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Uproar over suspension of bedoon bank accounts

Labor panel scraps 35-day annual leave, reverts to 30 days

Kuwait urged to host World Cup matches



KUWAIT: HH the Amir Sheikh Sabah Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah meets FIFA President Gianni Infantino. — KUNA

KUWAIT: FIFA President Gianni Infantino met HH the Amir Sheikh Sabah Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah yesterday, state media said, amid reports the state is in talks to host matches to support Qatar during the 2022 World Cup. HH the Amir and the head of the country's sports federation met with Infantino on a low-profile visit that began Saturday, the official

KUNA news agency said. Infantino also met with the speaker of Kuwait's National Assembly Marzouq Al-Ghanem and officials of the national football federation, KUNA said. While no details of the visit were made public, local media has reported that Infantino's hope is to convince

Continued on Page 24

By B Izzak

KUWAIT: MPs and activists were up in arms yesterday over a decision by the central agency for bedoons to ask banks to suspend the accounts of bedoons - stateless people - who did not provide the necessary documents to renew their IDs. MPs threatened action against the government and particularly the interior minister amid threats to grill the minister by MP Mohammad Hayef. The central agency for bedoons however said reports about the suspension have been exaggerated.

A statement by the agency said the accounts of only 10 percent of the bedoons have been suspended because they did not provide the documents to renew their IDs, while the accounts of 90 percent of bedoons are active. Some 77,000 undocumented residents in Kuwait received their identification cards in the 2018, it said in the statement. The vast majority of Kuwait's bedoons have access to state services, including free healthcare and education, the statement highlighted, warning that any attempted "circumvention of state laws" will be dealt with using legal force.

MPs supporting the cause of bedoons called on the Assembly to pass a draft law granting civil and social rights for bedoons, including permanent residencies, free health and education and public and private sector jobs, among other benefits.

In another development, the National Assembly's health and labor committee yesterday succumbed to

pressure by the government and the business community and decided to rescind its earlier approval of increasing the annual leave for private sector employees to 35 days. Head of the committee MP Hamoud Al-Khudhair said yesterday the panel decided to reduce the annual leave back to 30 days as it was before the amendment.

The amendment had been approved by the committee about two months ago and then passed by the National Assembly in the first reading last month. The Assembly was due to pass the amendment in the second and final reading more than three weeks ago, but the government delayed the vote. The government clearly told the panel that the amendment harms the interests of Kuwaiti businessmen against a minor benefit to a small number of Kuwaitis employed in the private sector.

The overwhelming majority of employees in the private sector are foreigners, who would have been the main beneficiaries of the amendment. The Kuwait chamber of commerce and industry, which represents the business community, and the banking association also stepped up pressure to block the amendment. Khudhair told reporters that the annual leave will now remain at 30 days but without including rest days - which means Fridays and public holidays. The lawmaker however said the only amendment that will be debated on Tuesday is granting Kuwaitis in the private sector full end of service indemnity, besides getting pension after retirement.

Duo sentenced to death for killing sheikh, 2 others

By Meshaal Al-Enezi

KUWAIT: The court of cassation yesterday sentenced two Iranians to death for killing a ruling family member, another Kuwaiti and an Indonesian woman in an armed robbery in 2016. The victims were found inside an apartment in Salwa with their hands and feet tied and their mouths gagged.

At the time, the interior ministry's media and public relations department had said in a statement the suspects were arrested after intense investigations and information from eyewitnesses. The suspects, Iranian nationals Mohammad Abdulredha Nawasser and Ali Mohammad Al-Bughhaibesh, committed the crime using a handgun, said the statement. Before escaping, the two suspects stole KD 276,000 and three guns belonging to the house owner, the statement added.



The two suspects are seen after their arrest in this file photo.

120 killed in Libya; Sisi meets Haftar

TRIPOLI: Fighting near Tripoli has killed 121 people since strongman Khalifa Haftar launched an offensive earlier this month to take the Libyan capital, the World Health Organization said yesterday. In clashes between Haftar's forces and those of the UN-backed Government of National Accord (GNA), both sides have proclaimed "advances" but neither appears to have made substantial progress on the ground in recent days. With more than 560 people wounded since the fighting started on April 4, the WHO said it was sending more medical supplies and staff to Tripoli.

On its Twitter feed, the agency denounced "repeated attacks on health care workers" and vehicles during the fighting. The UN's humanitarian coordination office, OCHA, said Saturday that

three medical personnel had been killed and that shrapnel had put five ambulances out of action. The mounting violence has sparked global alarm over the oil-rich country, in turmoil since NATO-backed forces overthrew former dictator Muammar Gaddafi in 2011. A bewildering array of militias have sought to take control since his ouster.

Haftar's offensive began shortly before a conference set for this month to discuss Libya's future - an event the UN cancelled as his forces closed in on the capital. Haftar, who leads the self-styled Libyan National Army (LNA), has pushed from his power base in the country's east towards the Libyan capital in the west, the seat of the UN-backed unity government led by Fayeze Al-Sarraj.

The unity government said its forces had shot down an LNA fighter jet yesterday "that was preparing to conduct air raids" south of Tripoli. An LNA source said the plane had come down in an area under its control and that the pilot, who had ejected, was "safe and sound".

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CAIRO: Egyptian President Abdel Fattah Al-Sisi (right) meets Libyan strongman Khalifa Haftar at the Ittihadia presidential palace yesterday. — AFP

World's largest plane makes first test flight

LOS ANGELES: The world's largest aircraft took off over the Mojave Desert in California on Saturday, the first flight for the carbon-composite plane built by Stratolaunch Systems Corp, started by late Microsoft

co-founder Paul Allen, as the company enters the lucrative private space market. The white airplane called Roc, which has a wingspan the length of an American football field and is powered by six engines on a twin fuselage, took to the air shortly before 7 am Pacific time (1400 GMT) and stayed aloft for more than two hours before landing safely back at the Mojave Air and Space Port as a crowd of hundreds of people cheered.

"What a fantastic first flight," Stratolaunch Chief Executive Officer Jean Floyd said in a statement posted to the company's website.

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This handout photograph shows the Stratolaunch plane flying above the California desert on Saturday, the first test flight of the US company's gigantic aircraft whose wingspan is almost half that of an Airbus A380. — AFP

EPA tightens shisha curbs

By A Saleh

KUWAIT: Environment Public Authority Chairman Sheikh Abdullah Al-Ahmed issued a decision on the conditions and regulations of smoking shisha in enclosed and semi-enclosed public places. The new regulations stress that smoking any form of tobacco is banned in schools, universities and health facilities, and set 19 conditions for serving shisha.

These include that the premises should be in a commercial or investment building, serving shisha only in open-air areas in shopping malls and licensed restaurants or cafes and semi-open areas in hotels that cannot be expanded without EPA approval.

There should also be automatic doors between smoking and non-smoking areas, a special 5-sq-m area for cleaning and preparing shisha, using disposable mouthpieces, clearly displaying a clear banning smoking by customers below 18 years of age, banning shisha delivery, safe storage of charcoal and several other conditions concerning safety and hygiene.

Israeli delegation cancels Bahrain visit after outcry

DUBAI: A delegation from Israel that was due to attend a conference in Bahrain this week has pulled out due to security concerns, the organizers said yesterday, after Bahrainis held an extensive campaign against the visit. A spokeswoman for Israel's Economy Minister Eli Cohen said his planned visit to Bahrain this week had been "delayed because of political issues". Another Israeli cabinet minister said this referred to coalition talks after Israel's election last week.

Israel and the Gulf Arab countries are in the midst of a diplomatic push aimed at forging an alliance against their common enemy Iran. Their efforts have become increasingly public after years of mostly covert contact due to strong opposition to the Israeli occupation of Palestinian territories. The group of around 30 Israeli business executives and government officials was scheduled to participate in a congress organized by the US-based Global Entrepreneurship Network (GEN) in Bahrain on April 15-18.

This prompted an outcry in Bahrain, with parliament joining calls on social media for the visit to be cancelled and some minor street protests held in Manama. "While we advised the Israeli delegation they would be welcome, they decided this morning not to come due to security concerns and a wish not to cause disruption for the other 180 nations participating," Jonathan Ortman, GEN president, said in a statement.

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Local

Amir meets Tunisian speaker, receives greetings of President Essebsi

We are proud of Amir's acts in world development: Tunisian speaker



KUWAIT: His Highness the Amir Sheikh Sabah Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah meets with Kuwaiti Parliament Speaker Marzouq Al-Ghanem and Tunisian President of the Assembly of the Representatives of the People Mohamed Ennaceur. — Amiri Diwan photos



His Highness the Amir Sheikh Sabah Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah meets with Chairman of Kuwait's Supreme Judicial Council and the Cassation Court, and President of the Constitutional Court, Justice Yousef Jassem Al-Mutawaa.

KUWAIT: His Highness the Amir Sheikh Sabah Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah received yesterday at Bayan Palace Kuwaiti Parliament Speaker Marzouq Al-Ghanem and Tunisian President of the Assembly of the Representatives of the People Mohamed Ennaceur and his accompanying delegation. Ennaceur conveyed the greetings and appreciation of Tunisian President Beji Caid Essebsi, wishing His Highness the Amir good health and well-being and for the people of Kuwait all prosperity. During the meeting, His Highness the Amir conveyed his greetings and appreciation to President Essebsi wishing him good health and for the Tunisian people further progress and development.

Ennaceur expressed his pride in His Highness Sheikh Sabah Al-Ahmad and his actions on the Arabic and International levels. "I conveyed President Beji Caid Essebsi's greetings to His Highness the Amir, and affirmed his important contribution in the 30th Arab Summit held in Tunisia last March, which was as usual a word of wisdom and poise," he said after the meeting. "We talked about the

general situation in the region and discussed his initiatives towards brotherhood and cooperation, and I showed pride in his acts on the international level," Ennaceur continued. "We stressed on the strong bilateral ties between Kuwait and Tunisia in all fields, and this visit confirms the deep bonds between the Tunisian and Kuwaiti peoples and we will continue on the parliamentary level to support this relationship in serving Arabic and International issues," he added.

His Highness the Amir also received at Bayan Palace Chairman of Kuwait's Supreme Judicial Council and the Cassation Court, and President of the Constitutional Court, Justice Yousef Jassem Al-Mutawaa. His Highness the Amir received as well Acting Prime Minister and Defense Minister Sheikh Nasser Sabah Al-Ahmad Al-Sabah. The meetings were attended by Minister of Amiri Diwan Affairs Sheikh Ali Jarrah Al-Sabah.

In other news, His Highness Sheikh Salem Al-Ali Al-Sabah, chief of Kuwait National Guard (KNG), sent a congratulatory cable to His Highness the Amir to congratulate him on

a World Bank award for his support to socio-economic development and peacemaking on regional and global scales. In the cable, His Highness Sheikh Salem underlined that the award reflects yet another world recognition to His Highness the Amir's enormous humanitarian initiatives to support development, as well as His Highness's ongoing endeavors to lessen the suffering of those in need, wishing His Highness everlasting health and prosperity. Meanwhile, Acting Prime Minister and Defense Minister Sheikh Nasser Sabah Al-Ahmad Al-Sabah conveyed congratulations to His Highness the Amir, stressing that His Highness is the prime supporter for all economic, social and humanitarian initiatives, wishing His Highness everlasting health and prosperity. Separately, His Highness the Amir sent a cable to Palestinian President Mahmoud Abbas, congratulating him on the new government formation. His Highness the Crown Prince Sheikh Nawaf Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah and His Highness the Prime Minister Sheikh Jaber Al-Mubarak Al-Hamad Al-Sabah have sent similar cables. — KUNA



His Highness the Amir Sheikh Sabah Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah meets with Acting Prime Minister and Defense Minister Sheikh Nasser Sabah Al-Ahmad Al-Sabah.



KUWAIT: Minister of Information and Minister of State for Youth Affairs Mohammad Al-Jabri honors Nouf Al-Ajmi from ABK.

ABK supports Arab sports development

KUWAIT: Al-Ahli Bank of Kuwait (ABK) sponsored the First International Scientific Forum, an event designed to support the development and enrichment of Arab sports. The two-day event was held at the Palms Hotel between April 3-5 and featured conferences, training courses, and an exhibition, allowing participants to exchange knowledge, experiences and ideas that

enable sustainable development in Arab sports. The first-of-its-kind forum was held to align with the International Day of Sport for Development and Peace, a UN General Assembly initiative that is marked globally on April 6 and was attended by the Minister of Information and Minister of State for Youth Affairs Mohammad Al-Jabri, as well as a number of ambassadors.

The adoption of this day signifies the increasing recognition by the UN of the positive influence that sport plays on the advancement social and economic development. ABK recognizes the positive impact sports can have on society and is committed to supporting and encouraging wider participation in sporting activities.



KUWAIT: National Assembly Speaker Marzouq Ali Al-Ghanem meets with Tunisian President of the Assembly of the Representatives Mohamed Ennaceur. — KUNA



Tunisian President of the Assembly of the Representatives Mohamed Ennaceur gestures during a visit to Kuwait's National Assembly yesterday.

Speaker holds official talks with Tunisian counterpart

KUWAIT: National Assembly Speaker Marzouq Ali Al-Ghanem held official talks yesterday with Tunisian President of the Assembly of the Representatives of the People Mohamed Ennaceur and his accompanying delegation. In a press statement, Al-Dostour news network said during the meeting, the two sides tackled boosting cooperation relations, and the two sides reviewed ways of developing them to best serve the interest of both countries and peoples.

The talks also covered the importance of increasing cooperation between the two parliaments through exchanging visits and coordinating positions in various parliamentary forums in addition to discussing the latest developments in the region. The meeting was attended by the secretary of the National Assembly, Dr Awdah Al-Ruwayi, head of the accompanying delegation of deputies, MP Mohammad Al-Huwaila, MPs Khaled Al-Shatti, Saud Al-Shuaieer, Kuwait's Ambassador to Tunisia Ali Al-Dhufiri and National Assembly Secretary General Allam Al-Kanderi. After the talks, Ghanem hosted a luncheon in honor of the visiting delegation. The Tunisian lawmakers



Acting Prime Minister and Defense Minister Sheikh Nasser Sabah Al-Ahmad Al-Sabah meets with Tunisian President of the Assembly of the Representatives Mohamed Ennaceur.

arrived in the country on Saturday for a five-day official visit.

Acting Prime Minister and Defense Minister Sheikh Nasser Sabah Al-Ahmad Al-Sabah also held talks with Ennaceur yesterday. The 'cordial talks,' attended by Kuwait

and Tunisia's respective envoys, revolved around matters of mutual concern, read a statement by the Kuwaiti defense ministry. Ennaceur, leading a parliamentary delegation, started a five-day official visit to Kuwait on Saturday. — KUNA

NSA chief meets UAE ambassador



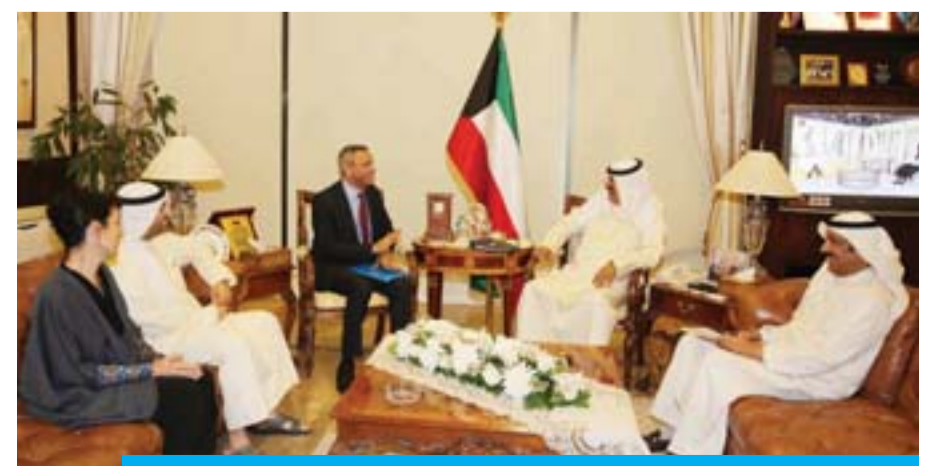
KUWAIT: National Security Apparatus Chief Sheikh Thamer Al-Ali Al-Sabah meets with UAE Ambassador to Kuwait Saqer Al-Raisi. — KUNA

KUWAIT: National Security Apparatus (NSA) Chief Sheikh Thamer Al-Ali Al-Sabah held talks with UAE Ambassador to Kuwait Saqer Al-Raisi on joint cooperation. During the meeting, the two

sides discussed ways of strengthening bilateral ties and ways of enhancing them. Latest regional developments and common issues were discussed during the meeting as well. — KUNA

Deputy Foreign Minister meets WFP official

KUWAIT: Deputy Foreign Minister Khaled Al-Jarallah met yesterday with visiting UN World Food Program (WFP) GCC Regional Director Majeed Yahya and his accompanying delegation. During the meeting, the two sides discussed ways on bolstering cooperation and tackled WFP activities around the world. Yahya praised Kuwait's humanitarian efforts, including support by Kuwait to the UN program. The meeting was attended by Assistant Deputy Foreign Minister Affairs' office Ambassador Ayham Al-Omar. — KUNA



KUWAIT: Deputy Foreign Minister Khaled Al-Jarallah meets with the visiting UN World Food Program GCC Regional Director Majeed Yahya. — KUNA

Local

Egypt suspends sending labor to Kuwait small projects due to trafficking fears

'Mass exodus' of expat teachers from education ministry

KUWAIT: The labor office at the Egyptian embassy banned owners of small projects from bringing in workers from Egypt to Kuwait with visas related to the projects, after the office received many complaints, a local daily reported yesterday quoting sources. Egyptian workers who arrived in Kuwait lately were surprised to find there were no real jobs, the sources told Al-Qabas. Their sponsors asked them to change the type of residency or choose another job in small projects. They said they had to pay KD 1,500 for a three-year residency permit. Reports had surfaced earlier this year about local authorities investigating possible involvement of some small projects' owners in visa trafficking cases reported recently in Kuwait.

Teachers resign

Meanwhile, educational officials in several educational zones warned against a drop in the number of teachers in some specialties next year if the ministry

does not take measures to increase the number of teachers contracted locally and from abroad. Officials said some zones saw many resignations from expat teachers in various specialties, especially in science - including physics and chemistry - in addition to computers and English.

They said the majority of those submitting their resignations are Jordanians, Egyptians and Tunisians in the intermediate and secondary stages, adding that the resignations did not have reasons mentioned, but after inquiring about the reason, it was found out that they all signed contracts with the education ministry of a neighboring country starting from the next school year.



One million expats paid KD 125 a month

They added that another group of expat teachers took special leaves for three days to go for interviews in the

Gulf country after their applications were accepted, but they did not resign until the results of the interviews were known. "I went for an interview in a Gulf country in mid-March along with nearly 40 teachers of various specialties," an expat teacher said. He said that many teachers went during the midterm break for written exams and personal interviews, and some had already signed contracts.

Low salaries

Meanwhile, official statistics revealed that 81 percent

of expatriate labor in the private sector receive salaries less than KD 330 per month, while one million out of 1.67 million expats in the private sector receive KD 125 or lower in monthly salaries. Only 1,492 persons receive a salary exceeding KD 5,000 per month; five percent of the total number of private sector expat employees, the statistics show.

Separately, Al-Qabas also reported that the number of marriages in January reached 1,148, while divorces reached 634 during the same month according to new statistics from the statistics and research department at the justice ministry. The statistics showed 345 cases of reversible divorce and 66 cases of khula (divorce initiated by the wife). Statistics also showed that the Capital governorate had the most divorce cases at 269, followed by Hawally at 108, Ahmadi with 106 and Mubarak Al-Kabeer with 53. The number of marriages outside the country reached 39, while the number of premarital medical tests reached 1,065, three of which appeared unsafe.

Supreme Council meeting discusses education in Kuwait

KUWAIT: Acting Prime Minister, Minister of Defense and Chief of the General Secretariat of the Supreme Council for Planning and Development Sheikh Nasser Sabah Al-Ahmad Al-Sabah, chaired yesterday the Supreme Council's seventh meeting. The General Secretariat of the Supreme Council for Planning and Development said in a statement that the seventh meeting tackled the education strategy in Kuwait with participation of representatives of the strategy joint committee. — KUNA



KUWAIT: Sheikh Nasser Sabah Al-Ahmad Al-Sabah chairs the Supreme Council for Planning and Development's 7th meeting yesterday. — KUNA

Councilmembers lament 'lack of cooperation' with investigations

By Meshaal Al-Enezi

KUWAIT: Municipal councilmembers Abdul Salam Al-Randi, Maha Al-Baghli, Meshaan Al-Hamdan and Ahmad Al-Enezi announced resigning from a commit-

tee entrusted with investigating the violations committed on public property over a lack of cooperation from the executive body, its failure to provide the committee with needed information and documents, dithering and delaying administrative and legal measures against violators and leaking related information and documents to the media.

However, in a statement the four members signed, they preferred not to talk about the details due to what they described as 'positive steps' taken by Minister of Awqaf and Islamic Affairs and Minister of State for Municipal Affairs Fahd Al-Sholah in this regard, such as suspending the main suspect, issuing direct orders to remove the violations, referring the issue to public prosecution and anti-corruption authority and forming a special committee headed by a fatwa and legislation department advisor to investigate the violations.

