful. They know how special it is," Ochoa said. "Hitting that first tee shot is

probably going to be the highlight of their career."

Augusta National's all-male status led to a 2003 protest across the street from the club but it was not until August 2012 when businesswoman Darla Moore and former US Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice were named the club's first women members.

Another move was 2014's debut of the Drive, Chip and Putt Championship, where young girls and boys won titles with a decisive putt on Augusta National's famed 18th green-three Women's Amateur players having taken part as youths.

Pak struck the first ceremonial tee shot followed in order by Ochoa, Lopez and Sorenstam, handling the duties in a similar fashion to how Jack Nicklaus, Gary Player and the late Arnold Palmer have done at the Masters. "First time in a long time I get nervous," Pak said. "I have honor to lead."

"For them to kind of make us like Arnold, Jack and Gary, it's a real big honor to be here and hit that first shot," Lopez said. — AFP

Crusaders trounce Brumbies as Folau makes history

CHRISTCHURCH: The formidable Canterbury Crusaders swamped the ACT Brumbies with a five-try second-half revival while Israel Folau made history with a new Super Rugby try-scoring record Saturday.

The table-topping Crusaders, returning to their home base for the first time since the Christchurch mosque massacres, came from 0-7 down at the break to beat the Canberra-based Brumbies 36-14.

Folau scored for the NSW Waratahs midway through the first half against the Auckland Blues for his 60th try, eclipsing the previous record of 59 by New Zealander Doug Howlett who retired 12 years ago. But it was the resurgent Blues who celebrated at the final whistle with a 32-29 victory to complete four consecutive wins for the first time since 2011.

On a triple-header night, the impressive Rebels outclassed Japan's Sunwolves 42-15 in Melbourne with Reece Hodge getting a treble and Quade Cooper booting six goals to keep them top of the Australian conference.

The gunning down of 50 Muslims by an alleged white supremacist has forced the Crusaders to rethink its branding given the link to the medieval Crusades, and the familiar sword-wielding knights on horseback have been dropped from the pre-match entertainment.

But they retained their familiar ability to find an extra gear when under pressure to retain their position at the head of the table.

The penalties that blighted their first half—when they conceded eight—disappeared and they found the precision that was missing.

Captain Matt Todd said the first-half discipline "was not good enough".

"They put us under a lot of pressure but we responded which was good. We were confident if we held the ball we could get points in the second half."

The Brumbies, missing injured flanker David Pocock and resting three other Wallabies, had a game plan to rattle the Crusaders.

It worked for 40 minutes but the second stanza was a different story, as Sevu Reece and Will Jordan bagged doubles and Jordan Taufua crossed as well before Tevita Kuridrani scored a late consolation for the visitors. — AFP

Sports

Jeremy Lamb stuns Raptors again to keep Hornets alive

Nuggets back on track as they defeat Blazers

CHARLOTTE: Jeremy Lamb was the star again, and the Charlotte Hornets remained alive in the playoff race with a thrilling 113-111 win over the visiting Toronto Raptors on Friday night. Lamb hit a 3-pointer with 3.3 seconds remaining to give the Hornets the lead, and then Charlotte held on when Kawhi Leonard's 3-point attempt wedged between the rim and the backboard with one second remaining. This was the first meeting of the teams since the Hornets stunned the Raptors 115-114 in Toronto on March 24, on Lamb's miracle bank shot from behind the half-court line at the final buzzer. The Hornets had lost three of their previous four and were in a total "must-win" mode Friday night. They still sit two games back of Detroit and Brooklyn, who are tied for the seventh spot in the East, and one game back of ninth-place Miami in the Eastern Conference.

SUNS 133, PELICANS 126 (OT)

Josh Jackson scored 35 points, including eight in overtime, as host Phoenix held off New Orleans. Jamal Crawford added 28 points and Ray Spalding had a career-high 21 points and 13 rebounds for the Suns, who went 2-3 on a five-game homestand. Phoenix was without five key players, including Devin Booker, who sustained a season-ending ankle injury on Wednesday. It was the second overtime win for Phoenix over New Orleans in three weeks. Jackson made a tying 3-pointer as the Suns scored five points in the final 2.2 seconds of the extra period in a 138-136 victory at New Orleans on March 16.

THUNDER 123, PISTONS 110

Paul George scored 30 points, and Russell Westbrook sealed his third consecutive season averaging a triple-double as Oklahoma City beat visiting Detroit. The game was critical to both teams' playoff positioning, and it was the Thunder who came out ahead, winning for the second consecutive game and the fourth time in seven games. The Thunder remain in seventh place in the Western Conference, a half-game ahead of the San Antonio Spurs with a game at hand. The Pistons lost for the third consecutive game and for the sixth time in their past eight to fall into a tie with idle Brooklyn just above the East playoff cutline.

CELTICS 117, PACERS 97

Jayson Tatum scored 22 points, and Gordon

Hayward added 21 as Boston took over sole possession of fourth place in the East with a victory over Indiana in Indianapolis. The result puts the Celtics on track for home-court advantage in the upcoming NBA playoffs. A first-round postseason series between the Celtics and Pacers is likely, though Boston moved within 1 1/2 games of Philadelphia for the No. 3 seed. Kyrie Irving scored 17 points for the Celtics while Hayward was 9 of 9 from the field and 3 of 3 from the free-throw line. The Pacers have lost eight of their last 11 games despite entering play Friday on a two-game win streak.

MAGIC 149, HAWKS 113

Orlando set an offensive season high in a rout of Atlanta in its final home game of the regular season, getting a key victory for playoff positioning. It was the third-highest point total in Orlando's history. The Magic's scoring record is 155, set back in 1990. The Magic set a franchise record for points scored in a first half with 81 and led by as much as 38 in the opening half. The record-setting performance couldn't have come at a better time. Orlando moved up to sixth in the East with its victory, a half-game ahead of Brooklyn and Detroit, though the Magic have one fewer game remaining than both.

TIMBERWOLVES 111, HEAT 109

Dario Saric and Gorgui Dieng scored 19 points each to lead host Minnesota over Miami. The loss was the third in a row for the Heat, who must make up a one-game deficit in the playoff race with three games remaining. Dwyane Wade led Miami with 24 points, including a steal at midcourt and a layup with 10 seconds left that cut the Heat's deficit to 110-109. Minnesota is out of playoff contention but played spoiler. Karl-Anthony Towns struggled with 11 turnovers, including four offensive fouls. He had an odd triple-double along with his 13 points and 12 rebounds.

WARRIORS 120, CAVALIERS 114

Stephen Curry rebounded from his lowest-scoring game of the season with one of his best, bombing in a game-high 40 points as Golden State outlasted Cleveland at Oakland, Calif., in a rematch of the past four NBA Finals. The victory allowed the Warriors to move within one win of clinching the top seed in the



PHOENIX: Julius Randle #30 of the New Orleans Pelicans shoots the ball against the Phoenix Suns at Talking Stick Resort Arena in Phoenix, Arizona. — AFP

Western Conference playoffs, which start next weekend. The Warriors swept the Cavaliers, then led by LeBron James, in last season's Finals. In sweeping the season series from the Cavaliers for the second consecutive season, the Warriors led wire-to-wire but saw a 21-point lead shrink to 115-112 with 2:52 to play.

NUGGETS 119, TRAIL BLAZERS 110

Nikola Jokic finished with 22 points, 13 rebounds and nine assists, Paul Millsap scored 25 points, and Denver outlasted visiting Portland. Jamal Murray scored 23 points to help the Nuggets clinch the Northwest Division and at least the No. 3 seed in the Western Conference. Denver has a slim chance at the top seed but leads Houston by 1 1/2 games for the second seed with a game in hand. Enes Kanter had 24

points. Rodney Hood had 17 points and Al-Farouq Aminu had 12 points and 14 rebounds for Portland. Damian Lillard scored 14 points but missed all six of his 3-point attempts.

ROCKETS 120, KNICKS 96

James Harden scored 26 points in 29 minutes as host Houston cruised to a wire-to-wire victory over league-worst New York. The Rockets earned their fifth straight win and 19th in 22 games by seizing control early. They led by double digits for the final 40:04, and by at least 20 points for the final 29:20. They went in front by as many as 42 points. Harden shot 8 of 21 and hit five of Houston's 22 3-pointers. He added eight assists and eight rebounds. — Reuters

China dreaming of Asian and WCup double, says Du

KUALA LUMPUR: Chinese Football Association acting president Du Zhaocai is hoping a successful attempt to host the Asian Cup in 2023 will lay the ground work for a future World Cup bid as the nation seeks to enhance its presence on the global football stage.