Medicine authority

Ministry of Health's assistant undersecretary for food and medicine control Dr Abdullah Monjed Al-Bader announced that he submitted a proposal to Minister Sheikh Dr Basel Al-Sabah concerning the establishment of a public authority for medicine and medical equipment. Bader said an independent authority directly supervised by the minister was needed to control medicine and cope with the rapid development in the field. He also noted that the authority will help regulate medicine affairs, including veterinary medications, food supplements, medical products, cosmetics and medical equipment and ensure their safety before reaching consumers. "The authority will also prevent overuse and waste," Bader added, noting that Kuwait had been one of the first Arab countries to regulate the use of medicine in the late 1960s.

Visa transfer

Well-informed sources said that in case of getting divorced, a woman applying to transfer her dependent residency visa needs the Interior Ministry's approval along with her divorce documents.

Economic legislations plan

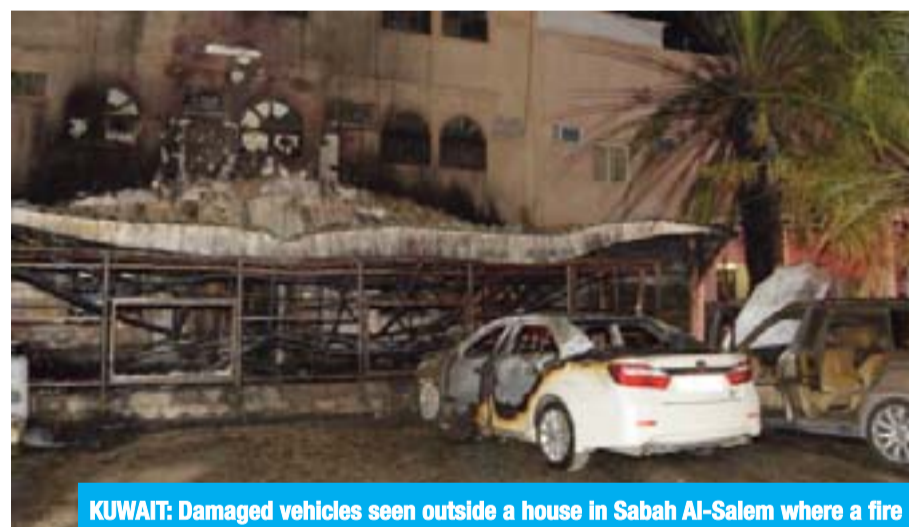
Minister of Commerce and Industry and Minister of State for Services Affairs Khaled Al-Roudhan announced completing the economic legislations plan, adding that three bills have already been referred to the parliament - on competitiveness, auditors and bankruptcy. Separately, the Public Authority for Industry (PAI) urged all industrial facilities to provide it with copies of their budgets and profits and losses after endorsing them by the Ministry of Commerce and Industry (MoCI) within three months effective this April. Informed sources said PAI will impose penalties against those who fail to file their budgets within the given period, in addition to suspending all transactions of the concerned facility.

Entertainment City

Finance Minister Nayef Al-Hajraf said the Cabinet has asked Touristic Enterprises Company (TEC) to carry on with executing a project to develop the Entertainment City and stressed that the Cabinet's decision to close the city was made after specialized experts examined the rides and found they were worn out, unsafe and unprofitable. Hajraf added that TEC had proposed various alternatives to fund the new project but a final decision has not been made yet.

Budgets boosted

The Cabinet issued two decisions boosting the budgets of the health and oil ministries with over KD 1.2 billion to cover the deficits they suffer from. Informed sources explained that the Ministry of Health was given an extra budget of KD 319.5 million, while the oil ministry was given KD 900 million to cover the deficit in subsidizing some refined products and local liquefied gas.



KUWAIT: Damaged vehicles seen outside a house in Sabah Al-Salem where a fire was reported.



Heavy damage left by the fire inside the house.

Body found on roof of Jabriya building

By Hanan Al-Saadoun and Agencies

KUWAIT: An Egyptian man was found dead on the roof of a Jabriya building yesterday, said security sources, noting that the man's face was covered in blood. The body was taken to the coroner, as a case was filed and further investigations are in progress.

Sabah Al-Salem fire

Qurain Fire Station men responded to a call about a fire in Sabah Al-Salem that spread to cars parked in front of a house in the area. The fire was put out and kept from spreading further. No injuries were reported, while an investigation was opened to reveal the cause of the fire.

Fatal crash

A Kuwaiti man was killed and another injured when their vehicle flipped over on Salmi road while on a hunting trip, Al-Rai reported yesterday. Forensics officers took the deceased to the coroner, while the injured was taken to Jahra Hospital.

Officer injured

A reckless driver in Jahra ran over an officer who

responded to a call and sped away. Detectives were able to identify the suspect and are looking for him. Police responded to a call about a reckless driver who was scaring people with his actions. When the driver saw the patrol car, he pulled over, but when the officer walked towards him, he drove at full speed and hit the officer. An ambulance took the officer to Jahra Hospital.

Kidnapped woman freed

Police officers succeeded in freeing a woman who was kidnapped by her boyfriend and held in a Kabd farm, but she was injured in the process. The suspect was arrested. A 32-year-old woman called Kabd police and told them that her 30-year-old sister was kidnapped and held at a farm by a Kuwaiti man. Policemen and detectives went to the area and when they knocked on the door, the suspect told them she was there but had already left, then closed the door. Officers surrounded the place and negotiated with the suspect for an hour to let the victim go. The suspect gave up and handed over the victim, who was in a

very bad condition with her body was bruised. The suspect was taken to concerned authorities.

Family issues

A Kuwaiti woman called police after her brother-in-law stormed her house and beat her along with his wife. Policemen responded, but the suspect had already escaped before their arrival. Police found the door destroyed, as well as furniture and other things.

Unconscious

A citizen was rushed to the ICU after he was found unconscious in his car in Yarmouk. Policemen broke the windows and handed him to paramedics.

Robbers caught

Criminal detectives arrested a Kuwaiti man and his girlfriend for breaking into three cars and stealing their contents. The couple said they spent the money they collected in cafes. The arrest was made in Salmiya. The suspects added they sold the stolen phones to a store.

Major military drill kicks off in Kuwait

KUWAIT: Large-scale military exercises involving eight nations and 13 government bodies opened in Kuwait yesterday, the country's national guard said. The Kuwaiti National Guard's undersecretary Lieutenant General Hashim Al-Rifai welcomed military contingents from countries including the United States, Britain, Italy, China, amongst others, to the week-long drill. The annual drill

aims to promote knowledge exchange and develop combat readiness, with focus on exercises dealing with emergency situations, he revealed. The Kuwaiti National Guard has placed security at the forefront of its 2020 strategy, which calls for a closer rapport with state bodies, the drill's organizer Major General Falah Shujaa revealed. — KUNA

Kuwait Airways redirects flights from Dubai airport

KUWAIT: Kuwait Airways announced yesterday that its outbound flights to Dubai International Airport (DXB) have been scheduled to land in Al-Maktoum international Airport instead. Regional Director of GCC in Kuwait Airways Mishaal Al-Dalk said in a statement to the press that flights to DXB were transferred to Al-Maktoum International Airport starting April 17 due to maintenance and renovation on the Northern runway.

Dalk stressed the company's keenness, represented by Chairman of the Board Yusef Al-Jassem and Chief Executive Officer Kamel Al-Awadhi, on providing all services and facilitating operations of departure and arrival. He also expressed his gratitude to Dubai Airports authority for their full cooperation in easing the procedures for the passengers. Meanwhile, CEO of Dubai Airports Paul Griffiths said that Roads and Transport Authority (RTA) will provide Al-Maktoum Airport with busses and a fleet of taxis during the shutdown of DXB. — KUNA

Local

Photo of the Day



KUWAIT: The Sharq district of Kuwait City captured during sunset. — Photo by Mohammad Subhi (KUNA)

Kuwait's chief lawmaker hosts FIFA president

Speaker receives heads, representatives of local sports clubs



KUWAIT: Kuwait's National Assembly Speaker Marzouq Al-Ghanem meets with FIFA President Gianni Infantino. — KUNA photos



President and members of Kuwait Football Association (KFA) meet with the visiting FIFA President Gianni Infantino.

KUWAIT: Kuwait's top lawmaker Marzouq Al-Ghanem yesterday received FIFA President Gianni Infantino, along with a delegation accompanying him. The president of Kuwait's Football Association Sheikh Ahmad Al-Yousef Al-Sabah attended the talks, the Kuwaiti parliament's Al-Dostour news service reported.

President and members of Kuwait Football Association (KFA) held talks with Infantino on Saturday on means of developing football in Kuwait. The two sides also discussed a host of issues over the development of football, a KFA statement said. The meeting was attended by KFA President Sheikh Ahmad Yusuf Al-Sabah, Vice-President Ahmad Oqla Al-Enezi, and members Sabeeh Abul, Ahmad Ajab, Khaled Al-Shemmeri, Ibrahim Al-Ansari, Fatma Hayat, Salem Saadoun and Mohammad Khalil. Infantino arrived in Kuwait earlier on Saturday for a two-day visit.

Meanwhile, Ghanem received yesterday heads and representatives of local sports clubs' boards, in the presence of Minister of Information and Minister of State for Youth Affairs Mohammad Al-Jabri and number of MPs. The meeting was attended by MPs Adnan Abdel Samad, Ahmad Al-Fadl, Dr Khalil Abul, Faisal Al-Kandari, Director General of the Public Authority of Sports Dr Humoud Al-Fleitah and the Deputy Director General of Financial Affairs at the Authority Ali Al-Hadiya.

The meeting was also attended by, Chairman of Al-Arabi Club Abdulaziz Ashour, Chairman of Al-Qadisiyah Club Sheikh Khaled Al-Fahad Al-Sabah, Chairman of Kuwait Club Khalid Al-Ghanem, Chairman of Al-Shabab Club Menahi Al-Azmi, Chairman of Fahaeel Club Hamad Al-Dabbous, Salmiya Club Chairman Sheikh Turki Al-Yousef Al-Sabah and Khaitan Club Chairman Abdullah Al-Otaibi.

Secretary of Kathma Club Yousef Boskandar, Secretary of Al-Yarmouk Club Fouad Al-Failakawi, Secretary of Al-Naser Club Dakheel Al-Adwani, Chairman of Al-Tadamon Club Mubarak Al-Nazzal, Secretary of Al-Jahra Club Khalaf Al-Sahou, Vice Chairman of Al-Sahel Club Mullaq Al-Azmi, Sulaibikhat Club Chairman Saad Al-Anazi, Burgan Club Chairman Haman Al-Hamlan and Secretary of Al-Qurain Club Abdulkarim Al-Shahoumi also attended the meeting.

Deputy Parliament Speaker Essa Al-Kandari received at



Deputy Speaker meets Khaitan SC Chief



Deputy Parliament Speaker Essa Al-Kandari meets with the Board Chairman of Khaitan Sporting Club Abdullah Al-Otaibi.

his office yesterday the Board Chairman of Khaitan Sporting Club (SC) Abdullah Al-Otaibi. Al-Dostour network said in a press statement that the meeting highlighted ways of boosting clubs performance and activities and finding ways to end obstacles facing the sporting clubs. — KUNA



National Assembly Speaker Marzouq Al-Ghanem meets with representatives of local sports clubs' boards.



Representatives of local sports clubs attend the meeting.

Local

Gulf Bank empowers Kuwaiti youth at annual INJAZ Kuwait Company Program Competition

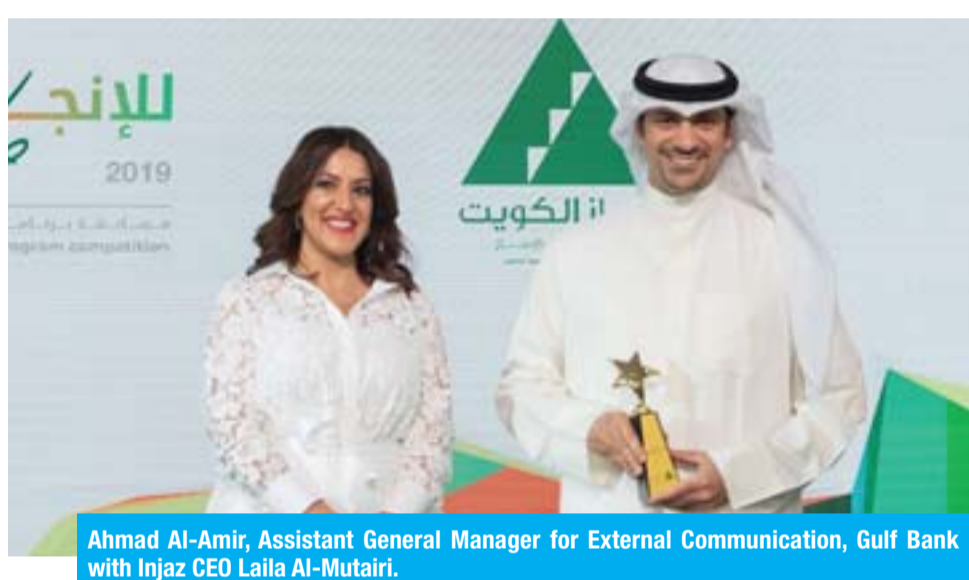
Bank presented winning students with 2019 'Best Student Company Award'



KUWAIT: Ahmad Al-Amir, Assistant General Manager for External Communication, Gulf Bank with Meren Team.



Ahmad Al-Amir, Assistant General Manager for External Communication, Gulf Bank with Seuse Team.



Ahmad Al-Amir, Assistant General Manager for External Communication, Gulf Bank with Injaz CEO Laila Al-Mutairi.



Tareq Al-Saleh, Assistant General Manager of Consumer Investments at Gulf Bank with Injaz CEO Laila Al-Mutairi.



Ahmad Al-Amir

KUWAIT: Title sponsors Gulf Bank sponsored the 'Best Student Company Award' for INJAZ Kuwait's 2019 'Company Program Competition.' Held at the Salwa Sabah Al-Ahmad Hall in the Marina Hotel from April 12 to 13, 2019, the competition was attended by INJAZ Kuwait's representatives, students, volunteers, CPC judges, parents, teachers, partners, sponsors, and supporters.

Gulf Bank hosted competing students for a workshop session under the theme of public speaking. The workshop was designed to help prepare participants for the presentation phase of the competition, in which 21 student companies were featured over the course of two days, with a total of 250 participating

students from private and public schools and universities competing.

In addition, Gulf Bank sponsored the 'Best Student Company of 2019' award, with 'Meren' winning in the university category, while 'Seuse' claimed the prize for the high school category. Ahmad Al-Amir, Assistant General Manager for External Communication, Gulf Bank, was on hand to present the award to the winning teams, while Tareq Al-Saleh, Assistant General Manager of Consumer Investments at Gulf Bank was part of the judging panel.

Commenting during the ceremony, he congratulated the winners, saying: "A long-time partner and supporter of INJAZ, Gulf Bank continues its investment in

youth educational programs. The Gulf Bank family is committed to volunteering with INJAZ, with employees from across various department and backgrounds participating each year. Lastly, on behalf of the Bank, we are proud to participate as title sponsors and contributors to the success of the Company Program Competition."

"On behalf of Gulf Bank, I would like to congratulate the winners of this year's Company Program Competition and the INJAZ Kuwait team on another successful event. We would also like to wish the winning team the best of luck at the regional competition," added Amir. Sponsorship of the competition falls under the bank's corporate social responsibility, through

which the bank supports and empowers the development of Kuwait's youth and their entrepreneurial spirit.

INJAZ Kuwait, part of the global network of Junior Achievement worldwide, is a non-profit (NPO), non-governmental organization (NGO) driven by Kuwait's private sector. Through strategic partnerships with Kuwait's business and education sectors, and with the help of qualified and dedicated volunteers, INJAZ delivers both Arabic and English language educational programs on entrepreneurial and leadership skills to build successful careers. Gulf Bank's corporate social responsibility (CSR) program is committed to educational initiatives that make a sustainable impact on youth and in the community.



Oman's team, the first place winner in the high school stage.



Saudi Arabia's team, the first place winner in the middle school stage.

Amir prioritizes care for youth: Minister



Minister Jenan Boushehri delivers a speech.



Sheikha Fadia Al-Sabah speaks to the audience



KUWAIT: Sheikha Fadia Saad Al-Abdullah Al-Salem Al-Sabah (center) and Sheikha Nabila Salman Sabah Al-Salem Al-Sabah (right) honor Minister of Public Works and Minister of State for Housing Affairs Jenan Boushehri. — KUNA



Honorary Chairperson of the Kuwait Disabled Club Sheikha Al-Abdullah Al-Sabah (left) is honored.

KUWAIT: Directives of His Highness the Amir Sheikh Sabah Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah always highlight care for the youth, males and females, Minister of Public Works and Minister of State for Housing Affairs Jenan Boushehri said on Saturday. The youth are partners in the country's march towards development and innovation, she said in a speech to the award ceremony of Kuwait innovation initiative for women's research and projects.

The minister was speaking on behalf of His Highness

the Amir, the sponsor of an initiative dubbed 'Sheikha Fadia Al-Saad Al-Sabah's scientific competition at the Gulf level.' She noted that His Highness the Amir has announced the establishment of Kuwait's innovation center to support and care for youth's inventions and innovations so as to turn them into scientific projects. She lauded achievements made by the female student winners in the competition, saying this will be in favor of their country and future.

Meanwhile, Chairwoman of Al-Saad center for Knowledge and scientific research Sheikha Fadia Saad Al-Abdullah Al-Salem Al-Sabah expressed her pleasure for this initiative, which has been established on a solid ground and spread in the Gulf countries, thanks to God. Chairwoman of the initiative Sheikha Nabila Salman Sabah Al-Salem Al-Sabah hoped that the competition would attract further female students interested in scientific research to contribute to developing the society. — KUNA

International

MONDAY, APRIL 15, 2019



Sudan protesters set demands as military rulers urge support

Money, money, money: The tycoon factor in India election

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OAMIDIYEH, Iran : Iranians take swim in the flooded Karkheh river in Omidiyeh, in Iran's Khuzestan province. Authorities ordered tens of thousands of residents of the southwestern Iranian city of Ahvaz to evacuate immediately as floodwaters entered the capital of oil-rich Khuzestan province, state television reported. — AFP

Floods kill 76; Iran weighs costs

Tehran blasts US dangerous measure, consequences

TEHRAN: Floods in Iran have killed 76 people and caused more than \$2.2 billion in damages in recent weeks, officials said yesterday, with warnings still in place for large swathes of the country. "With the death of five people in the Khuzestan province flood and another person in Ilam province the death toll has now reached 76" since March 19, according to a statement published online by the coroner's office.

The two southwestern provinces are the latest overwhelmed by floods that first hit the northeast of the usually arid country, forcing hundreds of thousands to evacuate from cities and villages. Officials have again issued flood warnings for the east of Iran with heavy rains that began on Saturday forecasted to continue. The floods have caused immense damage with homes, roads, infrastructure and agriculture all hit.

"Twenty-five provinces and more than 4,400 villages across the country were affected by the floods," Interior Minister Abdolreza Rahmani-Fazli told parliament, according to the official IRNA news agency. He said the damages amount to between 300 and 350 trillion rials - between \$2.2 and \$2.6 billion at the free market rate. Transport minister Mohammad Eslami meanwhile told lawmakers "725 bridges have been totally destroyed."

"More than 14,000 kilometers of roads have been damaged," he said, according to IRNA.

The head of Iran's meteorology service told the same parliamentary session that the floods do not necessarily mean that a decades-long drought has ended. "The recent floods were due to climate change and global warming," Sahar Tajbakhsh said according to the semi-official ISNA news agency. The Islamic republic has received aid from neighboring countries and further afield, with France on Saturday donating 210 tents and 114 pumps.

US targets IRGC

Meanwhile, Iran will ask the international community to take a position on the US designation of its Revolutionary Guards as a terrorist organization, Foreign Minister Mohammad Javad Zarif was cited as saying yesterday. Iran condemned US President Donald Trump's step last week as illegal. The

Islamic Revolutionary Guards Corps (IRGC) is a powerful elite force which controls much of the Iranian state and economy. "Today ... we will send messages to foreign ministers of all countries to tell them it is necessary for them to express their stances, and to warn them that this unprecedented and dangerous US measure has had and will have consequences," Zarif was quoted as saying by state news agency IRNA. Zarif said he had also sent letters to United Nations Secretary-General Antonio Guterres and the United Nations Security Council to protest against "this illegal US measure".

Tehran retaliated against Washington's move by designating the regional United States Central Command (CENTCOM) as a terrorist organization. Relations between Tehran and Washington took a turn for the worse last May when Trump pulled out of a 2015 nuclear deal between Iran and six world powers,

reached before he took office, and reimposed sanctions. The United States has already blacklisted dozens of entities and people for affiliations with the IRGC, but had not previously targeted the organization as a whole.

Revolutionary Guards commanders have repeatedly said that US bases in the Middle East and US aircraft carriers in the Gulf are within range of Iranian missiles. Tehran has also threatened to disrupt oil shipments through the Strait of Hormuz in the Gulf if the United States tries to strangle Iran's economy by halting its oil exports. Iran's oil minister said that the supply-demand balance in the global oil market is fragile due to US sanctions on Iran and Venezuela and tensions in Libya, and warned of consequences for increasing pressures on Tehran.