Du was one of the six newly elected members of the FIFA Council at the Asian Football Confederation's congress yesterday and his association is now aiming to win the rights to host the continental championship when the next host is determined in June.

"For China, the Asian Cup and the World Cup are our dreams and the Chinese football federation would like to host the Asian Cup and the World Cup in the future," he said.

"We are just making a plan for the future. "In China the local government pays a lot of focus on developing football and the cities are planning to host tournaments. "We are just preparing the bid and then we will apply."

China last hosted the Asian Cup finals in 2004 and will go head-to-head in the hosting battle for the 2023 tournament with South Korea. The decision will be made on June 4 in Paris.

China's men's senior team has struggled to make an impact since the early years of the millennium, with the country securing a place at their first - and so far only - World Cup finals in 2002.

Two years later, China progressed to the final of the Asian Cup on home soil, only to lose to Japan in the decider in Beijing. They have not reached the semi-finals of the tournament in four attempts since.

Despite their struggles on the pitch, China president Xi Jinping has set the country's sights on becoming a major player in global football and has said he wants the nation to qualify for, host and win the World Cup.

As a result, Chinese companies have pumped huge sums into hiring world class coaches and luring foreign talent to the Chinese Super League, but with mixed results. While Chinese clubs have impressed in continental competition, with Guangzhou Evergrande twice winning the Asian Champions League, the national team continues to struggle.

World Cup winner Marcello Lippi did not renew his contract after his team was knocked out of the Asian Cup at the quarter-final stage by Iran in January while interim coach Fabio Cannavaro saw the team lose to both Thailand and Uzbekistan in the recent China Cup.

The election of Du, who is also China's deputy sports minister, means China will continue to have a voice in world football's decision-making body as he takes over the role from CFA vice president Zhang Jian and he believes the country is moving in the right direction. — Reuters

Arsenal hoping to cure travel sickness at Everton

LIVERPOOL: Stellar home form has propelled Arsenal into the Premier League top four but their chances of staying there now depend on improving patchy results away from the Emirates Stadium.

The Gunners can climb above Tottenham into third place should they avoid defeat at Everton today. However, with five of their remaining seven league fixtures on the road, a trip to Goodison Park will be a stern test of whether Arsenal can maintain a hot streak of 16 points from the last 18 available in the Premier League.

Arsenal have won their last eight league games at the Emirates and have as many home points as title-chasing Liverpool. A league table on away form only, however, would place them down

10th with just five wins from 14 matches.

As well as Everton, Unai Emery's men must travel to Watford, Wolves, Leicester and Burnley. The first four are all in the mix for Europa League qualification and it is not inconceivable that the latter could need points on the final day to stay up.

"We are thinking game by game and we know we have five of seven matches away - for us it's a big challenge," said Emery on Friday. "We want to achieve the same good performances as when we play at Emirates Stadium. We have confidence now but we know it's very difficult. We know other clubs will take a lot of points."

Arsenal have won just twice away from home since November - at League One Blackpool in the FA Cup and already relegated Huddersfield in the Premier League. That run has included defeats at Southampton, Liverpool, West Ham and Manchester City in the league and embarrassing Europa League losses to BATE Borisov and Rennes. Even an encouraging 1-1 draw at Tottenham last month could have been better had Pierre-Emerick Aubameyang not missed a last-minute penalty. "The last matches in the Premier League - Tottenham and Huddersfield - we've had good performances and results, and were competitive," Emery said. "We



LONDON: File photo shows Arsenal's German midfielder Mesut Ozil (C) is fouled during the English Premier League football match between Arsenal and Newcastle United at the Emirates Stadium in London on April 1, 2019. — AFP

are getting better and being competitive at home. We want to be the same away but we know that the difficulty is that in each match at home, they (the other team) can feel better.