France, Britain and Germany, other signatories of the nuclear accord, have set up a new mechanism for non-dollar trade with Iran to protect against US sanctions. Zarif complained yesterday about the delay in the implementation of the mechanism, and urged Europe to make it operational as quickly as possible. "The Europeans should not believe that the Islamic Republic of Iran will wait for long," he said. — Agencies



Officials issue flood warnings

3 die as plane hits parked helicopter while taking off

KATHMANDU: A small plane operated by a private airline in Nepal hit a parked helicopter yesterday while preparing to take off in a mountainous area near Mount Everest, killing three people including a co-pilot, an airport official said. The Twin Otter aircraft crashed into the helicopter at Tenzing Hillary Airport at Lukla, known as the gateway to the world's highest mountain, 125 km northeast of capital Kathmandu.

The plane, operated by Summit Air, was not carrying passengers as it was trying to leave what is considered to be one of the world's most dangerous airports due to the shortness of its runway and its location surrounded by mountains. Officials said the cause of the incident was not immediately known. "Two people died on the spot and the third one died while undergoing treatment in a hospital in Kathmandu," airport official Pratap Babu Tiwari said.

The dead included two security guards who were near the helicopter. The pilot of the plane was among three people injured, though the lone stewardess escaped unhurt. Air crashes are common in mostly mountainous Nepal, home to eight of the world's 14 highest mountain peaks, including Mount Everest.

In February a helicopter carrying seven people



EVEREST: A Summit Air Let L-410 Turbolet aircraft bound for Kathmandu is seen after it hit two helicopters during take off at Lukla airport, the main gateway to the Everest region. — AFP

including the country's tourism minister crashed in bad weather in eastern Nepal, killing seven all on board. The Lukla airport was built by New Zealand mountaineer Sir Edmund Hillary - who together with Sherpa Tenzing Norgay became the first to reach the 8,850-metre (29,035-foot) Everest peak in 1953 - as a gift to the people of the remote Solukhumbu region where it is located. In 2008, another Twin Otter plane carrying 16 passengers and three crew crashed shortly before it was due to land at Lukla. — Reuters

India undermined Pakistan's nuclear threat, Modi says

NEW DELHI: Prime Minister Narendra Modi said yesterday that India had called Pakistan's nuclear bluff in recent cross-border air strikes that almost triggered a new war between the nuclear-armed rivals. Modi and his Hindu nationalist Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) have made national security the focus of their campaign for a national election now being held.

The prime minister told an election rally that an air strike inside Pakistan in February had shown that warnings hostilities could escalate into nuclear conflict were false. "Pakistan has threatened us with nuclear, nuclear, nuclear," Modi told an election rally in Jammu and Kashmir near the border with Pakistan. "Did we deflate their nuclear threat or not?" he asked the crowd that chanted "Modi, Modi, Modi" in response.

India says its fighter jets bombed a suspected militant installation in Pakistan on February 26 to avenge the killing of 40 paramilitaries by a suicide bomber in Indian Kashmir 12 days earlier. Pakistan responded by sending its warplanes toward Indian airspace, leading to a dogfight and the downing of an Indian jet. Military experts have long warned that

a conventional armed conflict between the two countries could result in nuclear war and that this was holding them back from a serious showdown.

Pakistan has never made a public nuclear threat. But its Prime Minister Imran Khan did call on both sides to pull back from the brink in February because of the "weapons we have". Modi renewed his warning to Pakistan that "his new India" is capable of "eliminating terrorists in their homes". India has long accused Pakistan of supporting militants in Kashmir, a charge its neighbor denies. The suicide bombing was claimed by a Pakistan-based group however.

The BJP has sought to use security to lead its election campaign amid a surge of nationalist sentiment since the air strikes. Opposition groups who have questioned the success of the raids have been slammed as "anti-national" by the party. Modi also vowed that India would never give up its claim to Kashmir, which is divided between the two countries, and has been the cause of two wars between the neighbors since their independence in 1947.

Tens of thousands of people have been killed in an insurgency in Indian-administered Kashmir since 1989. Modi attacked opposition parties who he said were working to "separate" Kashmir, the country's only Muslim majority state, from India. The government currently faces widespread opposition in Kashmir to a plan to scrap a constitutional article that gives the Himalayan region a special autonomous status within India. Opposition parties accuse Modi of exploiting turbulence in Kashmir to woo Hindu voters in the election. — AFP

International

Sudanese protesters set demands as military rulers urge global support

Thousands remain encamped outside Khartoum's army headquarters

KHARTOUM: Sudanese protesters demanded new military rulers set up a civilian government as the foreign ministry called yesterday for backing from the international community to help the country's "democratic transition". Thousands remained encamped outside Khartoum's army headquarters overnight to keep up pressure on a military council that took power after ousting veteran leader Omar al-Bashir on Thursday.

A 10-member delegation representing the protesters delivered their demands during talks with the council late Saturday, according to a statement by the Alliance for Freedom and Change umbrella group spearheading the rallies. "We will continue... our sit-in until all our demands are met," including the formation of a fully civilian government, said one of the alliance's leaders, Omar al-Degier.

Later the military council met with political parties and urged them to agree on an "independent figure" to be the country's prime minister, an AFP correspondent present at the meeting said. "We want to set up a civilian state based on freedom, justice and democracy," a member of the military council Lieutenant General Yasser al-Ata told several political parties, urging them to agree on the figures to sit in civilian government.

The protesters have insisted that civilian representatives must join the military council, and demanded that a fully civilian government be set up to run day-to-day affairs. Meanwhile, the foreign ministry urged the international community to back the military council "to achieve the Sudanese goal of democratic transition," it said in a statement. The council chief General Abdel Fattah al-Burhan is "committed to having a complete civilian government and the role of the council will be to maintain the sovereignty of the country", it added.

Talks between protest leaders and Sudan's new rulers were followed yesterday by a meeting between Washington's top envoy to Khartoum, Steven Koutsis, and the military council's deputy, Mohammad Hamdan Daglo, widely known as Himeidti, told Koutsis "about the measures taken by the military council to preserve the security and stability of the country," the official SUNA news agency reported. Himeidti is a field commander for the Rapid Support Forces (RSF) counter-insurgency unit, which rights groups have accused of abuses in the war-torn Darfur region.

Burhan talks the talk

On Saturday, the military council's new chief General Burhan vowed to dismantle Bashir's regime, lifting a night-time curfew with immediate effect. He also pledged that individuals implicated in killing protesters would face justice and that protesters detained under a state of emergency imposed by Bashir during his final weeks in power would be freed. Burhan took the oath of office on Friday after his predecessor General Awad Ibn Ouf stepped down little more than 24 hours after ousting Bashir.

Tens of thousands of people have massed non-stop outside the army headquarters since April 6, initially to urge the military to back their demand that Bashir be removed. Burhan comes with less baggage from Bashir's deeply unpopular rule than Ibn Ouf, a former defence minister and long-time close aide of the deposed president. But while celebrating the fall of both men in quick succession, protesters remain cautious.

Protest leaders say their demands include restructuring the country's feared National Intelligence and Security Service (NISS), whose chief Salih Ghosh resigned on



KHARTOUM: A woman takes a photograph with her smartphone of a billboard showing a reproduction of a picture of Alaa Salah, a Sudanese woman who has become an icon of the protest movement after a video of her leading demonstrators' chants went viral. — AFP

Saturday. Rights group Amnesty International on Saturday urged the military council to examine Ghosh's actions during a crackdown against protesters during the final weeks of Bashir's rule. "It is crucial that Sudan's new authorities investigate Salah Ghosh's role in the killings of scores of Sudanese protesters over the past

four months", said Amnesty's regional director Sarah Jackson. The newly formed 10-member transitional council contains several faces from Bashir's regime. On Saturday evening, the new military ruler named NISS deputy head Jalaluddin Sheikh to the council, with Himeidti as its deputy head. — AFP

'Fake news' fuelling ethno-religious crisis, tensions in Nigeria

LAGOS: Misinformation risks worsening ethnic and religious tensions in Nigeria, media commentators and researchers say, at a time of heightened concern about internal security and fragile community relations. The months and weeks running up to recent elections saw a slew of false claims about politicians and their parties, as part of deliberate attempts to shape the narrative before polling. Africa's most populous nation is often characterized as teetering on the brink.

Security threats include Boko Haram Islamists in the northeast and violence between nomadic cattle herders and farmers in central states. The latter is primarily a battle for water and land but those involved have been polarized along ethnic, sectarian and religious lines, in a country with more than 250 ethnic groups and where identity is rarely far from the surface.

Simon Kolawole, a former editor with Nigeria's ThisDay newspaper and founder of The Cable online news site, said manufactured lies in the guise of news was "further endangering the delicate ethno-religious fabric of Nigeria". It was also "hampering the credibility of news outlets in the country", he said. Information minister Lai Mohammed said misinformation and hate speech "threatens the peace, unity, security and corporate existence of Nigerians".

Of particular concern was the fabrication of stories pitting the country's mainly Muslim north against the predominantly Christian south - a traditional fault line often used by proponents of restructuring the current federal system and even breaking it up. "When you go by social



LAGOS: A man drives his scooter past portraits of some of the 200 Chibok schoolgirls abducted by Boko Haram Jihadists five years ago at Falomo roundabout in Lagos. — AFP

media, the impression you get is as if Nigeria is at war and as if Muslims are killing Christians," said Mohammed.

'Fake news' factories

Misinformation - deliberate or not - is not a new phenomenon in Nigeria. In November 1989, the state broadcaster NTA announced the death of Nnamdi Azikiwe, the country's first governor general and president after independence in 1960. By morning, most of the newspapers were running the story but "Zik", as he was known, was very much alive and would live for another seven years. Thirty years later, rumors circulated that President Muhammadu Buhari had died during one of his lengthy absences from Nigeria in 2017 on medical grounds, and that he had been replaced by a lookalike called Jubril from Sudan.

It took nearly two days before Azikiwe was to clear the air about the state of his health and inform the world he was still alive - and the false claim was relatively contained. The supposed death of Buhari in contrast spread

like wildfire on Twitter, Facebook and WhatsApp, so much so that he had to address the claim at a news conference. "It's the real me," he told supporters on a trip to Poland in December 2018.

That Buhari, 76, had to even devote time to debunking the claim is extraordinary but the fact it still circulates is a sign of the scale of problem - and the task facing the media and fact-checking organizations. Fredrick Nwabufo, a political analyst and columnist, said it was "an open secret" that Nigeria's two main political parties ran "media centers" to pump out misinformation during the election. He agreed there was a risk the practice could escalate ethnic and religious tensions.

Election impact?

The lookalike rumor can be traced to pro-Biafran supporters, who want a separate state for the ethnic Igbo people who dominate southeast Nigeria. Another claim, that Peoples Democratic Party (PDP) candidate Atiku Abubakar was being supported by the LGBT community, was designed to discredit him in the religious and socially conservative north. A recurrent claim against Buhari, who is also a Muslim from the north, is that he wants to Islamize all of Nigeria and extend Sharia law across the country. To what extent "fake news" influenced the result of the election is so far inconclusive. Buhari was re-elected by almost four million votes.

But Sam Ejiwumi, a doctoral student at the University of Lagos researching the possibility, said misinformation affects rural areas more than urban centers. "My fear is majorly with the impact it has on the credibility of the media. The media houses are no longer perceived as the custodian of credible news," he added. "We should all worry about how fake news especially during election can lead to increase in hate speech and alter the voting pattern. "While there is no data I'm aware of to support this claim at the moment, it is an hypothesis that will be examined soon enough." — AFP

Venezuela President orders an expansion of civilian militia

CARACAS: Venezuelan President Nicolas Maduro has ordered an expansion of civilian militia by nearly one million members as opposition leader Juan Guaido toured western Zulia state, which has been hard hit by electricity blackouts. Guaido, the leader of the opposition-controlled National Assembly who in January invoked Venezuela's constitution to assume an interim presidency, has called on the military to abandon Maduro amid a hyperinflationary economic collapse made worse by several nationwide blackouts in the past month.

Guaido has been recognized as Venezuela's rightful leader by the United States and most Western countries, who agree with his argument that Maduro's 2018 re-election was illegitimate. The civilian militia, created in 2008 by the late former president and Maduro mentor Hugo Chavez, reports directly to the presidency and is intended to complement the armed forces. Maduro, who calls Guaido a US puppet, said he aimed to raise the number of militia members to three million by year-end from what he said was more than 2 million currently.

Maduro has encouraged them to become involved in agricultural production. Shortages of food and medicine have prompted more than three million Venezuelans to emigrate in recent years. "With your rifles on your shoulders, be ready to defend the fatherland and dig the furrow to plant the seeds to produce food for the community, for the people," Maduro, a socialist, told thousands of militia members gathered in the capital Caracas, wearing khaki camouflaged uniforms.

So far, the military top brass has remained loyal to Maduro despite Guaido's offer of amnesty to military members who switch sides. Hundreds of soldiers have sought asylum in neighboring Colombia. While electricity has largely been restored in Caracas, Maduro's administration is rationing power to the rest of Venezuela.

Guaido is traveling in the interior to drum up support. In Zulia state, the site of the OPEC member's first oil well and home to Venezuela's second-largest city, Maracaibo, he said: "We are here to check on the situation, your suffering. But Zulia will rise up." Separately on Saturday, two employees of Venezuela's central bank who were arrested after meeting with Guaido earlier this week were freed, rights group Penal Forum said. Rights groups say Venezuelan authorities have arrested over 1,000 people after anti-government demonstrations this year. Guaido's chief of staff was arrested last month. — Reuters

Algeria activists fear tougher police tactics after Friday clashes

ALGIERS: Algerian civil society groups has warned of toughening police tactics and reaffirmed their commitment to peaceful pro-democracy rallies, a day after officers in riot gear clashed with protesters. The initially calm protest in central Algiers deteriorated into the worst street violence seen so far since marches began in mid-February demanding an end to the 20-year-rule of president Abdelaziz Bouteflika, who finally resigned on April 2, and his regime.

Police used tear gas and water cannon and scuffled with demonstrators, who in turn hurled stones and bottles, set light to at least one police car and turned large dumpsters into barricades. Injuries were reported on both sides, and activists raised fears that the standoff has entered a new phase. "Friday's mobilization was different because of the scale of the repression," according to Said Salhi, vice president of the Algerian League for the Defense of Human Rights. It said several activists were arrested on Saturday as they prepared to return to the key protest site at the capital's main post office, condemning the action as "harassment".

Demonstrators have vowed to push on with rallies against the interim government of Abdelkader Bensalah and its planned July 4 elections, arguing that leaders who emerged from the Bouteflika "system" cannot guarantee free and fair polls. Salhi noted that the mood was differ-



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

ent Friday outside the post office that has become an emblematic protest site. "It usually starts joyfully at the post office, but there was a desire on the part of the authorities to clear the area," he said.

Salhi said a turning point had come three days earlier when police had for the first time tried to disperse a student demonstration in Algiers with tear gas and water cannon. Political scientist Cherif Driss said that, while the demonstrations have continued unabated, "the police are trying to refocus, and are beginning to reduce the public space for expression". Driss added however that "the response remains moderate and professional, with mostly water cannons and tear gas. There is no brutal repression."

'Delinquents and troublemakers'

Police put Friday's violence down to "delinquents" infiltrating the crowds, and said 108 people had been arrested, while some protesters also blamed "troublemakers" for the clashes. Driss said it was too early to

tell whether Friday's clashes were the result of "a strategy to limit demonstrations or a reaction to groups infiltrating" the protests. The General Directorate of National Security reported that 83 police had suffered injuries. It denied having resorted to repressive tactics and said it was merely maintaining public order.

Several protesters were also injured, and at least one was hit in the chest by what appeared to be a rubber bullet, said an AFP photographer. Activist groups stressed their commitment to non-violence, although some shops and properties were damaged after protests in the early days of the movement. "The protesters are very committed to the continuation of the movement in its peaceful form," said Abdelwahab Ferfaoui of civic group the Youth Action Rally (RA)-Algeria. "It's the key to success." At Friday's clashes, AFP journalists saw some demonstrators placing themselves between rioters and police, raising their hands and chanting "silmiya" (peaceful) until the situation calmed. — AFP

News in brief

Iraq unearths mass grave

SAMAWA: Iraq must never forget Saddam Hussein's crimes or allow his party to return, President Barham Salih said yesterday after attending the unearthing of a mass grave of Kurds killed by the former leader's forces three decades ago. The grave, found in the desert about 170 km west of the city of Samawa, contained the remains of dozens of Kurds made to "disappear" by Saddam's forces, Salih's office said. They were among up to 180,000 people who may have been killed during Saddam's "Anfal" campaign that targeted Iraqi Kurds in the late 1980s when chemical gas was used, villages were razed and thousands of Kurds were forced into camps. "He killed them because they did not accept the continuation of this regime, because they wanted to live a free and dignified life," Salih, a Kurd, told a news conference at the grave site. — Reuters

Explosion in Nigeria kills 12

KANO: Twelve people were killed and 16 others badly injured when a fuel tanker exploded in northern Nigerian city of Gombe, police said yesterday. The driver lost control of the fuel tanker as he tried to avoid colliding with another truck at a bridge on the outskirts of the city on Saturday. The tanker fell on its side, "spilled its contents and exploded, causing an inferno that engulfed other road users," Gombe state police spokeswoman Mary Mallum said. "Twelve people burned to death while 16 others were seriously injured and evacuated to hospital for treatment," she said, accusing the driver - who was among those killed - of reckless driving and speeding. Accidents are common on Nigeria's poorly maintained roads, many caused by reckless driving, speeding and disregard for traffic rules. — AFP

Somali auto-rickshaw protest

MOGADISHU: At least three protesters died in Mogadishu when hundreds of auto-rickshaw taxi drivers took to the streets after an officer shot and killed a driver. The protest erupted shortly after police forces allegedly opened fire, killing one driver and a passenger at a checkpoint near the main Bakara market on the south side of the city. Mogadishu mayor Abdirahman Omar Osman called for calm after the latest in a series of similar incidents. "I condemn the killing of the rickshaw driver and the passenger. The police are currently pursuing the perpetrators so I urge the rickshaw drivers to show restraint," he said. According to witnesses, at least three people had been shot dead at Saturday's protest - but it was not clear if police had fired on them or else security guards from a local firm caught up in the unrest. — AFP

Rally car crashes into crowd

STOCKHOLM: Five people were injured in Sweden on Saturday when a rallycross car veered off a racetrack during a race and crashed into a crowd of spectators, police said. "There are five injured who have been transported to hospital. Two are reported to be lightly injured, and three seriously injured," Stockholm police said in a statement. "The driver of the car is one of the injured." The cause of the accident, which occurred at the Ticksta racetrack in Rimbo north of Stockholm, was not immediately known. So-called "folk racing" is a form of rally popular in the Nordic countries, run with standard, inexpensive cars on special gravel or tarmac tracks of 2.4 kilometers. — AFP

Palestinian governor arrested

JERUSALEM: Israeli police arrested the Palestinian governor of Jerusalem yesterday after he allegedly violated an order previously given to him by authorities, police and his lawyer said. The governor, Adnan Gheith, has been arrested several times in recent months in connection with an investigation related to a land sale. His lawyer Mohammed Mahmud said he had been given a six-month order not to visit the occupied West Bank or contact certain people there, and police accused him of violating the order. Police spokesman Micky Rosenfeld confirmed Gheith had been arrested and was being questioned, but could not provide further details. — AFP

International

Finnish voters may pave way for first leftist premier in 2 decades

Social Democrats leading in opinion polls

HELSINKI: Finland may usher in its first leftist prime minister in two decades in a parliamentary election, as voters fret over the future of the generous welfare system as the costs of caring for a rapidly ageing population rise. But if opinion polls are correct, the left-leaning Social Democrats' ability to govern may be hampered by a surge in support for the nationalist Finns Party, riding a wave of anti-immigrant sentiment sweeping the Nordics.

A survey commissioned by public broadcaster Yle showed the Social Democrats could win top spot with 19 percent of the vote, giving leader Antti Rinne first shot at forming a government. The Finns are running second with 16.3 percent support, after scoring rapid gains since the start of the year when cases of sexual abuse of minors by foreign men emerged. Finns Party leader Jussi Halla-aho, 47, cast his vote near his home in Eira, one of Helsinki's most expensive neighborhoods.

"As you probably know we have doubled our support in opinion polls during the past six months," he said. "We want to reduce to as low as possible the kind of immigration that is, in our opinion, damaging to the public finances of our country and to the safety and security of people." With the European Parliament election less than two months away, the Finnish ballot is being watched in Brussels. A strong result for the Finns Party could bolster a nationalist bloc threatening to shake up EU policy-making.

Anti-immigration parties have announced plans to join forces after the May 26 EU election in a move that

could give them a major say in how the continent is run. Just as the Social Democrats are benefiting from a growing sense of insecurity among Finland's older and poorer voters, the Finns argue the nation has gone too far in addressing issues such as climate change and migration at its own expense.

Shock

"We are going through a cultural shock in Finland. Part of the population is in a kind of state of shock amid all the change going on, and as a result they take the Finns Party's hand," said Karina Jutila, chief researcher at think tank e2. Polling stations close at 8 pm. Public broadcaster Yle will give its first estimate of the results, based on advance votes which account for 36.1 percent of the electorate, shortly after voting ends. The success of the Social Democrats would mark a departure for Finland and the region, where leftist parties have struggled in recent years, yielding some of their hold on the working class vote as nationalist parties have emerged.