"Everton won against Chelsea and

drew against Liverpool but their last matches at home." Arsenal could also be without experienced trio of Laurent Koscielny, Granit Xhaka and Aaron Ramsey through injury, while Lucas Torreira is suspended. — AFP

Wolves and Watford face off in 'best of the rest' FA Cup semi

LONDRES: Wolves and Watford meet in the FA Cup semi-final today, seeking silverware to add lustre to a season in which they are both battling to be the "best of the rest" in the Premier League. Nuno Espirito Santo's Wolves nestle just below the top six after a second straight win against Manchester United this week, with Watford a point and a place below them in eighth spot.

The clubs clash at Wembley for the right to play either quadruple-chasing Manchester City or Brighton in next month's showpiece final. Ambitious Wolves, bankrolled by the Chinese Fosun International group, were promoted last year after six seasons out of the top flight but they have made a splash since their return, taking 13 points off the big six.

Their rise has not been without controversy-a number of clubs last year urged the English Football League (EFL) to investigate the influence at Molineux of Portuguese super-agent Jorge Mendes, who looks after Jose Mourinho and Cristiano Ronaldo.

Mendes's Gestifute agency, whose clients also include the Wolves boss and players Ruben Neves, Diogo Jota and Ivan Cavaleiro, has flooded the club with talent out of reach of competitors.

But the EFL ruled that the club's relationship with Mendes, who has no official title at the club,

had not breached regulations regarding intermediaries. And only four other Premier League clubs spent less on agents fees than the Midlands club in the past two transfer windows.

Wolves this week made another powerful statement of intent, breaking their club transfer record to sign top-scorer Raul Jimenez, who had been on loan from Benfica, for a reported £30 million (\$39 million). Wing-back Matt Doherty said the rise of the club has been dizzying.

"It's been unbelievable," said the Irishman, who was with the club when they were relegated to the third tier of English football in 2013. "You've got to remember it's been a short space of time where this has all happened. It's not that long ago that we were in League One.

"Who would've thought we'd be in the semi-final of the FA Cup and seventh in the league-it's kind of a fairytale, so we're all very happy with the situation at the moment." Wolves are steeped in the history of their famous title-winning sides of the 1950s and are four-time winners of the FA Cup, even if their last success was in 1960.

"Everybody knows what it could mean, but we have to play it just like another game, then make it special to make something happen, play the game," said Nuno. Watford, who were losing finalists in 1984, cannot boast the same historical pedigree but are punching above their weight in a cut-throat league. On Tuesday they beat Fulham to reach 46 points, breaking their record Premier League tally and reaching their best mark in a top-flight campaign since 1986-87 (63). Javi Gracia is the 10th manager at the club since the Pozzo family's takeover of Watford in 2012, but the Spaniard is the first since Gianfranco Zola six years ago to last more than a season in charge and signed a new deal until 2023 with the Vicarage Road club in November. — AFP

Stadium issues hamper Oman's WCup hopes

KUALA LUMPUR: Oman will face a race against time to build a stadium large enough to satisfy FIFA requirements if football's governing body decides to expand the Qatar 2022 World Cup finals and asks the Sultanate to co-host the enlarged tournament. Oman Football Association president Salem Said Salem Al Wahaibi told Reuters that FIFA president Gianni Infantino has sounded out the country's government over their ability to co-host the event should it be expanded from 32 to 48 teams.

But with Muscat's Sultan Qaboos Stadium falling short of minimum capacity requirements for the World Cup, the Omanis would need to overhaul their biggest stadium to be considered a viable host. "Mr Infantino visited us and he gave a proposal to the government and they are still thinking about it," said Al Wahaibi on the sidelines of the Asian Football Confederation's congress on Saturday.

"They haven't come to a decision yet, but it's not a federation decision. We have some issues. We don't have a stadium for 40,000, so if we take it we will be working against time. That is the first enemy for us. There are so many issues and it won't be as easy as it looks.

"Our stadium, the maximum capacity we have is 29,000, so in two years can we get that? That's the question for the government, plus the other logistics. I'm optimistic but let's see."

Qatar was awarded the rights to host a 32-team World Cup in December 2010, but after becoming FIFA president in 2016 Infantino has been open to the idea of expanding the tournament to accommodate 16 additional teams. The 2026 edition is already slated to feature 48 nations and Infantino is keen to bring forward the enlarged format by four years. "Sharing a few games with a few of the neighbouring countries is, of course, an option as well to make it a true World Cup for the world and for the whole Gulf region," he said yesterday. — Reuters

Sports

Sheikh Salman retains place at helm of Asian football

India earn top FIFA seat, eye 2026 World Cup

KUALA LUMPUR: Sheikh Salman bin Ebrahim Al Khalifa was re-elected unopposed to the position as president of the Asian Football Confederation yesterday after the regional body's congress confirmed a new four-year term for the Bahraini by acclamation.