In Sweden, Prime Minister Stefan Lofven has clung to power after his Social Democrats suffered their worst parliamentary election result in more than a century last autumn, enlisting the support of two liberal parties with a pledge to enact some right-wing policies. In Denmark, which holds an election in June, the Social Democrats are gaining ground, in part after espousing the populists' anti-immigrant rhetoric. Rinne favors work-related immigration to compensate for Finland's ageing population, but also allowing in



MANTSALA: A voter casts a ballot to vote in the parliamentary elections yesterday at the city hall's polling station in Mantsala, Finland. — AFP

Nationalist Finns Party running close second



some refugees on humanitarian grounds, as the country has done thus far.

The 56-year-old former union leader is also promising to raise taxes to fund welfare and combat economic inequality, which he says has risen under the centre-right coalition of Prime Minister Juha Sipilä. Many of his supporters value Finland's generous welfare state and are unlikely to be put off by plans to raise taxes. But he will likely struggle to form a coalition, if the Finns score high and with Finance Minister Petteri Orpo's National Coalition, likely to win third place yesterday, calling

Rinne's economic policies "irresponsible".

Rinne has ruled out forming a government with the nationalists. "I think the economy is very important right now and then the climate of course and then children's issues," said lawyer Elli Heino, 33. "The environment. I can't emphasize it enough," business manager Lotta Mäkinen, 30, said. Nineteen parties are running in the election, with eight of them holding seats in the parliament now, ranging from the environmentalist Green party, polling at 12.2 percent, to the tiny Feminist Party founded two years ago. — Reuters

Things to know about Finland

HELSINKI: Finns went to the polls in legislative elections yesterday. Here are five things to know about the vote in Finland, where spending cuts and immigration have dominated the debate:

World's happiest people

Finland recently topped the UN world happiness rankings for the second year running. The secret to Finland's success is in its high quality of life, thanks to a world-beating education system, generous parental leave and low levels of inequality. How all this should be funded has been the biggest issue on the election campaign trail. The opposition Social Democrats, led by former union boss Antti Rinne, are campaigning against the public spending cuts implemented by the centre-right government over the last four years. They have been leading in the polls. But Finland's next prime minister will have to decide how to reform a generous welfare system in the face of a rapidly ageing population and declining birth rate.

Populist stronghold

Just 6.6 percent of Finland's population is foreign born, making it the least ethnically diverse country in Western Europe. Nevertheless, support for the anti-immigration Finns Party has shot up in the run-up to the election. They have made much of a series of heavily publicized cases of alleged sexual assaults by migrant men in December. The far-right party, which also

opposes further action against climate change, has risen from fifth place to second or third, according to the latest polls. While the party has finished in the top three in the past two general elections, its popularity fell after it joined the government in 2015 and found itself making compromises on immigration and the EU. Its new leader, the radical MEP Jussi Halla-aho, has pulled the party even further to the right.

The bear next door

Russia has long been one of Finland's main trading partners, thanks in part to a shared 1,300-kilometre land border. But the Nordic state has kept a wary eye on its eastern neighbor since Finland won independence from Russia 101 years ago. Two bloody conflicts during World War II, in which Finland ceded land to Russia despite inflicting huge casualties on the Soviet invaders, still scar the national consciousness. Finland's leaders maintain a regular dialogue with their Kremlin counterparts, while at the same time backing EU sanctions over Russia's actions in Crimea.

The shadow of Russia is a key reason for Finland's non-membership of NATO. Today however, it does partner more closely with the military alliance, and enthusiastically advocates tighter EU defense cooperation. Fighting off Russian hybrid attacks and disinformation campaigns is a growing priority - including making sure the coming election is free from outside interference. The question of how many new fighter jets Finland needs - in part as a deterrent against recent Russian airspace violations - has also become a key election issue. — AFP

Shifting Brexit date gives map-makers a headache

LEMPDES: In or out? The repeated delays to Brexit are a nightmare for map makers and guidebook printers who have to decide how to depict Britain's relationship with the European Union. "We are completely lost," said Henri Medori, manager of publisher AEDIS. In a hangar that serves as his firm's logistic hub in Lempdes, near Clermont-Ferrand in central France, dozens of copies of laminated leaflets on "Europe at 27" rest on boxes.

They reflect the number of countries that will be part of the EU once Britain finally leaves. "We have at least ten books that have a map of Europe, of the European Union. So it's a little complicated," he told AFP. "We have frozen the print run - we will start it as soon as we have certainty about Brexit." Britain was due to leave the EU on March 29, but this was delayed to April 12 and now to October 31 amid disagreement in parliament over how to manage the split.

Public pressure

AEDIS, which has 12 members of staff, was quick to remove Britain from the EU in its publications following the 2016 referendum vote for Brexit. Medori said there was "public pressure" to respond, explaining: "We were challenged by some readers who claimed our maps were wrong by including the UK." Then other clients complained, in emails that were "sometimes insulting", saying that technically Britain remains a member of the bloc. "So we added a box explaining Brexit," he said.

But the firm has sold at most 6,000 documents showing Europe as a union of 27 countries, mostly in shops in motorway rest areas. "For a year and a half, we have mostly given up on sales in this area," Medori said, adding that he had received no guidance from EU institutions. In Britain, the Oxford University Press (OUP) has avoided any radical changes to its maps but it also has to adapt. "We're monitoring the situation but not making major changes until we have greater clarity," a spokeswoman said. "But in some cases, we are removing maps if they will simply cause confusion."

Collectors' items

In Brussels, at a souvenir shop near the EU's headquarters, some items showing Britain's membership will disappear with Brexit. And



BIRMINGHAM: British politician and The Brexit Party leader, Nigel Farage addresses the first public rally of their European Parliament election campaign in Birmingham. — AFP

many of them, such as a badge with the EU and UK flags, are flying off the shelves. "Anything with the UK on it might one day become a collectors' item," said manager Tamara Goldstein. She also has a jigsaw puzzle that is selling well, showing the European Union as it will be after Brexit, with "no sign of Britain".

But given the uncertainty - with some politicians in London and Brussels still hoping Brexit might never happen - some items remain unchanged. "It depends on the manufacturers," said Goldstein. "Some product lines are being stopped because they don't know how to launch the next edition, without the British." However she sees some positives in the situation, noting the demand for pro-European goods has shot up in the past few months. "A few years ago, we sold a lot of neutral items," she said. "Now, clients are asking for more things saying 'I love Europe', 'I'm for Europe' and 'I feel European'." — AFP

Students at US university approve fund for slave descendants

WASHINGTON: Students at Georgetown University have approved a fund that would benefit the descendants of slaves sold by the elite Jesuit school in the 1800s. Creation of the reparations fund was approved in a student referendum and the results were announced late Thursday. The Georgetown University Student Association (GUSA) said 2,541 students voted in favor of the measure while 1,304 opposed it. It would levy a \$27.20 fee on students each semester to create a fund for the descendants of 272 slaves sold by the university's Jesuit founders in 1838 to pay off debt.

The fund would be the first of its kind in the country. It would be administered by a board made up of students and descendants of the slaves to provide money for the education of descendants and other charitable purposes. The results are not binding on the university, which was founded by Jesuits in 1789 and is located in the Georgetown neighborhood

of Washington. Todd Olson, the school's vice president for student affairs, said the university "values the engagement of our students." "Our students are contributing to an important national conversation and we share their commitment to addressing Georgetown's history with slavery," Olson said in a statement. "We understand that the goals of the student referendum are to honor the 272 enslaved individuals sold by the Maryland Jesuits in 1838," he said. "There are many approaches that enable our community to respond to the legacies of slavery," Olson said.

"This student referendum provides valuable insight into student perspectives and will help guide our continued engagement with students, faculty and staff, members of the descendant community, and the Society of Jesus," he added. The Georgetown referendum comes as Democratic candidates for president debate whether the United States should provide compensation to the descendants of African-American slaves.

Barack Obama, America's first black president, and 2016 Democratic nominee Hillary Clinton did not support compensation for the descendants of slaves. But several 2020 Democratic hopefuls, including Senator Elizabeth Warren and Julian Castro, the former mayor of San Antonio, have come out strongly in favor of reparations. Georgetown University has an undergraduate enrollment of more than 7,000. Tuition for undergraduates in the 2019 fiscal year is \$53,520. — AFP

On Palm Sunday, Pope says Church needs to be humble

VATICAN CITY: Tens of thousands of people waved palm and olive branches in St Peter's Square on Palm Sunday as Pope Francis led the world's Catholics into Holy Week commemorations ahead of Easter calling for the Church to be humble. Palm Sunday is when Christians mark the day the Bible says Jesus rode into Jerusalem and was hailed by the crowd as Messiah, only to be crucified days later.

After a long procession across the square accompanied by dozens of bishops and cardinals, and following gospel readings, Francis said in his homily that it was important to resist the temptations of triumphalism and remain humble. "Joyful acclamations at Jesus' entrance into Jerusalem, followed by his humiliation. Festive cries, followed by brutal torture. This twofold mystery accompanies our entrance into Holy Week each year," he said.

The Church itself had to resist triumphalism and spiritual worldliness, he added, calling them "the most treacherous temptation threatening the Church". At the end of the



VATICAN CITY: The Pope's official alms giver, or Papal Almoner, Polish Cardinal Konrad Krajewski (front right) and Cardinals hold woven palm branches during the Pope's Palm Sunday mass yesterday at St Peter's square. — AFP

two-hour service, Francis asked the crowd to pray for peace, particularly in the Holy Land and all of the Middle East. Palm Sunday marks the start of a hectic week of activities leading to Easter Sunday, the most important day on the Christian liturgical calendar.

On Holy Thursday, Francis will travel to the city of Velletri, south of Rome, to wash and kiss the feet of 12 inmates in a prison there to commemorate Jesus' gesture of humility toward his

apostles on the night before he died. On Good Friday, Francis, marking his seventh Easter season since his election in 2013, is due lead a Via Crucis (Way of the Cross) procession around Rome's ancient colosseum. The 82-year-old leader of the world's 1.3 billion Roman Catholics leads an Easter vigil service on Saturday night and on Easter Sunday he reads the traditional "Urbi et Orbi" (to the city and the world) message. — Reuters

International

Money, money, money: The tycoon factor in India poll

Modi re-election bid has financial backing from corporate India

MUMBAI: India's tycoons are playing a pivotal role in the Asian giant's most expensive election ever, from funding campaigns and tacit endorsements to being hot-button issues themselves. Prime Minister Narendra Modi's re-election bid has received huge financial backing from corporate India, raising fears about the integrity of the world's largest democratic process, experts say.

Meanwhile, Congress party opponent Rahul Gandhi is trying to exploit a fighter jet deal involving industrialist Anil Ambani while fugitive tycoons Vijay Mallya and Nirav Modi loom over the vote from London. Contesting polls is getting costlier in India and analysts say parties are becoming more reliant on donations from anonymous businessmen, leading to a lack of transparency and worrying conflicts of interest.

"There's a trend towards plutocracy," Niranjan Sahoo, of the Observer Research Foundation (ORF) think-tank, told AFP. "Unbridled corporate influence can have a serious impact on policies," he added. The New Delhi-based Centre for Media Studies estimates that around \$5 billion was spent during the 2014 election that swept Modi's Hindu nationalist Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) to power - up from \$2 billion in 2009.

The group thinks the 2019 contest could top \$7 billion, making it one of the priciest elections globally. "Elections are getting more expensive for many structural reasons," Milan Vaishnav, a senior fellow at the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace think-tank

said. "(There is a) growing population, increasing political competition, voter expectations of handouts in the form of cash and other inducements, and technological change, which means greater outlays for media and digital outreach," he added.

Analysts say traditional funding streams, such as party memberships, are declining so parties increasingly rely on wealthy donors to fund campaigns. Data compiled by the Association for Democratic Reforms (ADR), an election watchdog, showed that in financial year 2017-18 corporates and individuals contributed 12 times more to the BJP than to six other national parties, including Congress, combined.

'Quid pro quo'

The BJP received 93 percent of all donations above 20,000 rupees (\$290) that year, according to ADR'S analysis. Modi's BJP banked 4.37 billion rupees (\$63.3 million); Congress got just 267 million rupees. "There is a huge funding disparity now. Congress simply doesn't have the money to fight elections. That should worry people," said the ORF's Sahoo. Modi's government says it has cracked down on so-called "black money" in politics by lowering the amount that can be donated in cash from 20,000 rupees to 2,000 rupees. Critics, however, say it is now easier for wealthy entities to donate to political parties: corporate funding formed 92 percent of the total donations declared by the BJP in 2017-18, according to ADR.

Congress party trying to exploit fighter jet scandal



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Indonesians to vote in world's biggest single day election

JAKARTA: Tens of millions of Indonesians will vote in presidential and parliamentary elections this week after campaigns focused on the economy, but with political Islam looming ever larger in the world's biggest Muslim-majority nation. President Joko Widodo, a former furniture salesman who launched his political career as a small-city mayor, is standing for re-election in a contest with ex-general Prabowo Subianto, whom he narrowly defeated in 2014.

Most opinion polls give Widodo a double-digit lead but the opposition has disputed survey findings. It has also said it has uncovered data irregularities affecting millions on the electoral rolls and has vowed to take legal action or use "people power" if its complaints are not resolved.

Some analysts say an unexpected win for the challenger would probably cause a brief slump in Indonesian markets, while a very close race could elevate the risk of a disputed vote. "In a scenario in which Widodo wins by an unexpectedly narrow margin, large and prolonged protests in Jakarta would elevate tensions and pressure the currency," Kevin O'Rourke, a political analyst and author of the Reformasi Weekly, said in the Indonesia-focused newsletter last week.

While most polls have put the president ahead, they could not be taken for granted, a



JAKARTA: Photo shows a giant poster of president and vice presidential candidates, Prabowo Subianto and Sandiaga Uno (bottom center), with the capital city Jakarta in the background. —AFP

senior government official said. "Absolutely everybody is flying blind because we don't know how far the opinion polls can be respected," said the official, who spoke on condition of anonymity. Widodo ended his six-month campaign with a mass rally at Jakarta's main stadium at the weekend, where festive crowds overflowed into a surrounding park and streets.

Running ran out on stage in sneakers, to the cheers of the crowd after an hours-long concert by local bands, he struck an optimistic tone for the future of the world's third-largest democracy. That was a stark contrast to his opponent, who has repeatedly warned Indonesia is on the verge of collapse. Prabowo, as he is usually known, held a similarly big rally the previous weekend where supporters, many dressed in Islamic robes, held a mass prayer before a fiery speech about how Indonesia was

being pillaged by foreigners and the elite.

Quick counts

Widodo has touted a record infrastructure drive and deregulation as major successes during his tenure, calling it a first step to tackle inequality and poverty in Southeast Asia's biggest economy. In a televised weekend debate, Widodo and his running mate, Islamic cleric Ma'ruf Amin, said their opponents, neither of whom has served in public office for more than a few months, did not understand managing macrolevel economics. Widodo, a moderate Muslim from central Java, has had to burnish his Islamic credentials after smear campaigns and hoax stories accused him of being anti-Islam, a communist or too close to China, all politically damaging in Indonesia. — Reuters

New attacks as Taliban begins spring offensive

KABUL: A fresh round of violence gripped Afghanistan yesterday and explosions shattered weeks of relative calm in the capital Kabul, one day after the Taliban launched their annual spring offensive. The bloodshed comes as the US pushes for a peace settlement with the Taliban, and ahead of a new round of talks expected to take place in Qatar later this month.

In one assault, Taliban attackers were reported around the edges of the northern city of Kunduz, which the militants briefly captured in 2015. Nacem Mangal, head of the Kunduz regional hospital, told AFP at least eight people were killed and 62 wounded. The Taliban takeover of Kunduz in 2015 shocked observers, and marked the first time since their ouster in 2001 that they had been able to conquer a major city.

Late Saturday in Kabul, a central police station came under attack in the first major incident of its kind in several weeks. Ministry of the Interior spokesman Nasrat Rahimi said at least one person was killed and six others wounded when two hand grenades were thrown at a military vehicle. No one immediately claimed responsibility. After nearly 18 years of war, the US is trying to forge a settlement with the Taliban, and President Donald Trump is impatient for some sort of resolution.



BALKH PROVINCE: An Afghan Muslim offers prayers at the courtyard of the Hazrat Ali shrine, or Blue Mosque, in Mazar-i-Sharif. —AFP

US officials have already met several times with the Taliban and further talks are expected in the Qatari capital Doha later this month. Afghan President Ashraf Ghani wants to send a delegation to "exchange views" with the Taliban, but even the process of picking delegates has become bogged down with squabbling and delays. The Taliban have long refused to speak officially with Kabul, dubbing the government a "puppet" of the West, and the militants have insisted that government officials are attending only in a "personal capacity".

Ongoing clashes

In Ghor province in the west, at least seven

Afghan security forces were killed in a Taliban ambush, Ghor provincial governor spokesman Abdul Hai Khatibi told AFP. And the Taliban said they had conducted a truck bomb attack in the Shirzad district of the eastern province Nangarhar late Friday, claiming to have killed or wounded "more than 200 soldiers, police and militias".

The insurgents frequently exaggerate numbers. Nangarhar provincial governor spokesman Ataulah Khogyani said two Afghan troops had been killed, along with 27 Taliban fighters. The violence came hours after the Taliban announced the start of Operation Fath, the name the militants have given to this year's spring offensive. — AFP



BANGALORE: President of Indian National Congress party Rahul Gandhi (center) and Former Indian Prime Minister and Janata Dal (Secular) Supremo HD Deve Gowda (right) speak while AICC General Secretary KC Venugopal (left) listens during an election campaign rally at Krishnaraja Nagar. —AFP

Detractors point to the government removing a cap on corporate donations two years ago and introducing a scheme whereby donors can give anonymously through "electoral bonds" purchased from a bank. On Friday India's supreme court ordered parties to reveal the identity of donors after activists challenged the bond system, which the government has defended. "The lack of transparency allows conflicts of interest and quid pro quos to flourish", said Vaishnav, who suspects that medium-sized businesses requiring permits from the government are more of an issue than India's big oligarchs.

Tycoons do not explicitly endorse candidates for fear of backing the wrong horse but Modi, 68, is seen to be close to several big tycoons. In 2014 he travelled between rallies in a corporate jet and helicopter owned by billionaire industrialist Gautam Adani, while magnate Ratan Tata praised Modi for carrying out air strikes in Pakistan. India's richest man Mukesh Ambani - whose personal net worth has soared from \$18.6 billion when Modi came to power to \$53 billion today, according to Forbes - has repeatedly called him "our beloved prime minister" in speeches. — Reuters

Kim gains more power in leadership shuffle

SEOUL: North Korea has replaced its long-serving head of state with a close aide to leader Kim Jong Un, promoting a man who was placed on a US sanctions list last year for alleged human rights abuses, state media said. The move came as part of a top-ranking reshuffle that analysts said further cemented Kim's already unshakable grip on power. Kim also acquired a new title, and now becomes "the supreme representative of all the Korean people" - a newly-created role that observers say makes him more like a modern national leader, on a par with other country's presidents and prime ministers.

Kim Yong Nam, the now-91-year-old who held the position of the North's head of state - an almost entirely ceremonial role - for almost 20 years, was replaced by Choe Ryong Hae, the state-run KCNA said. As the new president of the Supreme People's Assembly, Choe is technically head of state, although real power in North Korea is wielded by Kim and his immediate family. The reshuffle comes at a time of heightened diplomatic activity that has seen Kim Jong Un hold landmark summits with the leaders of the US, China and South Korea.

Born in 1950, Choe is considered Kim Jong Un's right-hand man - frequently referred to as the regime's "virtual number two official", having been key to the party's hierarchy since the 1980s. Some reports have even suggested that one of

Choe's sons is married to Kim Jong Un's powerful sister, Kim Yo Jong. Choe is also one of the three North Korean officials placed under sanctions by the US last year over human rights abuse allegations.

Analysts said, however, the existing strictures on Choe will have little impact on his future diplomatic endeavours, as long as its nuclear dialogue with the US continues. "Kim Yong Chol, the North's top nuclear negotiator, also has been sanctioned by Washington since 2010." Ahn Chan-il, the president of the World Institute for North Korea Studies in Seoul said. "But he visited Washington without a problem earlier this year. Washington will always make exceptions - as long as Pyongyang has something to offer."

New title

Kim's new job adds to a growing list of titles he has accrued since he took power after the 2011 death of his father. Analysts say it may also indicate a change in the country's constitution that concentrates more authority in the young leader. "If Pyongyang indeed revised its constitution, then it just means Kim Jong Un now has more power than ever," said analyst Ahn. "If that's the case, Kim will be the one who will be officially representing Pyongyang both at home and abroad".

Unlike his father, Kim Jong-Il, the young Kim has increasingly greeted foreign heads of state and visiting dignitaries, performing the functions of a modern head of state. Jeong Young-tae, an analyst at the Institute of North Korean Studies in Seoul, says the new title is part of Pyongyang's efforts to "secularize" Kim and his power. "Kim Jong Un wants to re-brand North Korea as a 'normal' socialist country in the world stage," he said. "The new title 'representative' is a break from some of his previous titles that are redolent of a religious cult." — AFP

Drive-by shooting outside Australian nightclub kills one

SYDNEY: A drive-by shooting outside a nightclub in the Australian city of Melbourne inflicted "horrific injuries" that killed a security guard and wounded three men, police said yesterday, but there was no suggestion yet that the attack was terror-related. Australia has some of the world's toughest gun control laws, adopted after its worst mass murder, when a gunman killed 35 people at Port Arthur in the island state of Tasmania in 1996.

Yesterday's shooting took place around 3.20 am in the lively entertainment district of Melbourne's southeastern suburb of Prahran, police said. Three security guards and a man queuing to enter were taken to hospital with gunshot injuries, police said in a televised news conference in Melbourne.

"It would appear that shots have been discharged from a car in this area into a crowd standing outside the nightclub," homicide inspector Andrew Stammer said. The victims suffered "horrific injuries" from a weapon fired in close proximity, he added. One guard died in hospital, another man was in critical condition and two escaped life-

threatening injuries. One guard was shot in the face, the Age newspaper said.

However, there was no suggestion yet that the attack was terror-related, a police spokeswoman said by telephone. Detectives are expected to investigate links between an outlawed motorcycle gang and the club, the Age said. Bloodstained clothing and bullet casings littered the street outside the entrance to the second-storey Love Machine nightclub yesterday. Police urged witnesses who saw any vehicle moving at speed around 3 am to come forward, and mentioned a black Porsche SUV that was later found burnt-out in the north Melbourne suburb of Wollert.

No arrests have yet been made, and investigation continues. A murder-suicide last year in Western Australia that killed seven members of a family was the country's worst mass shooting since the Port Arthur case. Neighboring New Zealand has adopted legislation to ban semi-automatic firearms and assault rifles after its worst peacetime shooting in March, which killed 50 worshippers in two mosques in the city of Christchurch. —Reuters

Analysis

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CIRCULATION : 24833199 Extn. 163
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P.O.Box 1301 Safat, 13014 Kuwait.
Email: info@kuwaittimes.com
Website: www.kuwaittimes.net

How Mueller's hunt for conspiracy came up short

As recently as February, Special Counsel Robert Mueller's team dropped hints that the inquiry into Russia's role in the 2016 US election might unearth evidence of active cooperation between Moscow and President Donald Trump's campaign. That turned out not to be the case. Attorney General William Barr, who has said he hopes to release Mueller's nearly 400 page report this week, told US lawmakers on March 24 that the special counsel investigation "did not establish that members of the Trump campaign conspired or coordinated with the Russian government in its election interference activities."

To be sure, the investigation documented numerous contacts between Trump campaign figures and Russia, a willingness on the part of the campaign to accept help from Moscow, and no indication that the campaign told the Kremlin to keep out of an American presidential race. No criminal conspiracy was documented, according to Barr. But tantalizing court statements by members of Mueller's team and evidence disclosed in various prosecutions by the special counsel had suggested on several occasions during the 22-month investigation that a different conclusion had been possible.

Frank Montoya, a former senior FBI official with extensive experience in counterintelligence investigations, said the words "did not establish" are commonly used in national security cases as language merely ruling out a chargeable offense. "It doesn't mean a subject is innocent. It means investigators didn't find enough evidence to charge a crime," Montoya said.

The most recent indication that the special counsel might document a Trump-Russia conspiracy came on Feb. 4 during a closed-door court hearing in Washington. Prosecutor Andrew Weissmann said Mueller was still investigating interactions between former Trump campaign chairman Paul Manafort and his Russian business partner Konstantin Kilimnik as critical to the inquiry. "This goes to the larger view of what we think is going on, and what we think the motive here is," Weissmann said, according to a transcript released days later that indicated Mueller might be on the verge of a breakthrough. "This goes, I think, very much to the heart of what the Special Counsel's Office is investigating."

Mueller's team said Manafort shared political polling data from the campaign with Kilimnik, who the special counsel has said had ties to Russian intelligence. The two also discussed proposals for a Ukrainian client to solve the Crimea conflict in a Kremlin-friendly way, Mueller said. Three weeks after Weissmann made his comments, Mueller's office backtracked. It said in a court filing it needed to correct its assertions about Manafort's interactions with Kilimnik. Partially redacted court filings indicated the correction may relate to the polling data.

When Mueller's report is released - with parts blacked out by Barr to protect certain sensitive information - it is unclear how harsh a light it will shine on the contacts between Trump campaign figures and Russians. Those making contacts included the president's son Donald Trump Jr, son-in-law Jared Kushner, former Trump lawyer Michael Cohen and campaign figures Manafort, Jeff Sessions, Michael Flynn and George Papadopoulos.

Mueller and US intelligence agencies have concluded Russia employed hacking and propaganda to sow division in the United States, harm Democratic candidate Hillary Clinton and boost Trump's candidacy. Moscow has denied election interference. A key event in the question of conspiracy was a June 2016 meeting at Trump Tower in New York in which Manafort, Kushner and Trump Jr met with Kremlin-connected lawyer Natalia Veselnitskaya, who had offered damaging information about Clinton. After being promised "dirt" on Clinton, Trump Jr wrote in an email, "I love it."

Mueller charged 34 people and three Russian entities. He convicted or secured guilty pleas from Trump aides including Manafort, Flynn, Cohen and Papadopoulos, and charged Russian intelligence officers and a Russian "troll farm". Perhaps no avenue of inquiry appeared more promising on the question of conspiracy than Mueller's pursuit of longtime Trump political adviser Roger Stone, who had suggested he had a relationship with the WikiLeaks website and advance knowledge of its release of Democratic emails the special counsel said were stolen by Russians to hurt Clinton.

But when Mueller indicted Stone in January, the seven criminal counts did not refer to conspiring with Russians and there was no allegation of close ties to WikiLeaks founder Julian Assange, who separately was charged with conspiracy to commit computer intrusion related to a 2010 hack of US government computers. Mueller questioned more than a half dozen Stone associates to establish if he had acted as a go-between for the campaign with Wikileaks. — Reuters

All articles appearing on these pages are the personal opinion of the writers. Kuwait Times takes no responsibility for views expressed therein.



Young Sudanese paint the national flag on a wall in the capital Khartoum yesterday. — AFP

Arab Spring comes later in Sudan and Algeria

The armed forces of Algeria and Sudan, which pushed out the long-serving rulers of those countries after mass protests, are following a script that has failed millions of Arabs since the 2011 uprisings. Those "Arab Spring" upheavals raised hopes of political and economic reforms in countries such as Egypt, where the army watched patiently from the sidelines and then capitalized on the turmoil to widen its influence in politics. Egypt's armed forces chief effectively brushed President Hosni Mubarak aside when it became clear security forces could not contain street protests against the veteran leader.

A military council took charge, overseeing a turbulent and sometimes violent transition during which Egypt's first democratic elections took place. Two years later, army chief General Abdel Fattah Al-Sisi led the overthrow of Egypt's first freely elected president, Mohamed Morsi. Sisi then won elections in 2014 and 2018, on both occasions with 97 percent of the vote. Parliament has proposed constitutional reforms that could allow him to remain in power until 2034.

"What I think caused a lot of the uprisings in 2011 and what's causing them today in Sudan and Algeria is the politics of deception: When the president says I won by 85 or 99 percent at the polls but wherever you go everyone disapproves of him," said Mohammed Alyahya, a Saudi political analyst and editor-in-chief of Al Arabiya English. "That can be viable when you have robust economic development. But if you don't have that and you're not granting people political and civil rights, then you're essentially giving them nothing but repression, and that is ultimately unsustainable."

Sudan appears to be following the Egyptian model, at least for now, after long-serving leader Omar Al-Bashir was overthrown in a military coup last week after sus-

tained protests. Crowds had gathered outside the ministry of defense to ask the army to help them topple Bashir. The new head of Sudan's military council, Abdel Fattah Al-Burhan Abdelrahman, said on Saturday a civilian government would be formed after consultations with the opposition and promised a transition period of no more than two years. He had just succeeded the officer who announced Bashir's arrest, Defense Minister Awad Ibn Auf, who stepped down as head of the military council after only a day in the face of demands for a civilian government.

Pressure for change

Protesters, however, kept up the pressure for change, just as they did in Egypt when Field Marshal Hussein Tantawi - who was defense minister for two decades - ran the country after Mubarak's fall. A common chant amongst the Sudanese was "either victory or Egypt", a reference to their objection to following that script. Social media in both countries latched on to Sisi and Burhan's identical first names to humorously warn of a similar fate.

"The biggest blunder was the hope that the army would be an ally. I understand the emotions around the army but it's a misunderstanding of what the army is and what it does," said Sudanese commentator Magdi El Gizouli. "If you call on the army to intervene to resolve a crisis, this is what it can do, it can't do better." Algeria's Army Chief, Lieutenant General Ahmed Gaed Salah, took a softer approach. He declared the ailing Bouteflika, 82, unfit for office when he attempted to extend his fourth term, raising the prospect of prolonged demonstrations.

In a matter of days, parliament named a new interim leader who was part of the ruling elite, the army expressed support for a transition and a date was set for a presidential election - providing what analysts say is political cover

for the army, a long-time kingmaker in Algeria. Any future civilian leader in Sudan or Algeria needs the support of the army - a common arrangement in the Arab World - while also facing huge economic and political challenges. Problems that triggered the unrest across the Middle East in 2011 have since become more acute. Ousted autocrats have been replaced by leaders who also failed to create jobs, and eradicate poverty and corruption

Bread prices

More than one in four people below the age of 30 in Algeria are unemployed - a central grievance of protesters who want the economy liberalized and diversified to reduce reliance on oil and gas. In Sudan, what started as a protest about bread prices and poor living conditions turned into one about the regime. Echoing 2011, their cry is: "The people want the regime to fall."

But Elsheikh Ali, a 29-year-old Sudanese sales manager, said this was not exactly a second Arab Spring because the present protests were more about economic hardships than politics. "Sudan and Algeria aren't a second wave. They're about hunger and the dire economic situation, and a wave of oppressed youth that haven't gotten their full freedoms," Ali said. "It's not a victory in any way. People want to see accountability for all the people who brought us to this point." Fawaz Gerages, professor of Middle Eastern politics at the London School of Economics and author of two recent books about the Arab Spring, agrees. "The term Arab Spring is very misleading because it implies that everything will blossom, that there's a magic bullet to resolve a severe crisis that has been in the making for decades," he said. "What we are talking about is social protests that are symptoms of economic and political vulnerabilities." — Reuters

Indonesia polls bring battle over China's Belt and Road push

Indonesia has become the latest election battleground for Beijing's soaring economic clout, as the opposition warns pro-China policies are saddling the mineral-rich archipelago with bad debt as it is sold off piecemeal to foreign interests. Business links with top trade partner China have been thrust into the spotlight by ex-general Prabowo Subianto who is challenging Indonesian leader Joko Widodo for the presidency of Southeast Asia's largest economy on Wednesday.

Trailing by double digits in the polls, Subianto has leaned on a fiery nationalist ticket and pledged to re-evaluate Chinese investment, even as Jakarta courts huge contracts from Beijing's \$1.0 trillion Belt and Road Initiative (BRI). "All (BRI) initiatives should be reviewed," Irawan Ronodipuro, foreign affairs director for Subianto's campaign, told AFP. "Blindly embracing these projects can compromise the national interest."

Pushing back at China's globe-spanning project has proved successful elsewhere in Asia, including in Sri Lanka, the Maldives and Malaysia, as the trademark infrastructure push to link Asia, Europe and Africa is used to whip up fears about eroding sovereignty. "China's growing economic power has become a key election issue in many Asian countries ... with opposition politicians winning the elections after they criticise incumbents for their 'pro-China' policies," Deasy Simandjuntak, a visiting Indonesian researcher at the Singapore-based Institute of Southeast Asian Studies, told AFP.

Ports and power plants

Since taking office in 2014, Widodo has pushed Chinese investment to fulfil his own multi-billion-dollar drive to build much-needed roads, airports and other infrastructure across the sprawling archipelago of more than 17,000 islands. Last year, China and Indonesia signed \$23 billion in belt and road initiative contracts, including two hydro power plants on Borneo island and a power station on holiday hotspot Bali. Indonesia has since said it would offer \$91 billion worth of projects - from ports to power plants - to Chinese investors at a Beijing summit in late April, just after the polls.

Chinese firms are already involved in several other ventures, including an industrial park on Sulawesi island and a \$6.0 billion high-speed railway between the capital Jakarta and mountain-fringed Bandung city - which Subianto has promised to review. Both projects have

stoked fears about an influx of Chinese workers and Indonesia taking on unsustainable debt.

Perceptions about Chinese encroachment have a particular resonance in the country of 260 million, as resentment lingers over the success of some billionaire Chinese Indonesians who control vast swathes of the economy. The ethnic minority has suffered a long history of discrimination, including being a target during anti-communist purges in the mid-1960s. "Chinese capital is associated with communism and that is threatening," said Trissia Wijaya, an East Asian political economy specialist at Australia's Murdoch University. "It's very ingrained in the Indonesian mind-set," she added.

'Indonesia first'

However, debate over Widodo's so-called pivot to China was full of misleading claims, said Wijaya, with a tide of fake news online fanning anti-Beijing sentiment. "Most Chinese investment in Indonesia is in industry, such as mining," she told AFP, adding that little was in strategic or sensitive assets. The deals involve mostly private-sector companies and brought much-needed capital to build industrial processing plants such as the one in Sulawesi, added the Indonesian academic.

Analysts said it was too early to know if Subianto would take an outright anti-China policy if he takes office, but there are signs that investors are nervous about his plans for the economy. "His rhetoric is so extreme that I think he would have to follow through on at least some of it," said Kevin O'Rourke, an Indonesia-based political risk analyst. "There would be a lot of jitters among foreign investors."

The 67-year-old Subianto is a proponent of "smart nationalism" who, taking a page from US President Donald Trump nationalist policies, would put "Indonesia first", countered his foreign affairs director Ronodipuro. "But that doesn't mean we'll start putting restrictions on trade and investment," he added. Ahead of the polls, Widodo has been burnishing his own nationalist credentials, including taking back control of the giant Grasberg gold and copper mine from US operator Freeport-McMoRan.

He can also claim a relatively solid economic record, with inflation at historically low levels and a slump in the rupiah currency coming off 2018 lows. Annual growth is hovering around 5.0 percent, although it is still well short of Widodo's 2014 election pledge to hit seven percent annually. While the former furniture exporter, popularly known as Jokowi, has faced criticism that big-ticket infrastructure projects have done little to help the poor, some voters appear to see tangible benefits. "The president's work is real - we've seen it," said Untung Sri Rejeki, a 53-year-old housewife in Central Java. "There is development happening all over." — AFP

Taxman will be all over royal baby

Talk about being born with a silver spoon in your mouth: the royal baby of Prince Harry and Meghan Markle will have a particularly glittery one. And US tax authorities will be keen to know how much that utensil is worth. That's because the baby will have dual nationality: British because of his father and US from his American mother, whose official title is the duchess of Sussex. "When one of the parents is American and has resided in the US for five years with at least two after the age of 14, the baby is automatically a citizen," said David Treitel, founder of American Tax Returns, a consultancy for US expatriates living in Britain. "This is the case with Meghan," said Treitel, noting this case is a first in the British royal family.

US nationality comes with a bevy of restrictive conditions: like any American who is born, grows up and dies anywhere in the world, year after year Meghan and Harry's child will have to show the Internal Revenue Service his or her tax status is clean. From the moment of birth, money deposited in banks by the royal parents - eager to ensure a bright future for their progeny - must be duly reported to the tax man. The same would apply to money that comes in if mom and dad decide, say, to have the child follow in the footsteps of his ex-actress mother to become a star on TV or in movies.

'Accidental Americans'

Forget about privacy, said Treitel. The IRS will "get to know a lot more about the couple's wealth" through the tax returns of the couple and their mother. "A lot more information is gonna get to the US," he added. To wit: the IRS will demand that any valuable gifts from non-Americans to Harry and Meghan's child - and he will be feted, won't he? - also be declared as assets. "Imagine the queen giving the baby some nice beautiful book of art from the royal collection, with paintings by Van Gogh or Miro. If this gift is worth more than \$100,000, it is reportable," said Treitel.

However, baby shower gifts that Markle received recently in New York will not have to be declared if they came from fellow Americans, the expert said. And although the baby and the mother will have to present forms that will be very time-consuming for their accountants, they may still not have to pay a lot in tax: these may be offset by duties paid in Britain, tax specialist Laura Saunders told The Wall Street Journal.

US tax authorities' efforts to keep a close watch on American expatriates can have serious consequences for people whose sole link to America is that they were simply born there. Such is the case of so-called "Accidental Americans" - such as thousands of people in France who automatically received US citizenship because they were born in the US but left America as little kids and no longer have any links whatsoever to the country. — AFP

Business

MONDAY, APRIL 15, 2019

NBK reports KD 107.7m in net profit for Q1

Net profit grew by 15.1% in first quarter of 2019, total assets reach KD 27.4bn

KUWAIT: The National Bank of Kuwait ("NBK", the "Bank" or the "Group") has announced its financial results for the first quarter of 2019. NBK reported a net profit of KD 107.7 million (\$354.1 million), which increased by 15.1 percent in the first quarter of 2018, with total assets increasing by 2.4 percent year on year to reach KD 27.4 billion (\$90.1 billion).

Commenting on the results, NBK Group Chairman, Nasser Al-Sayer, said: "NBK's strong results in the first quarter of 2019 are a continuation of the Bank's robust performance, which reflects the success of the Group's strategy to consolidate our leading position in the domestic market while continuing to expand the scope of our international operations to further diversify the Group's profit streams and ensure continued future growth."

NBK's performance in the first quarter of 2019 confirms the solid financial fundamentals of the Group and its ability to generate revenues from core banking activities. Net operating income increased by 5.7 percent year-on-year to KD 225.6 million (\$741.5 million), with growth recorded across almost all business lines.

The domestic operating environment is



Nasser Al-Sayer



Isam Al-Sager

promising as the government continues with its development plan, thus increased capital spending. Kuwait's fiscal position is better than peers given the substantial buffers and strong sovereign ratings; creating room for acceleration in spending despite volatile oil prices and the expected slower growth rates globally.

Furthermore, NBK remains committed to support and finance development projects under Kuwait's 2035 vision. We aspire to remain the leaders for mega projects financing and play our role in supporting the prosperity of the national economy."

NBK Group CEO, Isam Al-Sager, commented: "We are very proud of the strong financial results reported for the first three months of 2019 as it reflects the success of our diversification strategy and leadership of the Kuwaiti banking sector. Our strategy was further bolstered through the Bank's Islamic banking arm, Boubyan Bank, which continues to contribute positively to the Group's bottom line and supports the maintenance of a dominant share in the local market."

The strong growth in financial results

coincides with NBK's strategy of maintaining asset quality and maximizing the value to shareholders. This is clearly reflected by the improvement in our profitability indicators: where the return on average assets reached 1.59 percent compared to 1.44 percent in the first quarter of 2018, while the return on average equity reached 14.5 percent against 13.2 percent in the first quarter of 2018. Moreover, the Bank continued to maintain high levels of capital, with capital adequacy ratio reaching 16.9 percent as of end of March 2019; exceeding the minimum regulatory requirements.

We aim to better utilize our international operations with an aspiration to further increase its contribution to the Group's profits. In the first quarter of 2019, our international operations contribution to total Group's profits reached 25 percent. In Egypt, we continue to focus on increasing our market share in the retail sector, relying on the transfer of our expertise in providing leading technological solutions to the region's largest market

in terms of population; while in KSA, we will seek to grow the client-base and AuMs of our recently launched NBK Wealth Management Company.

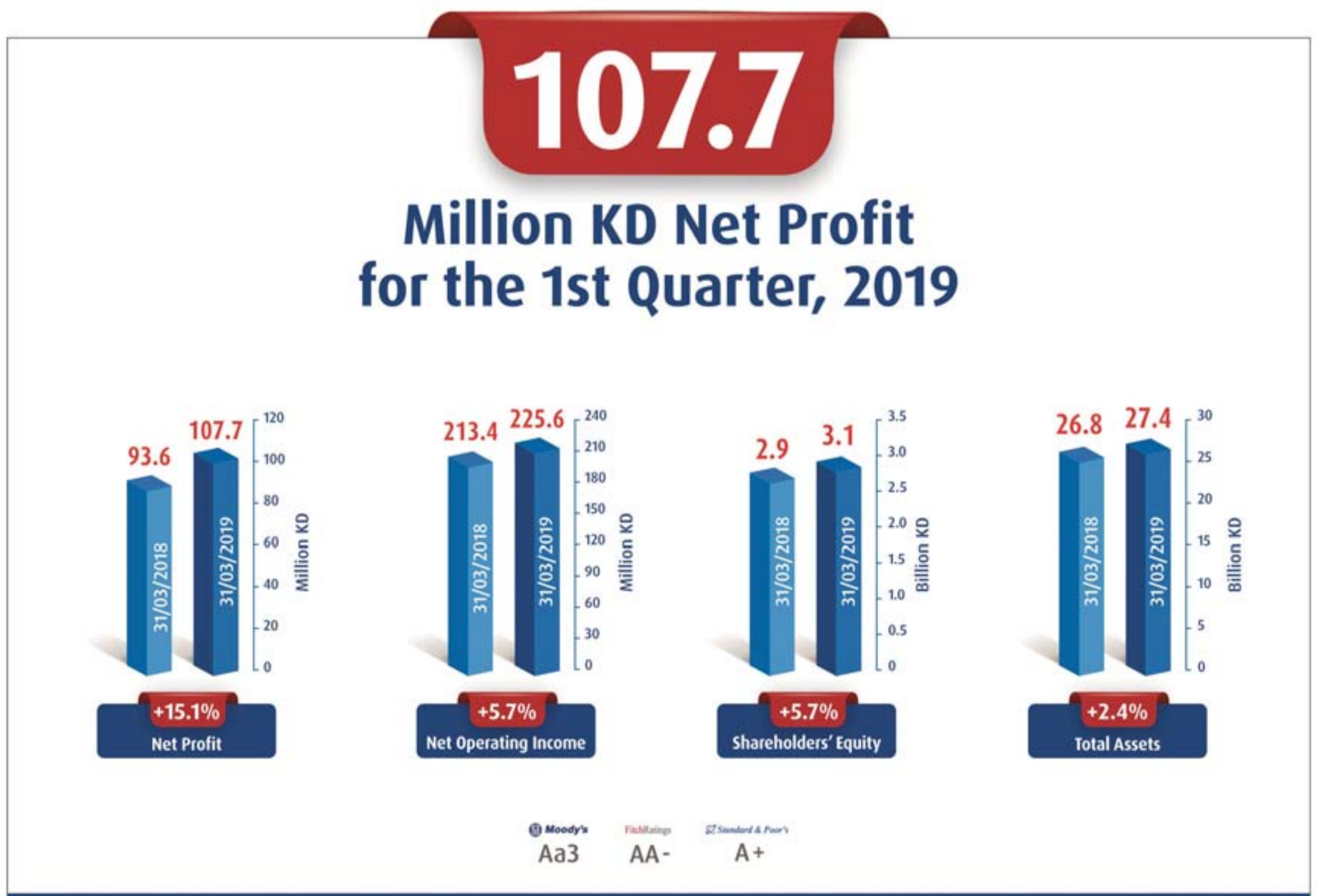
In France, NBK's Paris office was converted into a full subsidiary as a conservative and long-term positioning no matter how Brexit ends up. This will guarantee the Bank's ability to continue serving clients with business ties within Europe and MENA.