The 53-year-old, who was not present at the meeting due to the death of his mother earlier in the week, was handed a third term at the helm after his rivals, Mohammed Al Romaihi from the United Arab Emirates and Qatari Saoud Al Mohannadi, withdrew.

Sheikh Salman will extend his reign as president until at least 2023, by which time he will have completed a 10-year spell in charge of the 47-member body after initially completing the truncated term of former president Mohammed bin Hammam.

He took over for the last two years of Bin Hammam's stint as AFC president after the Qatari was banned for life by governing body FIFA from all football activities for his involvement in a corruption scandal.

A member of the Bahrian royal family, Sheikh Salman first came to prominence in footballing circles in 2009 when he faced off against Bin Hammam for a seat on FIFA's decision making body, a ballot he lost by a single vote.

However, he won the presidential election

in 2013 and was returned unopposed in 2015 before running unsuccessfully against Gianni Infantino for the position of FIFA president the following year.

Initially elected on a platform of accountability, he has become increasingly distant during his presidency, rarely taking questions from the media since winning his second term of office. The former Bahrain Football Association president has denied accusations he was involved in human rights abuses by the Gulf state's ruling family during a crackdown on democracy protesters in 2011.

The issue resurfaced in January when Sheikh Salman's position in world football was questioned by campaigners seeking the release of former Bahrain international Hakeem Al Araibi from a Thai detention centre under threat of extradition to the Gulf state. Sheikh Salman did not comment publicly on the matter and the AFC later claimed to have recused him 18 months earlier from involvement in matters involving nations in the west of the continent due to a potential conflict of interests.

Those matters, though, have done little to dampen enthusiasm for him to remain in charge of Asia's governing body, with his hopes of reelection boosted in June last year when he signed off on a new deal for the AFC's commercial and broadcast rights.

The agreement with Chinese-backed company DDMC Fortis will ensure revenues more than double from those under the current agreement with long-term partner Lagardere Sports.

Meanwhile, India set their sights on qualifying for the 2026 World Cup as Praful Patel became their first representative on the powerful FIFA Council yesterday. Patel, one of six Asian delegates elected to the Council at the Asian Football Confederation Congress, said the World Cup was the next big step for India after making great strides in recent years.

India's confidence has grown after a positive Asian Cup in January, where they returned to the tournament after eight years and were unlucky not to reach the second round. "I personally feel that among all the countries in Asia there is a tremendous goodwill for India, and (also) China should be much more involved in the game and also the AFC and FIFA," Patel said in Kuala Lumpur.

"We should be putting our best efforts to make sure that the Indian team qualifies in 2026 for the World Cup," he added. However, India are also searching for a new coach after Englishman Stephen Constantine quit following their Asian Cup exit after a last-gasp defeat to Bahrain. — Agencies



KUALA LUMPUR: FIFA President Gianni Infantino receives pennant from AFC senior vice president Praful Patel during the Asian Football Confederation (AFC) Congress 2019 in Kuala Lumpur yesterday. — AFP

Benzema defies offside calls to give Madrid victory

MADRID: Karim Benzema shrugged off having two goals ruled out to score twice as Real Madrid came back from behind to beat Eibar 2-1 at home yesterday in Zinedine Zidane's 100th La Liga game in charge of the club.

Benzema had an early strike disallowed at a barely half-full Santiago Bernabeu for offside and the visitors took a surprise lead in the 39th minute thanks to a cool finish from forward Marc Cardona, who is on loan from Barcelona.

Eibar had humbled Madrid 3-0 back in November and looked to be on course to do the double on the deposed European champions until Benzema headed in an equaliser in the 59th minute, shortly after being denied again by the linesman's flag.

Benzema netted another header in the 81st minute to put Madrid in front and the Frenchman passed up two opportunities to clinch a hat-trick in the closing stages, missing the target and then hitting the post in stoppage time.