Our diversification strategy is not only limited to our geographical presence, it focuses also on diversifying our products and services offered to our clients. The Bank is investing in implementing the digital transformation strategy via various initiatives that includes all the activities and markets in which we operate. This has already helped us achieve our long-term goals, ensuring that we maintain our leadership and provide the best banking services," Al-Sager concluded.

Performance highlights - Q1 2019

- Net profit attributable grew by 15.1 percent y-o-y to KD 107.7 million (\$354.1 million)
- Net operating income reached KD 225.6 million (\$741.5 million), growing 5.7 percent on the first quarter of 2018
- Customer loans and advances increased by 8.1 percent y-o-y to KD 16.0 billion (\$52.7 billion)
- Customer deposits reached KD 14.7 billion (\$48.2 billion) increasing by 2.8 percent y-o-y
- Strong capitalization with Capital Adequacy Ratio of 16.9 percent, in excess of regulatory requirements
- Consistent long-term credit ratings a reflection of conservative approach to risk
- Robust asset quality metrics with the NPL/gross loans ratio at 1.51 percent and an NPL coverage ratio of 206.8 percent.

- Al-Sayer: NBK's strong performance in 1Q 2019 confirms the solid financial fundamentals of the Group
- NBK remains committed to support and finance development projects under Kuwait's 2035 Vision
- Al-Sager: The strong financial results reflect the success of our diversification strategy and our leadership of the Kuwaiti banking sector
- NBK is making noticeable progress in implementing the digital transformation strategy



Business

Boubyan Bank records KD 14.6m in net profits in first quarter of 2019

Al-Majed: A remarkable start for 2019 and a motivation for further achievements

KUWAIT: Boubyan Bank has announced KD 14.6 million in net profits for Q1 2019, at a growth rate of 16 percent compared with the comparative period of the past year, while the earning per share amounts to 5.83 fils compared with 5.01 fils for the comparative period of 2018.

Adel Abdul Wahab Al-Majed, the Bank's Vice-Chairman & Chief Executive Officer, commented on such positive results by stating: "Thanks to Allah, the Almighty, we have had a good start this year, which is a strong one in a new year where we will spare no effort to make it remarkable similar to the past years, and to continue our journey of success and achievements."

He added: "It is no secret that achieving good growth rates at the beginning of any financial year is very important since it represents a strong motive for everyone towards more hard work and more successes. Our success is attributed to the Grace of Allah, the Almighty, in the first place, then to the efforts of our human resources, the trust of our shareholders and customers which helped us continue our journey towards achieving good growth rates which highlight the success of our strategy and plans to expand in the local market."

Al-Majed stated that all of the bank's main indicators witnessed a remarkable growth until the end of the first quarter where the total assets increased to KD 4.6 billion at a growth rate of 8 percent while the operating income increased to register KD 37 million at a growth rate of 9 percent in addition to the increase in customers' deposits by 7 percent, amounting to KD 3.8 billion.

He further added that the total equity of the bank increased to KD 406 million compared with KD 367 million last year and that there was a notable increase in the financing portfolio up to KD 3.4 billion with a growth rate of 13 percent in addition to the continuous growth of the bank's customers' base.

Al-Majed stated as well that the market share, in financing, increased generally to approximately 8.7 percent in the meantime, while Boubyan Bank's share of the retail finance increased specifically to approximately 11.3 percent. Besides, the bank recorded outstanding growth rates in the corporate credit portfolio which stood at 15 percent. This was achieved by attracting a number of operational companies known for their financial and economic creditworthiness while continuing to maintain the highest standards of credit quality, studying and diversifying risks.

The Best in Kuwait

Al-Majed added: "The bank continues its local achievements and has followed the journey it started before many years by being named the Best Islamic Bank in Kuwait in 2019 by Global Finance for the 4th year in a row due to the growth witnessed by the various indicators of the bank as well as the growth of its market shares."

"The bank takes pride in its record of awards and recognitions received in the past years, especially in the recent years where we have been recognized by regional and global institutions which are renowned for their fairness and the credi-



Adel Abdul Wahab Al-Majed

bility of their choices which are based on numbers, financial results, and market achievements," he added.

Al-Majed went on to add: "Such global recognitions put more responsibilities on the management to commit to the remarkable service levels we provide to our customers. We believe that creativity and innovation are the way to continue in our path of success."

Furthermore, Boubyan Bank has continued to top the pyramid of customer service in Kuwait, supported by earning two awards from Service Hero, the international consumer-driven customer satisfaction index. The bank received the First Place Award in Customer Service as a Country Winner, for the fourth time in addition to being named the Best Islamic Bank in Customer Service for the ninth year in a row since 2010.

Al-Majed stated: "The confidence of our customers was well-placed, and this was

Boubyan Bank's Key Financial Indicators In KD Million

Indicator	Q1 2019	Q1 2018	Growth
Net profits	14.6	12.6	16%
Operating income	37.2	34.2	9%
Customers' deposits	3,794	3,536	7%
Financing portfolio	3,405	3,013	13%
Assets	4,554	4,210	8%

fruitful as it contributed to earning those two special awards in Kuwait. The bank will continue at that remarkable level of customer service."

Al-Majed went on to explain: "Customer service is an integral part of the bank's culture. It is no secret that almost all competitors offer similar products and services, however, the excellence and outperformance come through service and the way of dealing with customers, especially in Kuwait where customers have high expectations."

He went on to add: "Upon reviewing our products and services, one can see that aside from contributing, logically, to our profitability, they - most importantly - constitute a part of our social responsibility. This is because we contribute to emphasize the concepts of innovation and creativity in the first place besides minimizing the effort and time dedicated to obtaining the service or the product, thus, saving our customers the time which they may spend in doing more valuable activities such as family activities."

CSR and human resources

Al-Majed stated that the first quarter of this year marked a number of activities and events organized by the bank as a part of its corporate social responsibility to support the youth as well many other segments of the society in addition to sponsoring a number of sports activities.

"Boubyan Bank gives a special attention to its human resources as a part of the bank's approach being a developed and modern bank keeping up with international and regional changes through its young management, and the Consumer Banking Group, which comprises mostly of youths, testifies to this. The bank is known for placing the youth in leading roles, and this has further helped Boubyan Bank earn the award for the "Replacement and Nationalization of Manpower in Kuwait". The award is given on an annual basis by the GCC Council of Ministers of Labor for the best GCC institution," Al-Majed concluded.

Rags-to-riches Skoda mulls post-Brexit sales woes

MLADA BOLESLAV, Czech Republic: Once the butt of jokes, Czech-made Skoda cars have won over Brits, but the UK's exit from the European Union could deal a heavy blow to the brand and the entire Czech economy.

Britain is the fifth largest export market for the Czech Republic, an EU member of 10.6 million people heavily dependent on overseas shipments, especially cars. The EU has given Britain until October 31 to organize an orderly departure, but a no-deal hard Brexit that would slap high tariffs on imports like cars is still possible.

Controlled by Volkswagen since 1991, Skoda exports some 80,000 cars to Britain a year, almost 10 percent of its annual output. In an emailed statement, Skoda told AFP it was "worried and getting ready for all scenarios" and called for a "solution acceptable for all parties", but declined to elaborate. Radek Spicar, vice-president of the Czech Confederation of Industry, went further, warning that the company might suffer a heavy blow.

"A hard Brexit would mean 10 percent import duties slapped on cars, and that would hurt," he told AFP. "It would stifle demand for cars. Companies like Skoda wouldn't collapse, but they would lose part of an important market," Spicar added.

Despite the grim outlook, Skoda raised its first-quarter sales to Britain by 3.6 percent against a year ago to 22,200 units, company spokesman Zdenek Stepanek told AFP. Spicar pointed out Britain was also a "symbolic" market for the make, which has come a long way from being the butt of jokes to one of the most respected makes there.

No joke anymore

"How do you double the value of a Skoda? Fill the tank with petrol," went a popular joke about Skoda's clunky models produced in the



Skoda has left communist-era jokes far behind

1980s when Czechoslovakia—the predecessor of the Czech Republic and Slovakia—was still communist. "Do you know why Skoda has heated rear windows? So when you're pushing it home in the winter, your hands stay warm," said another.

But Britons gradually melted-Skoda's Fabia model was named car of the year by What Car? magazine in 2000, while the Skoda Yeti became the best car to own in a 2013 poll of 46,000 British drivers conducted by the Auto Express magazine.

"Nobody is ashamed of driving a Skoda now, Jeremy Clarkson praised it in Top Gear, it is driven by taxi drivers," said Spicar. "Britain is simply a symbolic, important market, and Brexit would be terribly unpleasant for the make."

A hard Brexit would "slash Czech exports to the UK by 20 percent, Czech GDP growth by 1.1 points, and employment by 40,000 staff", analysts at the Ceska sportitelna bank, a Czech unit of Austria's Erste Bank, have warned.

Czech companies sell goods worth 210 billion koruna (\$2 billion euros, \$9.2 billion) to Britain a year, with auto exports making up more than half of the total, according to Ceska.

Accounting for more than 20 percent of Czech industrial output, the car industry "is the most threatened by Brexit because of its size within the economy", David Marek, chief

economist at Deloitte Czech Republic, said. Three global carmakers with Czech plants turned out more than 1.4 million cars in 2018, a new record, with Skoda making up over 60 percent of that.

South Korea's Hyundai, and TPCA, a joint venture of Japan's Toyota and France's Peugeot-Citroen, also have Czech factories.

'Hard Brexit would be unpleasant'

A thriving auto sector has been a major contributor to economic growth since 2013, with 2.9 percent expansion last year following 4.5 percent in 2017. Czech producers of electronics, nuclear plant components, sweets, photo equipment and others are also worried. "We generate turnover of some 10 million euros in Britain, which is about four percent of our total turnover," says Tomas Kolar, chief executive of Linet, a producer of hospital beds and mattresses.

"A hard Brexit would be unpleasant but not critical," he added. For Linet, just like for car makers and other companies, Brexit will most probably mean their products will have to get a fresh certificate for sales in the British market. "This is a non-tariff trade barrier, independent regulation present in all non-EU countries. It may take time before we get the certificates," said Kolar. —AFP

Job insecurity

Last year China's infrastructure investment fell to 3.8 percent on-year growth, down from years of near 20 percent expansion. In recent months, big earth moving projects that Beijing had put on hold were restarted to pull along the economy. Growth was largely driven by infrastructure investment, with project approvals front-loaded and huge special bond issuance, said Nathan Hung Lai Chow, an economist at DBS.

"Consumer confidence remained fragile due to job insecurity," Chow said. China's normally steady unemployment rate rose to 5.3 percent in February, from 4.9 percent in December, while retail sales growth remained near a 15-year low. The International Monetary Fund on Tuesday raised its forecast for full year growth to 6.3 percent from 6.2 percent citing China's ramping economic stimulus and clearing trade tensions with the US. — AFP

French farmers nervous as EU funding reforms loom

PARIS: Like every spring, Guillaume Lefort sits at his computer labelling all his farm's fields on a map, an annual ritual of registering for subsidies from Europe's Common Agricultural Policy.

"Wheat is here, that's cilantro, and next to it the field is fallow," Lefort says. "Without the CAP money, we wouldn't manage. It wouldn't be possible."

Like other French farmers, he will be watching the outcome of the EU Parliament elections next month, which will lead to a new slate of European Commission officials.

One of the Commission's first tasks will be to help draft a new 2021-2027 budget along with member states which will affect the CAP money that is a cornerstone of EU spending and a lifeline for millions of farmers across the bloc. It represents the biggest line in the EU's budget, representing 37 percent of the total in 2017, and is either defended as a vital way of protecting rural livelihoods, or a over-generous and misdirected stream of money.

The Heinrich Boell foundation, for example, calculates that just 20 percent of Europe's agricultural businesses—mainly huge industrialized farms—received 80 percent of the CAP funds each year.

Already Brussels has proposed trimming the CAP by five percent from the previous six-year period, to 365 billion euros (\$413 billion) — to cover Britain's looming exit from the bloc and new priorities for European leaders have emerged in areas such as security, border reinforcements and new technology, raising the specter of an even bigger cut.

Even French President Emmanuel Macron has signaled he is ready to consider a reform of the CAP-breaking from a tradition that has seen France as the biggest defender of the budget because of the country's powerful farming lobbies.

'First line of insurance'

The core of the CAP's support to some

seven million farms across Europe is the Basic Payment Scheme (BPS), direct transfers which the EU says amount to an average of 266 euros per eligible hectare per year. The basic payments open the door to other aid, including payments to young farmers or for environmentally friendly practices. Lefort said he hopes the base level will remain "solid".

"It's my first line of insurance... But the BPS has been falling." The threat of escalating trade tensions worldwide adds to the risks for farms, whose products are often the first targets for countries looking to impose tariffs. Whether its meat, milk, cereals or even hemp, grown with conventional methods or organic practices, "in agriculture, no farm in the world can survive without government help," Lefort said.

But Lefort, who began farming his 250 hectares (620 acres) some 75 kilometers south of Paris nine years ago, also worries the CAP won't impose enough "common" rules, in particular on environmental norms. "This year we won't be able to use neonicotinoids on beets," he said, after France moved last year to ban five pesticides containing the compounds, which are suspected of decimating bee populations.

"The Belgians have gotten an exemption, so they'll produce more beets than us, and cheaper," he said. Many farmers are also hoping the CAP can start playing a bigger role in Europe's transition to a cleaner environment and improved food quality and safety. Critics say the program has encouraged intensive farming and the use of massive amounts of pesticides since its creation in 1962, leading to a loss of biodiversity.

'True priorities'

Remi Seingier, a 33-year-old farmer not far from Lefort's operation, is converting 38 hectares of his land to organic crops. Since beginning to take over the farm from his father four years ago, he has also started re-planting trees and hedges in his fields to help replenish soil nutrients after years of pesticide use. He also relies on CAP funding, though he has yet to receive the funds he applied for to help finance his shift to organics. "I'm not exploiting nature. I'm focused on quality and transformation, with short supply chains and local distribution, even if it means lower yields," Seingier said. — AFP



Agriculture is a cornerstone of EU spending and a lifeline for millions of farmers across the bloc. — AFP

China's economic growth cools to 6.3%: Poll

BEIJING: China's economy cooled further in the first quarter, according to an AFP survey of analysts, as Beijing resorted to tried-and-tested measures to combat tepid global demand and a bruising US trade war. The world's second largest economy expanded by 6.3 percent in the January to March period, the poll of 13 economists found ahead of the official release of gross domestic product figures on Wednesday.

It would mark the slowest pace of quarterly growth for almost three decades. The figure remains within the range targeted by the government of 6.0 to 6.5 percent for the whole year, down from 6.6 percent in 2018. To combat the slowdown, Beijing has stepped up support

for the economy in recent months, announcing massive tax cuts and other fee reductions to help struggling companies. Last month Premier Li Keqiang acknowledged "downward pressure" but vowed not to let the economy "slip out of a reasonable range".

Beijing faces a delicate balancing act as it tries to support private businesses in need of credit, without further inflating its debt balloon. Policymakers have turned the credit taps back on after several years of crushing deleveraging with credit data Friday from China's central bank showing monetary easing kicking in. Bank loan growth accelerated to its fastest monthly pace since 2016, said Chang Liu of Capital Economics, noting it usually takes six months for credit growth to translate into greater economic activity.

But another economist, Bjorn Giesbergen of RaboResearch, warned that loans have not always reached the private sector and "China's debt-to-GDP levels are already excessive". The problems are only going to get "exponentially worse" if the new credit again does not flow to the private sector, he said. Policies enacted this

Business

Zain recognized by Amazon's Ring

The first operator to officially offer Ring's smart home products in region

KUWAIT: Zain, the leading digital service provider in Kuwait, was recognized by global smart home leader and Amazon company Ring. The recognition came to highlight Zain's leadership in being the first telecom operator to officially offer Ring's smart home products and solutions in the Middle East region as part of the Zain LIFE smart home portfolio of innovative solutions.

Ring and Amazon officials recognized Zain represented by Zain Kuwait's Chief Commercial Officer Meshal Mohammed. Zain's offering of Ring products under its Zain LIFE portfolio of innovative solutions comes in line with its strategy to transform into an integrated digital lifestyle provider, which is centered around digital transformation leadership and empowering the community to enjoy a smarter portable lifestyle, as well as using advanced technology solutions to enable an easier and more flexible life.

The Ring kit, which comes with FREE installation, features a number of the latest outdoor security devices that were designed to provide a unique home security experience through several surveillance solutions that monitor the outdoor area and notify the user as soon as any unusual activity outside the home is identified.

The kit includes 4 smart devices, including an outdoor video doorbell that works wirelessly, and features a high-quality camera with motion detection, night vision, and two-way audio. The kit also includes an indoor chime device that also works as a Wi-Fi extender, as well as two outdoor smart cameras that feature high-quality recording, motion detection, night vision, and two-way audio. The cameras immediately alert the user whenever movement is detected.

The Smart Homes sector is one of the main aspects of the digital transformation journey undertaken by telecoms around the world, particularly with respect to securing homes and protecting them against theft with the use of modern technology. Zain is continuously working on designing new plans to match these transformation processes to be included in Zain LIFE in addition to its existing portfolio of smart solutions.

Zain always aspires to new levels of excellence in all services it offers to its customers. Through the launch of this new kit, Zain affirms its continuous efforts in meeting its customers' needs and aspirations, and deliver its promise to offering the best services and latest technologies.



KUWAIT: Zain being recognized by global smart home leader and Amazon company Ring.

Burgan Bank announces winners of Yawmi draw

KUWAIT: Burgan Bank announced yesterday the names of the daily draw winners of its Yawmi account draw, each taking home a cash-prize of KD 5,000.

The lucky winners are:

- Tareq Jassem Mohammad Alqattan
- Sameerah Khudhair Alshammari
- Elias Fahad Kikash
- Ibrahim Ahmad Abdulsamad Saleem
- Abdulstar Abdulsamad Taqi Alsafar

In addition to the daily draw, Burgan Bank also offers a quarterly draw with more chances to win higher rewards, offering the chance to one lucky customer to win KD 125,000 every three months. The Yawmi Account offers daily and quarterly draws, wherein the quarterly draw requires customers to maintain a minimum amount of KD 500 in their account for two months prior to the draw date. Additionally, every KD 10 in the account will entitle customers to one chance of winning. If the account balance is KD 500 and above, the account holder will be qualified for both the quarterly and daily draws.

Burgan Bank encourages everyone to open a Yawmi account and/or increase their deposit to maximize their chances of becoming a winner. The higher the level of the deposit, the higher the likelihood to win.

Al-Tijari announces weekly winners of Al-Najma account

KUWAIT: Commercial Bank conducted the weekly draw on Al-Najma Account and the draw on the "Salary and Cash on Top" campaign. The draws were conducted in the presence of Ministry of Commerce and Industry representative Abdulaziz Ashkanani.

The results of the draw were as follows:

- Al-Najma weekly account - the prize of KD 5,000 and was for the share Alaa Fawzi Mohammad Salem
- The "Salary & Cash on Top" Campaign weekly winner - the prize KD 1,000 and was for the share Abdulrahman Fahad Al-Jasmi

The bank stated that the account prizes this year is featured by the highest cash prize and diversity of prizes throughout the year clarifying that Al-Najma Account will offer weekly prize of KD 5,000, monthly prize of KD 20,000 and a semi-annual prize of KD 500,000 in addition to the largest prize - linked bank account payout of KD 1,500,000. Al-Najma Account can be opened by depositing KD 100, and customer should maintain a minimum amount of KD 500 to be eligible to enter all draws on Al-Najma Account prizes.