Madrid moved on to 60 points after 31 games thanks to the victory but remain third in the standings, 10 points behind leaders Barcelona who host nearest challengers Atletico Madrid in a top-of-the-table clash later. — Reuters



MADRID: Real Madrid's French defender Raphael Varane (L) jumps for the ball during the Spanish league football match between Real Madrid CF and SD Eibar at the Santiago Bernabeu stadium in Madrid yesterday. — AFP

Cunha seals comeback win to keep Leipzig on Champions League course

BERLIN: LB Leipzig remain on track for a top-four finish in the Bundesliga after Matheus Cunha's delightful chip sealed a 4-2 win over top half rivals Bayer Leverkusen yesterday. Leipzig twice came from behind to claim a fourth consecutive victory in all competitions and cement their claim for a Champions League place.

"We fought back well today after a tough week. It was an important three points in terms of the Champions League," said Leipzig forward Marcel Sabitzer. Kai Havertz gave Leverkusen the lead from 12 yards after Willi Orban tripped Kevin Volland in the box early on.

Leipzig replied almost immediately when Sabitzer curled in a free-kick from the edge of the box, but Havertz quickly restored the lead with a superb half-volley. Leverkusen looked comfortable until Timo Werner suddenly smashed in Leipzig's second just after the hour mark.

Emil Forsberg then put Leipzig in front from the penalty spot before Cunha secured the three points with a splendid lob seven minutes from time. Leipzig are three points ahead of fourth-placed Eintracht Frankfurt, who

snatched a late 2-1 win at Schalke.

Ante Rebic rounded Schalke goalkeeper Alexander Nuebel on 13 minutes to put Frankfurt ahead, but Suat Serdar levelled the scores with his second goal in two games. Yet Frankfurt were awarded an injury-time penalty by VAR and Luka Jovic fired in the winner.

Schalke remain five points clear of the bottom three after Nuremberg and Stuttgart shared the points in a relegation showdown. Matheus Pereira's opener for Nuremberg came against the run of play just before half-time. Stuttgart's Ozcan Kabak then scored a controversial equaliser, given by VAR despite an apparent offside in the build-up.

The equaliser keeps Stuttgart four points ahead of Nuremberg in the relegation play-off place. Relegation seems all but certain for Hanover, meanwhile, after they suffered a 3-1 defeat to local rivals Wolfsburg.

Hanover had an early penalty appeal turned down, but Henrik Weydandt broke free on the counter-attack to slide in the opener after half an hour. Their lead lasted all of 100 seconds, a Renato Steffen header bringing Wolfsburg level.

Steffen scored again after half-time, and Jerome Roussillon added a third late on to seal the win and push Hanover further towards the drop. Elsewhere, Benito Raman continued his excellent recent form with a brace for Fortuna Dueseldorf in their 2-1 win over Hertha Berlin. Hertha's Marko Grujic cancelled out Raman's first-half opener, but the Belgian striker scored again after the break to secure three points and move Dueseldorf a step closer to safety. — AFP

desperately required in the 80th minute, racing away to score a majestic solo goal.

It was Salah's 50th Premier League goal for Liverpool and six minutes later Henderson, on as a substitute, wrapped it up with a close-range finish. Shane Long had made it a nail-biting night for Liverpool's massed ranks of supporters when he fired relegation-threatened Southampton ahead in the ninth minute.

But Liverpool recovered from a surprisingly sluggish start and Naby Keita's header, his first goal for the club, levelled the scores before halftime. Victory lifted Liverpool to 82 points from 33 games, with City on 80 from 32.

"It was very big. Every game is massive. We've got to win every game. I thought we showed great character in the first half," Henderson told Sky Sports. "It was a big performance in the second half and a big result." Liverpool needed a stoppage-time winner to beat Tottenham Hotspur 2-1 at Anfield last weekend and they were forced to do things the hard way again at St Mary's. They were caught cold early on and Long punished them, calmly firing home after Ryan Bertrand's cross was flicked on. — Reuters

Barnes hits back to boost Burnley's survival bid

LONDON: Ashley Barnes went from zero to hero as Burnley boosted their bid for Premier League survival with a crucial 3-1 win against Bournemouth yesterday.

Sean Dyche's side made the worst possible start at Dean Court when Barnes headed into his own net as he tried to clear under pressure from Bournemouth's Nathan Ake in the fourth minute.

However, Burnley were gifted an equaliser in the 18th minute as Bournemouth keeper Asmir Begovic let Ashley Westwood's corner go straight through his hands and Chris Wood nodded in at the far post.

Inspired by the New Zealand forward's 11th goal this season, the Claretts struck again two minutes later, with Westwood firing home after Chris Mepham failed to clear Dwight McNeil's cross.

Burnley were well on top and Barnes struck at the right end in the 57th minute. Once again Begovic was guilty of poor handling, allowing the ball to slip to Wood, who laid it back for Barnes to slot into the empty net.

Burnley are eight points clear of the relegation zone, and although third bottom Cardiff have a game in hand, Dyche's men have taken a major step towards staying up. Leicester powered to a 4-1 rout of relegated Huddersfield as Brendan Rodgers' side moved into seventh.

Youri Tielemans put Leicester ahead at the John Smith's Stadium with his second goal since joining on loan from Monaco. The Belgian midfielder netted with a deflected strike from the edge of the area after Huddersfield were unable to clear Jamie Vardy's miscued shot in the 24th minute.

Vardy doubled Leicester's lead three minutes after half-time, collecting Ricardo Pereira's cross and slotting home after rounding keeper Ben Hamer. Huddersfield midfielder Aaron Mooy reduced the deficit with a 52nd minute penalty controversially awarded for Caglar Soyuncu's challenge on Karlan Grant.

James Maddison put the result beyond doubt with a fine free-kick in the 79th minute. Bottom of the table Huddersfield, playing their first home match since relegation was confirmed, endured one last blow when Vardy stroked in an 84th minute penalty after the England striker was brought down by Terrence Kongolo.

Luka Milivojevic extended his superb penalty record as Crystal Palace won 1-0 at Newcastle to climb 11 points clear of the bottom three. Newcastle defender Florian Lejeune was stretched off with his left knee heavily strapped after a nasty second half collision with Andros Townsend that left him needing a hospital scan.

Roy Hodgson's team took the points in the 81st minute when Wilfried Zaha was clipped by DeAndre Yedlin and Serbian midfielder Milivojevic slammed in his 10th successful spot-kick this term. — AFP