As for the chances of winning, the more balance a customer maintains in Al-Najma Account, the more chances the account holder will get to win, where each KD 25 will give the customer one chance to win, the account also offers additional benefits like the ATM card, a credit card against customer's account and all CBK banking services that customer can enjoy.

As regarding "Salary & Cash on Top" campaign designated for Kuwaiti and expatriate employees as well as the retirees and which is valid until 31 December 2019 and the mechanism of joining this campaign for availing its benefits, the Bank explained that Kuwaiti employees with a salary of KD 500 & above whether newly recruited or in service can transfer their salary to the Bank and avail the benefits of this campaign by getting instant cash gift of KD 250 or an interest free loan 5 times the salary up to KD 10,000, add to this they will automatically enter the weekly draw on KD 1,000.

As for the expatriate customers categorized under Premier Banking Account with a salary of KD 1,700 and above, they will get instant cash gift. The retirees with pension KD 1,000 and above will also get an instant cash gift of KD 150 when transferring their pension to the Bank and automatically enter the weekly draw on a prize of KD 1,000 and avail the benefits of this campaign designated for Kuwaiti and expatriate employees working in private and public sector as well as the retirees. Further, the campaign provides customers with the opportunity to get additional benefits and take advantage of the advanced and unrivalled services and products the bank provides to its customers to meet their needs and expectations.



Turkish Airlines adds Sharjah to its flight network

SHARJAH: Flying to more countries than any other airline in the world, Turkish Airlines consistently continues to enhance its flight network. The national flag carrier now started scheduled flights to Sharjah, one of the favorite tourism centers of United Arab Emirates. Sharjah became the 307th destination that added to the extensive flight network of the global brand.

As Turkish Airlines' third flight destination in the UAE after Abu Dhabi and Dubai, flights to Sharjah will be conducted on the Istanbul-Sharjah-Istanbul route. During the launch of the inaugural flight, Turkish Airlines Chief Marketing Officer (CMO) Ahmet Olmüstür stated the following: "With Istanbul Airport, a new era has begun for Turkish aviation and tourism sectors. With having such a monumental facility as our home base, now we have an unmatched advantage to further accelerate our network expansion performance. As part of this performance, today we are highly pleased to add Sharjah as our third destination in the United Arab Emirates after Abu Dhabi and Dubai to ever-expanding flight network of Turkish Airlines." Selected as the Cultural Capital of Arab World in 1998, Sharjah is a coastal destination away from the desert heat and it is the third biggest and third most populous emirate of United Arab Emirates. Modern but old, crowded but peaceful, Sharjah's rich history, culture and economy attracts the passengers traveling here.



Global carmakers face bumpy road as China hosts auto show

SHANGHAI: Global carmakers flock to the Shanghai Auto Show this week with the world's largest vehicle market facing an unfamiliar sales slump just as China veers toward an ultra-competitive electric future. Fuelled by rising incomes and government sales incentives, China has been the golden goose upon which the global automotive industry has staked its future.

But after years of strong growth, car sales fell last year for the first time since the 1990s, hit by a slowing economy, US trade tension, and a Chinese crackdown on shady credit practices that has cramped car-financing channels.

Sales dipped 2.8 percent in 2018 to 28.1 million units, according to that China Association of Automobile Manufacturers (CAAM), a pace that has accelerated in recent months.

"This is the first time since the takeoff of the Chinese market that there has been such a long and sharp decline

in sales," said Laurent Petizon, an auto analyst at Alix Partners. "We are starting to worry a little bit. It's a new phenomenon." The decline is magnified by a prior buying rush as consumers moved to beat the government's recent removal of tax rebates for small car purchases.

Cut-throat

Major carmakers still see solid potential, particularly in bright spots such as SUVs and electric vehicles, which will account for many of the new models on display in Shanghai.

But cut-throat competition is expected to intensify even in EVs with Beijing moving to phase out policies that encourage the purchase of "green" vehicles. This mixed picture-optimism combined with worrying new realities-is reflected in the plans of carmakers like Ford.

The US manufacturer this month announced plans to launch 30 new models in China within three years, a dozen electric. But it also unveiled a strategy to cater more directly to the evolving needs of Chinese car buyers. This includes incorporating the artificial intelligence technology of China's Baidu into Ford vehicles, giving Ford's Chinese joint ventures more freedom on design choices, and other steps.

Although China is the world's largest "new energy" vehicle market and sales soared 62 percent last year, they remain a drop in the China bucket with 1.3 million units sold, thanks in part to purchasing incentives.

But they represent the future for China, especially with the government planning to impose quotas requiring carmakers maintain a certain percentage of new energy vehicles in their Chinese production.

This has given rise to a number of Chinese EV start-ups seeking to stake out territory that will have to face off against the likes of Tesla.

Tesla ups ante

The California automaker, widely seen as the EV standard-setter, is putting more eggs in China's basket. Tesla chief Elon Musk broke ground in January on a factory in Shanghai—the company's biggest overseas move yet.

The new plant will eventually have an annual production capacity of 500,000 vehicles, dramatically increasing Tesla's output.

Foreshadowing further competition, Beijing has vowed to open its market, removing a requirement that foreign manufacturers form manufacturing joint ventures with Chinese partners.

Tesla's planned factory is believed to be the first to take advantage of this. Regardless of short-term jockeying for position, China will remain a crucial market, particularly in electric, said Ferdinand Dudenhoeffer, director of the Germany-based Center of Automotive Research.

"The situation will slowly improve. Next year, the market will recover little by little and in three to four years, will have resumed its earlier growth," he said. — AFP

What's On



This summer, be seen around the cool pool of Symphony Style Hotel

Swim, Soak and get tanned! Head down to the Symphony Style Hotel Kuwait's pool deck to do get all this and more. Whether it is a stress-busting swim, a lazy afternoon or the view of one sunset you are craving for, being seen next to the perfect azure mosaic pool of Symphony Style Kuwait, A Radisson Collection Hotel, is granting you a new cool and desirable status among your peers this summer.

Lay under the sun where you are surrounded by style, touches of luxury and comfort all around you. The bespoke pool chairs and loungers create a serene setting and enhance your experience under the summer sun. You can also tuck into the simple, yet sumptuous food from the new pool menu. Whether it's a classic Caesar salad or a seasonal fruit platter, a chicken and rocca sandwich

or a classic angus beef burger, there's plenty of choice to refuel as you stay cool. Kids are catered for, while an extensive drinks menu includes concoctions such as a banana colada or Punchbowl, teas, coffees and soft drinks. The swimming pool of Symphony Style Kuwait, A Radisson Collection Hotel, is the place where you can truly set your own pace.



GUST begins collaboration with University of California San Diego

Gulf University for Science and Technology (GUST), Kuwait's premier private university yesterday announced an agreement with the University of California San Diego (UCSD) that will offer students a third university to choose from when electing to go on a summer scholarship, offer student exchange opportunities, and allow GUST professors to explore international research collaborations. The new agreement comes into effect immediately, with the first batch of GUST students expected to head to San Diego next summer.



The newly forged partnership comes to fruition after months of negotiation, and the decision to work closely together will prove to be mutually beneficial, as GUST moves closer to its goal of increasing its academic research output and footprint locally and internationally. Currently, UCSD is ranked as the 17th best university in the world by US News and World Report, and the 5th best public university in the United States for research, global and regional reputation, international collaboration, number of highly-cited papers, and doctorate degrees awarded.

GUST's Vice President of Academic Affairs, Professor Ali Ansari, said, "GUST's international footprint is impressive for its age and stature. We were founded in 2002, and currently rank 49th in the Arab region according to Quacquarelli Symonds (QS), out of almost 1000 institutions. What's more, we maintain a number

of professional relationships with universities across the globe such as the National University of Singapore, Swansea University, ESC Rennes in France, and Sun Yat Sen University in Guangzhou, China. With this new agreement, our portfolio of collaboration not only grows, but we become better equipped to improve, offer curricula of a higher standard, and make GUST a more well-rounded place to study and work."

This new agreement expands the choices available to GUST students to experience university life abroad. Each year, the university offers its students a limited number of competitive summer scholarships to enrich their academic experience through international study. GUST's summer scholarships are open to all students from both the College of Arts & Sciences and the College of Business Administration that fulfill the eligibility requirements. The scholarships include tuition, a round trip economy class ticket to the United States, and a support allowance. Since 2006, a total of 105 students were granted a Summer Scholarship to attend the University of Missouri-St Louis, and George Washington University, and previously Florida International University, and University of Dubai.

Further to this, GUST provides a limited number of faculty fellowships for research and development during the summer. They are available to all GUST faculty on an equal opportunity basis. Since 2006, a total of 63 faculty members were granted fellowships to conduct collaborative research projects with their peer researchers: 45 to the University of Missouri - St Louis, 11 to Florida International University, two to the University of Massachusetts-Lowell, and one to each of Cambridge University, Oxford University, Derby University, London School of Economics, and the University of Queensland.



KUWAIT: Under the patronage of Director General of Hawally Education Zone Mansour Al-Dhafiri and in the presence of General Supervisor of Physical Education Waleed Ayeshe, and Senior Technical Supervisor of Hawally Education Dr Istiqal Al-Raqom held the closing ceremony for sports activities in Al-Najah Elementary Boys School, Al-Shuhada, Khabab bin Al-Arrat, Al-Fadhel bin Al-Abbas and Othman Al-Othman elementary school gave various performances during the ceremony. Dr Istiqal Raqom thanked Al-Najah School and its principal Abeer Al-Zaid for hosting the event. She also thanked all the supervisors and teachers for their efforts in helping the Hawally zone win the cup of general excellence.



IWG visits Failaka Island

On Wednesday, April 3, 2019, the National Council for Culture, Arts and Letters organized a leisure trip for the ladies of the International Women's Group. The members gathered at the Marina Crescent to take the ferry and start an interestingly enjoyable journey. As soon as they boarded, the ship's captain welcomed the members of the group and their trip to island discovery started.

The history of the Kuwaiti Island, Failaka,

dates back to 3000 BC. It is believed that the Greeks were the first to inhabit this island and established a civilization parallel to the Dilmun civilization in Bahrain. During the period of trade between China and India, Failaka was strategically one of the most famous historical islands in Kuwait; it is the island that combines the ancient and modern history of Kuwait. The island is rich in cultural landmarks from various ages, specifically from the end of the third millennium BC until modern times. IWG members enjoyed the cruise and took plenty of memorable pictures. The tour included historical, archaeological and touristic facilities on the island. IWG members explored the Sheikh Abdullah Al-Salem Palace Museum, some remains of

ancient villages, walls and castles built by many civilizations, some old buildings and museums displaying antiques, monuments, equipment and coins of which some date back to the third millennium BC.

The ladies enjoyed visiting several restaurants that serve different cuisines ranging from tradition Kuwaiti to a wide selection of Mediterranean dishes. They also explored several hotel and resorts known to be the go-to places for visitors and tourists that aim to have a relaxing time while feasting their eyes on the beautiful sunsets by the clear beaches. At the end of the tour, the members thanked the National Council for Culture, Arts and Letters and expressed their happiness participating in this special journey.



Technology & Health

Huawei enhances HUAWEI P30 with famous artworks in HUAWEI Themes

Users can download famous artworks free of charge for six months

KUWAIT: Leading technology brand Huawei announced it has added selected digital artworks by 10 world-renowned artists to its art gallery app, HUAWEI Themes, to celebrate the launch of HUAWEI P30 and HUAWEI P30 Pro, the company's most advanced series of smartphone cameras. The new themes are free of charge for six months for HUAWEI P30 Series users starting from March 26, 2019. The HUAWEI P30 Series also come with a wide selection of themes, giving consumers unrivalled personalization options, as announced in the HUAWEI P30 Series global launch event yesterday.

The newly added artworks feature prestigious masterpieces, including *Starry Night Over the Rhone* by Vincent van Gogh, *Portrait of a Young Woman*, *Vaite* (Jeanne Goupil) by Paul Gauguin, and *Liberty Leading the People* by Eugène Delacroix. These offerings are perfect for discerning consumers who are looking to personalize their Huawei smartphones, and are part of Huawei's continuous efforts to provide a highly customized user experience.

To get the best out of the HUAWEI P30 and HUAWEI P30 Pro, users of the HUAWEI P30 Series can simply log-in to the Themes app with their HUAWEI ID, browse or search for their favorite artworks, download them, and then customize their smartphones. After those easy steps, the HUAWEI P30 Series users can have famous artworks in their pockets.

"Today our consumers are demanding a more sophisticated, personalized service for mobile usage, and our continuous efforts in bringing art to a wider audience through advanced mobile technology is an ideal fit for satisfying our consumers in a meaningful, creative way," said Ping'an Zhang, President of Mobile Services, Huawei Consumer Business Group. "HUAWEI Themes is one example of how this is happening, and it is part of our efforts in changing

the way people enjoy and create art," he added. HUAWEI Themes is part of Huawei Mobile Services' key products available globally, which also include HUAWEI AppGallery and HUAWEI Mobile Cloud, offering users a better digital life, with HUAWEI ID as the key to access all the services.

HUAWEI themes

HUAWEI Themes offers tens of thousands of stylish themes, fonts and wallpapers, allowing users to create a personalized look for their smartphones. A large number of the themes are from Huawei's collaboration with major art centers, including France's Reunion des Musees Nationaux, as well as partnerships with major brands such as Netflix, Fox, and Paramount. Self-designed themes created by consumers are also available with the help of Huawei's free Theme creation tools. This digital gallery service continues to grow in popularity, hitting more than 730 million downloads in 2018.

HUAWEI AppGallery

Another key tool is the HUAWEI AppGallery, which is Huawei's official Android app platform available in more than 170 countries. It offers users a new way to discover content and explore a better digital life, enabling them to search, download, manage and share a wide range of selected and diversified apps in this platform. It features a four-layer detection mechanism to ensure that all apps are safe to download and use. HUAWEI AppGallery also provides exclusive gift packs for Huawei and Honor users, including vouchers, discount coupons, and VIP privileges.

HUAWEI Mobile Cloud

An essential tool for smartphone users, especially those owning a HUAWEI P30 or HUAWEI P30 Pro with its pow-



erful cameras, HUAWEI Mobile Cloud provides a massive space, from its free 5GB to the maximum 2TB, to store all their memories. With this app, contacts, SMS, notes, recordings, photos and videos can be stored and synced across Huawei devices. The data can be managed on all Huawei devices using the same HUAWEI ID.

Huawei Mobile Services also provides other products, including HUAWEI Video, HUAWEI Music, and many others in selected markets. Together with all these products, Huawei Mobile Services now helps enrich more than 500 million users' mobile life every day, with its business covering more than 170 countries/regions.

Mother of 3-DNA baby praises fertility treatment

ATHENS: The Greek mother of the first baby born using DNA from three people praised the revolutionary technique that helped her conceive — and thanked the mystery woman who donated her egg. Under the terms of the treatment, she was not allowed to meet the donor, said 32-year-old Matina Karavokyri. But she had a message for the woman whose egg donation allowed her to finally have a child by in vitro fertilization (IVF).

"I would like to thank her very much," she told the Athens-Macedonian News Agency (ANA). "She is one of the many people that

helped to make me happy. I will never be able to forget her, even though I do not know her. I wish her all the best." A team of Greek and Spanish doctors helped her give birth to a baby boy Tuesday using a new IVF technique they call the Maternal Spindle Transfer method, at the Institute of Life, in Athens.

The team used an egg from the infertile mother, the father's sperm and another woman's egg to conceive the baby boy, transferring genetic material with chromosomes from the mother to the egg of a donor whose own genetic material had been removed. A similar DNA-switching technique was used in Mexico in 2016 to avoid transmission of a mother's hereditary illness to her child. This new technique was developed to help mothers who had failed multiple times to conceive through IVF treatment because of genetic disorders or other problems.

Karavokyri said she had made four unsuccessful attempts at IVF fertilization when they were offered the new technique. "Then I was given the choice to try this new method and I

did not think twice," she said. And the new technique meant she could keep her genetic material. "It does not contain anything from a third person. It's ours a hundred percent," Karavokyri added. "We finally managed to become parents and acquire a healthy and biological child, thanks to a great scientific advancement that will enable many women to have the child they tried for with IVF treatments for so long and who think they cannot succeed," she said.

Greek embryologist Panagiotis Psathas led the team who pioneered the approach, working with Spain's Dr Nuno Costa-Borges. Some specialists in the field however, have raised ethical reservations. "I'm concerned that there's no proven need for the patient to have her genetic material removed from her eggs and transferred into the eggs of a donor," said Tim Child, Oxford University professor and medical director of the Fertility Partnership. "The risks of the technique aren't entirely known, though may be considered acceptable if being used to treat mitochondrial disease, but not in this situation," he said in a statement. — AFP

HK admits world's largest air purifier choked on debut

HONG KONG: Red-faced Hong Kong officials admitted that a record-breaking air filter for a new bypass under the city broke down shortly after it began operating. Hong Kong opened a long-awaited \$4.6 billion tunnel under a 3.7 kilometer long section of the main island in late February with much fanfare. The bypass was greeted by traffic-weary residents with relief and heralded as a technological marvel because of its state-of-the-art air filter system.

The government said it would remove at least 80 percent of harmful particulates

and nitrogen dioxide using large fans which suck exhaust into air purification plants in three ventilation buildings along the tunnel. It was touted as the largest of its kind in the world in terms of volume of air handled — 5.4 million cubic meters of vehicle exhaust every hour. But on Tuesday the Highways Department released a statement saying the system's eye-catching eastern filter — a lemon-squeezer shaped tower which stands on the city's famous harbor side — had ceased operations "since the end of February".

The statement said contractors discovered 15 fans in the filter system suffered "different degrees of damage including broken bolts and damaged blade edges". Work to fix the damage was expected to be completed by late April. The statement said two other filters were operating normally and that the incident had not affected air quality inside the tunnel. Nonetheless the malfunction will be a source of embarrassment for an infrastructure project already beset by years of delays and cost overruns. — AFP

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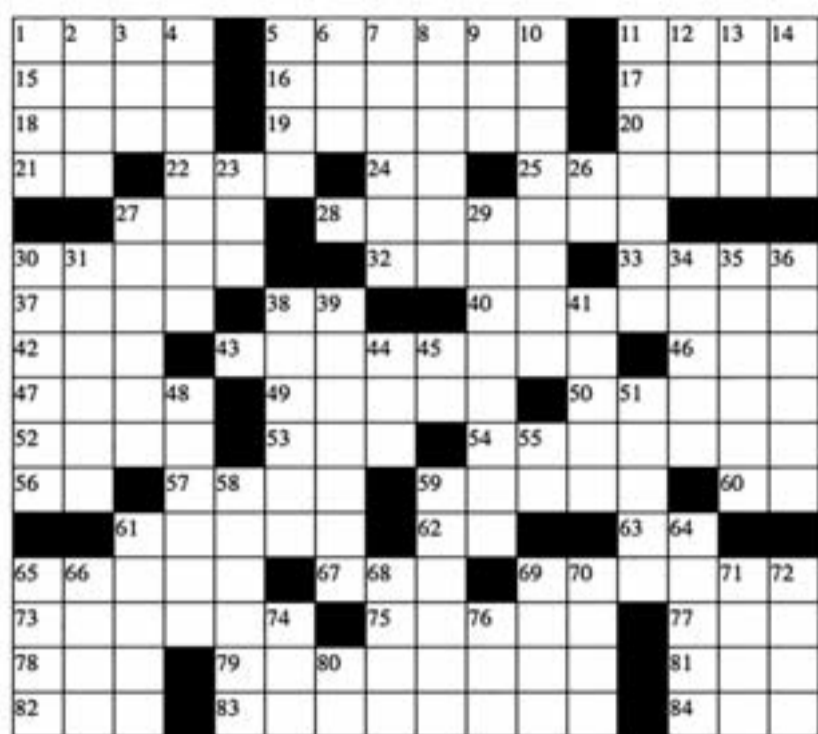
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Stars

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- ACROSS**
- (Old Testament) In Judeo-Christian mythology.
 - Of or relating to abasia (inability to walk).
 - Affectedly dainty or refined.
 - Used as a Hindi courtesy title.
 - Coextensive with the family Punicaceae.
 - Suggestive of the supernatural.
 - (Greek mythology) God of love.
 - A complex carbohydrate found chiefly in seeds, fruits, tubers, roots and stem pith of plants, notably in corn, potatoes, wheat, and rice.
 - Something causes misery or death.
 - A doctor's degree in religion.
 - Any of various dark heavy viscid substances obtained as a residue.
 - A midwestern state in north central United States.
 - Somewhat ill or prone to illness.
 - Having or showing a sense of what is fitting and considerate in dealing with others.
 - The action of an armed force that surrounds a fortified place and isolates it while continuing to attack.
 - A member of an extinct North American Indian people who lived in the Pit river valley in northern California.
 - Fallow deer.
 - Large elliptical brightly colored deep-sea fish of Atlantic and Pacific and Mediterranean.
 - United States composer and rockabilly tenor popular in the 1950s (1936-1988).
 - A long projecting or anterior elongation of an animal's head.
 - Biennial or perennial herbs of north temperate regions.
 - (Babylonian) The sky god.
 - A fraudulent business scheme.
 - Jordan's port.
 - A person who avoids the company or assistance of others.
 - The villain in William Shakespeare's tragedy who tricked Othello into murdering his wife.
 - A change in the electrical properties of the skin in response to stress or anxiety.
 - Dried bark of the cascara buckthorn used as a laxative.
 - An international organization of European countries formed after World War II to reduce trade barriers and increase cooperation among its members.
 - A spread made chiefly from vegetable oils and used as a substitute for butter.
 - An associate degree in nursing.
 - A radioactive element of the actinide series.
 - A public promotion of some product or service.
 - A mountain peak in the Andes in Argentina (21,654 feet high).
 - The universal time coordinated when an event is received on Earth.
 - Of an instrument of certain death.
 - (Greek mythology) One of the mountain nymphs.
 - Aircraft landing in bad weather in which the pilot is talked down by ground control using precision approach radar.
 - A self-funded retirement plan that allows you to contribute a limited yearly sum toward your retirement.
 - Black-headed snakes.
 - A barrier constructed to contain the flow or water or to keep out the sea.
 - A port in southwestern Scotland.
- DOWN**
- In bed.
 - Any of a group of Indic languages spoken in Kashmir and eastern Afghanistan and northern Pakistan.
 - A dark-skinned member of a race of people living in Australia when Europeans arrived.
 - A mountain range in northern Kashmir.
 - South American armadillo with three bands of bony plates.
 - (informal) Of very poor quality.
 - Used to indicate that a statement explains or supports a previous statement.
 - A white or colorless vitreous insoluble solid (SiO₂).
 - A hospital unit staffed and equipped to provide intensive care.
 - A small outdoor fire for warmth or cooking (as at a camp).
 - Italian operatic soprano (born in 1922).
 - Having little physical or spiritual strength.
 - Bulky grayish-brown eagle with a short wedge-shaped white tail.
 - Having an eye or eyes or eyelike feature especially as specified.
 - (informal) Of the highest quality.
 - A bivalent and trivalent metallic element of the rare earth group.
 - A cylindrical drawstring bag used by sailors to hold their clothing and other gear.
 - Of or relating to the chest or thorax.
 - A medicinal drug used to evoke vomiting (especially in cases of drug overdose or poisoning).
 - (Hindu) A manner of sitting (as in the practice of Yoga).
 - Prokaryotic bacteria and blue-green algae and various primitive pathogens.
 - (zoology) Relating to frogs and toads.
 - (South African) A camp defended by a circular formation of wagons.
 - So lacking in interest as to cause mental weariness.
 - Strong lightweight wood of the balsa tree used especially for floats.
 - A room or establishment where alcoholic drinks are served over a counter.
 - The blood group whose red cells carry both the A and B antigens.
 - Informal terms for money.
 - English scholastic philosopher and assumed author of Occam's Razor (1285-1349).
 - A colorless and odorless inert gas.
 - Covered with dense cottony hairs or hairlike filaments.
 - An analgesic for mild pain.
 - The table in Christian churches where communion is given.
 - (Irish) Chief god of the Tuatha De Danann.
 - Characterized by lightness and insubstantiality.
 - (Roman Catholic Church) The supreme ecclesiastical tribunal for cases appealed to the Holy See from diocesan courts.
 - (British) An open river valley (in a hilly area).
 - The sixth month of the civil year.
 - Someone who works (or provides workers) during a strike.
 - God of love and erotic desire.
 - A rapid escape (as by criminals).
 - Any of various trees of the genus Ulmus.
 - A soft gray ductile metallic element used in alloys.