Liverpool strike late to win 3-1 at Southampton

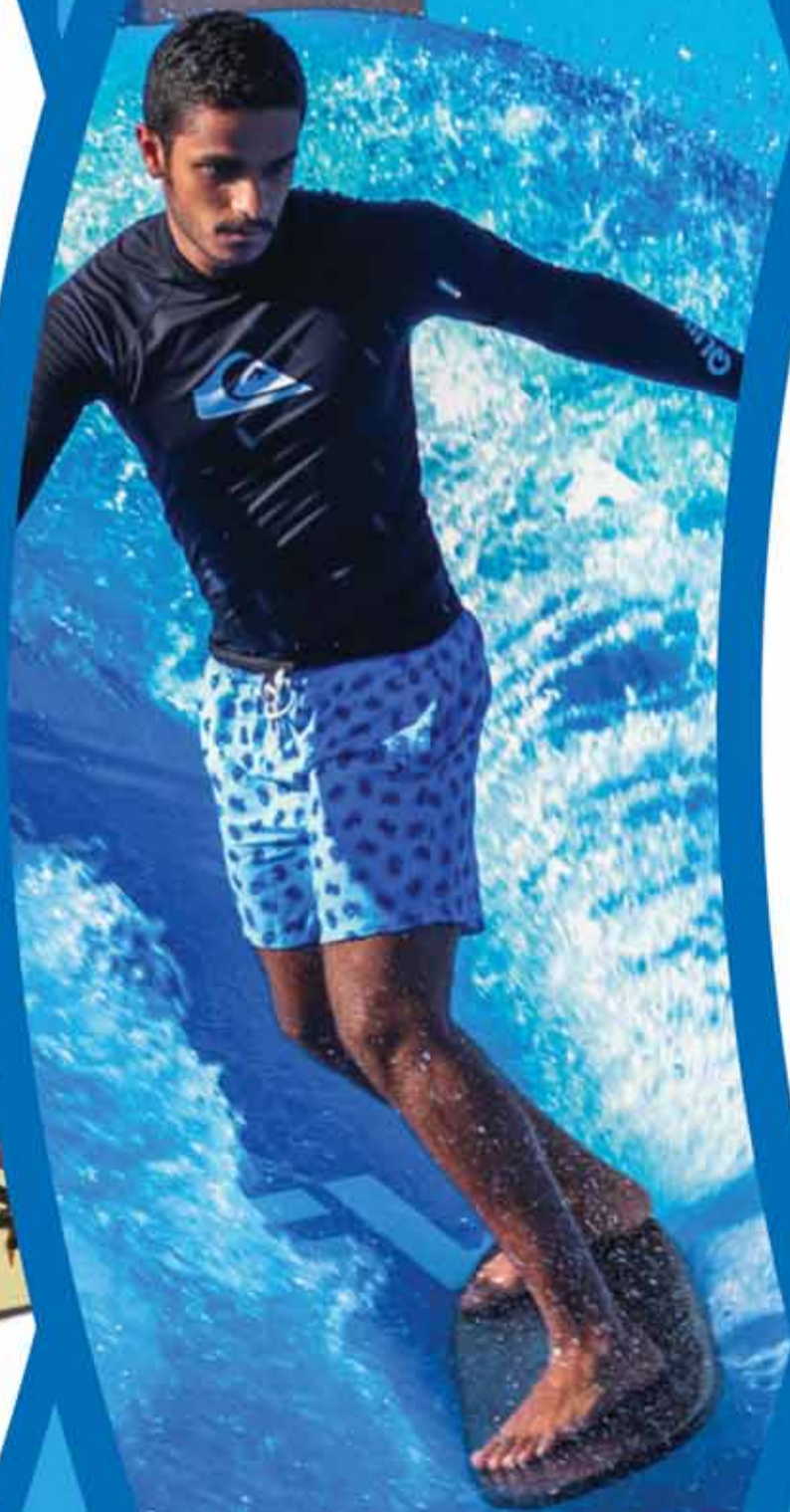
LONDON: Late goals by Mohamed Salah and Jordan Henderson earned Liverpool a crucial 3-1 victory at Southampton to move them back to the top of the Premier League on Friday. For the second week running Liverpool looked like losing ground on Manchester City in a titanic title race, but once again Juergen Klopp's side would not be denied as they edged a step closer to a first league title since 1990.

With games running out they lead City by two points, although Pep Guardiola's champions have a game in hand. Locked at 1-1 Liverpool were laying siege to the Southampton goal but it was Salah, who had not scored for eight games, who provided the moment of magic they

Live		Matches on TV
		(Local Timings)
ENGLISH PREMIER LEAGUE		
Everton FC v Arsenal FC		16:05
beIN SPORTS HD 2		
SPANISH LEAGUE		
Deportivo Alaves v CD Leganes		13:00
beIN SPORTS HD 1		
Getafe CF v Athletic de Bilbao		15:00
beIN SPORTS HD 3		
Real Valladolid v Sevilla FC		17:15
beIN SPORTS HD 3		
Celta de Vigo v Real Sociedad		19:30
beIN SPORTS HD 3		
Levante v Huesca		19:30
beIN SPORTS HD 6		
Real Betis v Villarreal CF		21:45
beIN SPORTS HD 3		
ITALIAN CALCIO LEAGUE		
ACF Fiorentina v Frosinone Calcio		13:30
beIN SPORTS HD 4		
Udinese Calcio v Empoli		16:00
beIN SPORTS		
Cagliari Calcio v spal		16:00
beIN SPORTS		
SS Lazio v US Sassuolo Calcio		19:00
beIN SPORTS HD 2		
Internazionale Milano v Atalanta		19:00
beIN SPORTS HD 4		
SSC Napoli v Genoa CFC		21:30
beIN SPORTS HD 4		
GERMAN BUNDESLIGA 1ST DIV		
FC Augsburg v TSG 1899 Hoffenheim		16:30
beIN SPORTS HD 5		
Borussia Monchengladbach v SV Werder Bremen		19:00
beIN SPORTS HD 5		
FRENCH LEAGUE		
Stade Reims v LOSC Lille		6:00
beIN SPORTS HD 6		
Toulouse FC v FC Nantes		16:00
beIN SPORTS		
OGC Nice v Montpellier HSC		18:00
beIN SPORTS HD 8		
Paris Saint-Germain v RC Strasbourg		22:00
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