STAR TRACK



Aries (March 21-April 19)

You may find that you want to be alone to contemplate your past and lack of accomplishments, today. This isn't a good place to be. Think of items you've helped others with. Think more on what's made you look good at work and in the love department. Be proud and happy with your life. Once you see that you've done some wonderful things, Aries, you'll be able to expound upon them and make your life even better. Always stay positive. Someone you trust and respect may add to this day's unhappiness by giving you some good, solid advice. Listen to your own thoughts now and keep others from upsetting you. You're your own best advisor.



Taurus (April 20-May 20)

Though you may not be working on the job today, you're thinking about your work. Creative details of items to make the job better runs through your mind enough that you find yourself taking notes. Your inventive attitude makes you wish you had work personnel to bounce your ideas off. They'll be with you soon enough, Taurus, but you could cook out this evening and invite friends from work. In that way you're killing two birds with one stone (not politically correct disclaimer but a great old saying). Enjoy your day and make the most of it.



Gemini (May 21-June 20)

Get away from the routine of life. Try doing something entirely different for a change. Perhaps a visit to the country or going to a winery is the closest to a vacation you can get now. If you must stay at home, clean the house or plant some veggies, anything to keep you from doing the same old-same old. You need to break dull behavior. Get around to making ready for spring even if it's in the house. Once you have everything done and, in its place, you'll feel better about your work too.



Cancer (June 21-July 22)

You could find yourself feeling less than loving with someone in your circle. You may organize a progressive dinner where you involve each family member and friend in the dinner plans. Your ability to manage the whole affair gives others the chore of making one course themselves, leaving them to enjoy the rest of the meal and the comradery of friends. You're in hog heaven with being in control. Everyone wins. Cancer, be lenient with someone who crosses you now. You may be glad you did later.



Leo (July 23-August 22)

Keep your hands in your pockets when shopping. You may go window shopping now but you really don't want to spend money. The beauty in life and those you care for is uppermost in your mind now. It occupies a special place so that you can refer back to that beauty at a moment's notice. Work is something you love as well. Wisdom is a gift from God that you've learned through life experiences and you're proud of that accomplishment, Leo. Allowing gut to work through some of your issues in life is a gift you've given yourself that works. Whether others realize it or not, you need your instincts and appreciate them too.



Virgo (August 23-September 22)

The good life is on your mind. It seems you've come together with a group who's in one mind and that is to make success for all of you. They've chosen you to lead the way. You couldn't have a better referral than that. You may find yourself questioning someone's motives now but you'll resolve that issue quickly. Right now, you have a grasp of spiritual or abstract ideas. Being able to see a concept and make it work is your forte. Work mates as well as your lover appreciate this psychological gift you have.



Libra (September 23-October 22)

Your neighbor may have you tramping around a wine tasting today. You may think that you don't like this sort of thing. Give it a try. You'll probably love it especially if it includes international wines and great conversation too. You feel so good about yourself you splurge on a lottery ticket. Smile and believe. You may win today. This is a happy day that you thoroughly enjoy, Libra. There may be a little jealousy from one of your friends, a brother or a sister. Soothe those feelings and be glad people want to be with you.



Scorpio (October 23-November 21)

You want a day of warm and fuzzy. You've got it as long as you don't allow others to mess it up. Take time to be with your pets or just stay home alone. Watch a series you want to catch up. Perhaps you should see what happened to the dragons. Aren't they coming back on soon? Make some soup and call it a winter day. Snuggle up under a warm blanket and think about old times. This is a time just for you, Scorpio. Make use of it and enjoy.



Sagittarius (November 22-December 21)

Tensions are still high as they've been for the last week or so. This is a time you've dived into deep analysis of your life and those around you. People who love you and you love mean the world to you now. You need their opinion of you to be high. Today might not be the best time to invite those you love over because you may not be seen in the best light. Do something you love this evening, something that makes you feel good.



Capricorn (December 22-January 19)

This is a time for rest and relaxation which might include company later. You may have visitors that weren't invited but come to see you. It's because they need something which you may have at your disposal and that's good, sound advice. Whether you want to invite these visitors over for the fun part of the day is up to you. "Too much of a good thing," though is like they say. "It can get old fast." If you want to play with neighbors, family and friends, make it all about that and enjoy yourself.



Aquarius (January 20-February 18)

Your support group of your lover, family and friends lends you the very support for which you've asked. The feeling is all warm and fuzzy. You feel good because you know they appreciate you as they always have. Work is not done in vain but for the good of those you love. This is a great time to look your life over, see the past for what it is and invest in your future. You may even think about changing some aspects of your life perhaps even your work mode or place, Aquarius. Let the fun begin. Life has a way of doing this.



Pisces (February 19-March 20)

Others find you quick to speak and lively right now when it actually should be a day of rest. If you can take the day off, invite those you love over but don't make it the same family members you were with yesterday. You don't want to revisit those issues today. Your job is on your mind and you're finding all kinds of inventive ways to help you and your coworkers. You feel a bigger than usual need to help others now. Try to help yourself first. Get some rest and play. The play will be the best thing for you.

Wordsearch Puzzle

Christmas - Word Search

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

- | | | |
|--------------|-----------|-----------|
| ANGEL | GOLD | SHEPHERDS |
| BELLS | JESUS | SINGING |
| BETHLEHEM | JOSEPH | STABLE |
| CANDLES | MANGER | STAR |
| CAROLS | MARY | WISE MEN |
| FRANKINCENSE | MISTLETOE | TREE |
| GABRIEL | MYRRH | WREATH |
| GIFTS | ORNAMENTS | |

Yesterday's Solution

Car Parts 2 - Solution

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

- | | | |
|-------------|-------------|--------------|
| ALTERNATOR | DRIVE SHAFT | STARTER |
| AXLE | FRAME | SUSPENSION |
| BATTERY | FUSE | TRANSMISSION |
| BUMPER | HEADLIGHT | TURN SIGNAL |
| CARBURETOR | HORN | WHEEL RIM |
| CLUTCH | IGNITION | |
| COOLING FAN | MIRROR | |
| CRANKCASE | RADIATOR | |

Yesterday's Solution

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

Daily Sudoku

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

Yesterday's Solution

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

Lifestyle

MONDAY, APRIL 15, 2019



Kenyan artist Bankslove completes a graffiti called "Dakar Vision" painted by French artists Lezzart and Laec on a wall of the maison de la culture (house of culture) Doua Seck in Dakar during the festigrapp, an urban culture festival. — AFP

When traditions fade, Native Americans dance to remember

For 56 years, Louis Mofsie has danced with his troupe, making Native American heritage shine and ensuring that age-old steps live on, even if their tribes of origin may have forgotten them. Born in Brooklyn 82 years ago, the director of the Thunderbird American Indian Dancers—which he founded in 1963—is a native New Yorker who only saw Indian reservations on trips out West. The son of a Hopi from Arizona and a Winnebago from Nebraska, he was still passionate about Native American culture as a young man, quickly looking beyond his tribal ties.

"We went to different reservations, and we danced with the people and we learned the songs and we learned the dances," recalls Mofsie, who also learned from the large Mohawk community that lived in Brooklyn. "We put these all together, and then we all came back here to New York. And it kind of grew from that," he explained. The goal at first was to "bring those different styles of dancing to New York so people here have an opportunity to see these-without having to travel all over the Southwest."

These were purely social dances, since ritual or sacred dances traditionally are not to be danced or even seen by anyone outside a tribe. Though he carefully avoided that pitfall, Louis Mofsie had "troubles" early on. "Real troubles, because he wanted to share the Indian culture with a large audience and some people in his community were opposed to it," says Crystal Field, Artistic Director of Theater for the New City, where the Thunderbird performs every year. "Every culture that's oppressed draws into itself and then you are the enemy. They're protecting themselves that way."

Sometimes inter-tribal, often presented at pow wows, large community gatherings, Mofsie's chosen dances focus on nature, mainly wildlife, such as the Robin dance, which celebrates the arrival of spring. The step is often supple, even airy, like a series of bounces alternating to the rhythm pounded out by percussion instruments and songs. It's not a couple's dance, even though women and men practice; the sequencing recalls a bit of swing, or even traditional rock, which has the same fluidity. Louis also fondly remembers his meeting with the famous American choreographer Martha Graham and his Mexican counterpart Jose Limon. "Many of their dances were influenced by native American dances," he says.

'Make leaps'

In the series of shows each year by the Thunderbird at the Theater for the New City, an institution in Manhattan's East Village, Mofsie takes care to contextualize the dances, which if they are not sacred, make sense. "The important thing for us, too, is to explain what all these dances are, what they mean, because what people have seen on television and movies just looks like a bunch of people jumping around," says the octogenarian who still leads a troupe of 20 dancers. "These dances all have an origin, stories that are



Thunderbird American Indian Dancers perform at the Theater for the New City in New York. — AFP photos

part of it. That's important to us, too."

The old dances intermingle steps that evoke the history of Native American people and their struggles with the white men altering their way of life forever. One of them refers to the federal government's forced assimilation policy from the 1870s to the 1960s, which sent thousands of Native American children to boarding schools outside reservations. Mofsie is delighted to see more people who are deeply interested in Native American culture, as evidenced by the series of shows that was packed.

But he is more concerned today about the preservation of this cultural heritage, which he knows is fragile. "Some of these dances, I think, they're no longer" danced. "I think it's important for those dances to be kept alive so that's what we're doing," he told AFP. Mofsie would like them to be cataloged and documented in video, for generations to come. He collaborates with the American Indian Community House, an inter-tribal organization based in New York, which has a large collection of documents. But so far nobody has sought to inventory the dances fully, including in images—not the AICW or the National Museum of the American Indians, part of the Smithsonian Institution in Washington.

A specialist in Native American heritage at Washington State University, Lotus Norton-Wisla, who helps community organizations in their archival work, says he has never heard of such a project. Mofsie thinks about the troupe, which is getting older, even though some young people have joined him. "With the influences that young people have today with television, ipods, and everything else, it's very hard to keep this going," he said. — AFP

Ostrich, rodent on the menu as Cuba seeks food miracle

From breeding miniature cows to importing water buffalo, Cuban leaders have long gotten creative in their effort to remedy food shortages. Now, they are proposing ostrich and rodent farms as an answer, prompting ridicule from a weary population. Meat and eggs have become hard to find in the Communist-run country in recent months due to a declining economy. Meanwhile officials are touting the potential of the flightless African bird and the hutia, a rodent native to Cuba that can weigh up to 8.5 kg (19 pounds). "An ostrich lays 60 eggs, and of those you get around 40 chicks, and from these 40 chicks per year you get four tons of meat - whereas a cow just gives birth to one calf and after a year it's only a yearling," said Guillermo Garcia Frias.

Garcia Frias, 91, holds the honorary title of commander of the revolution as a former guerrilla in Cuba's 1959 revolution and heads state company Flora and Fauna that is developing seven ostrich farms. He spoke at a roundtable discussion broadcast on state TV last week. He lavished praise on hutias for their "level of protein higher than any other meat" and "high quality pelt," noting his company was also breeding crocodiles.

His comments have prompted sarcastic memes and jokes that have gone viral on social media since Cuba's food schemes have often failed to fulfill expectations. In one meme, a Cuban arrives home with a live ostrich he got via the state ration card. In another a flock of the birds from Cuba arrives at the Mexican-US border seeking asylum.

Cubans also joked the state might give them an ostrich per household, as it did with chickens during the deep economic depression of the 1990s following the fall

of former benefactor the Soviet Union. "They should be focusing on chicken, a basic foodstuff that has disappeared, rather than something so unusual," said Elizabeth Perez, 22, a law student who said she hadn't been able to find chicken in the supermarket for a month. Ostriches are already farmed around the world, particularly in South Africa. In the United States, the bird is often served more as a novelty than a staple. The red meat is said to resemble lean beef, with a gamey flavor.

For some, Garcia Frias' comments recalled late leader Fidel Castro's genetic engineering project to produce high-yield dairy cows. His cow Ubre Blanca or White Udder is in the Guinness Book of Records for the highest milk yield by a cow in one day: 110 liters (29 gallons). Her offspring were not as productive so the experiment petered out. Cuba imports 60 to 70 percent of its food because of inefficient central planning of the state-run economy and the effect of the decades-old U.S. trade embargo.

But the country has also had to cut back on imports over the past three years due to cash shortfalls resulting from problems with its deals with former and current leftist allies, in particular declining aid from crisis-stricken Venezuela. Whenever chicken arrives at supermarkets in Havana these days, long queues quickly form and do not peter out until the stock is exhausted. Communist Party leader Raul Castro on Wednesday warned the economic situation could worsen in coming months as the United States further tightens its sanctions on the island although it would not become as dire as in the 1990s. — Reuters



A flock of ostriches is seen at a farm on the outskirts of Havana. — Reuters





Ware used to work with the author of Fifty Shades of Grey

Jessie Ware used to work with E.L. James. The 34-year-old singer revealed that she worked alongside the 'Fifty Shades of Grey' author at a production company before her singing career kicked off - although she never got to read the hit erotic romance novel before anyone else, as the author hadn't yet penned the best-selling erotic tome - which inspired the blockbuster movie franchise starring Dakota Johnson and Jamie Dornan as Anastasia Steele and the titular Christian Grey. Speaking on Jay Rayner's 'Out To Lunch' podcast, Jessie disclosed: "I then got a job at Love Productions who do 'The Great

British Bake Off.'" Jay then asked: "You were there with E.L. James?" To which Jessie responded: "Yeah ... She was just starting to write." The host then enquired: "Was she sharing pages?" Jessie revealed: "Yes across the desk but I don't think I saw 'Fifty Shades'. I think I saw something else. She hadn't written 'Fifty Shades'." The 'Say You Love Me' hitmaker met up with the novelist "years later", and the pair reminisced on their time working together while also toasting to James being a "dirty cow" for writing such "filth". She said: "We met up for a drink years later to celebrate the fact that we didn't work for Love Productions anymore - things definitely

worked out brilliantly for E.L. James - and lovely for me. "So it was quite fabulous. "I'd just done a TV show in America and just done 'Conan' and she was living in the Chateau Marmont while filming for 'Fifty Shades' ... it was just fabulous and she was like 'Let's go for a drink' and it was just so brilliant. "We like cheering going like, 'Yeah, to doing this and being mad and to you being a dirty cow and writing filth and me and enjoying that.' "Yeah it was really funny; it was a funny old night."

WILL.I.AM WANTS TO RELEASE A VIDEO A MONTH WITH NXTGEN AND SMITH



Will.i.am is aiming to release a video a month with 'The Voice' acts NXTGEN and Emmanuel Smith. The 44-year-old rapper-and-producer revealed that he'll be posting regular videos of the performers - who both made it to the semi-final stage of the singing competition under his mentorship - in order to and gather "data" from fans which will eventually boost their careers. Speaking exclusively to BANG Showbiz, he said: "I'm already collaborating NXTGEN and we've already recorded 4 songs, shot a video, released a video. Checkout NXTGEN on iTunes, Apple Music, Spotify and on YouTube. I'm also shooting a video with Emmanuel shortly and the aim is having a video shot every month. So that the time next year two of my contestants have 12 songs. That's the dream. Now here's why that's important, if you're at Universal and you want to know what you want to do with the artist whether they win or lose, data is

important, data from a phone call isn't heavy enough, you need real data, viewers, streams, when they listen to it, where they listen to it. Because then you know where to spend money against and to really help these contestants have a career." The 'Scream & Shout' hitmaker - who judges alongside Sir Tom Jones, Olly Murs and Jennifer Hudson - went on to urge future contestants to promote their music on streaming services such as Spotify and make things happen for themselves with their music. He added: "I hope that next season people that come on the show are promoting songs they have currently on streaming services where the data is rich and they know what they are gonna do with the money that will come whether they win or lose."



Taylor Swift teases new album release date

Taylor Swift has hinted that her seventh album will be released on April 26. The 29-year-old star updated her official website to add a countdown clock with an end date of April 26, while she has changed her Twitter and Instagram bios to read "4.26". Taylor released her sixth album, 'Reputation', in November 2017. Back in February, she sparked speculation she was set to announce details of her seventh album after she posted a series of cryptic images on her social media profiles alluding to the number seven. These included a picture of her sitting on the seventh step of a spiral staircase and a graphic of seven palm trees with a starry blue sky. The pop superstar simply captioned the tree artwork with seven palm tree emojis, and added a pink heart to her stair picture, which also featured a piano on display. In November, Taylor signed a global recording agreement with Universal Music Group. The multi-year agreement sees UMG act as the exclusive worldwide recorded music partner for Swift, whilst UMG's Republic Records will serve as her label partner in America. Meanwhile, Taylor recently admitted her music is heavily influenced by "nostalgia" and she loves the "challenge" of mixing personal moments with catchy pop tracks. She continued: "I love writing songs because I love preserving memories, like putting a picture frame around a feeling you once had. "I like to use nostalgia as inspiration when I'm writing songs for the same reason I like to take photographs. I like to be able to remember the extremely good and extremely bad times... "The fun challenge of writing a pop song is squeezing those evocative details into the catchiest melodic cadence you can possibly think of. I thrive on the challenge of sprinkling personal mementos and shreds of reality into a genre of music that is universally known for being, well, universal."

Chemical Brothers love Glastonbury

Chemical Brothers thinks there's nowhere more "exciting" to play than Glastonbury. The 'Galvanize' hitmakers - comprising Ed Simons and Tom Rowlands - had a "religious experience" when they saw Orbital perform at the festival in 1994, and after being booked for their 12th appearance this summer, the duo enjoy the gig just as much as they did the first time. Ed said: "We both had a religious experience [seeing Orbital]. I still get tingly when I think about it. We wanted to do that. "It's still to be the most exciting concert you can play." The pair broke records in 2000 by performing in front of what was believed to be the largest crowd in the festival's history but can barely remember the show, so try now to take in the moments much more. Tom told Q magazine: "Early on you think everything's going to last forever, whereas now you think, realistically, how many more times are we going to get to do this amazing thing? You become more aware of it." The Chemical Brothers headlined the Other Stage in 2015 but Tom was joined by video designer Adam Smith as Ed was taking time off from touring to write his dissertation for his master's degree. And for both Tom and Ed - who watched the set on TV - it was a very surreal experience. Ed said: "I thought, 'Yeah, it's hard that it's happening without me.' So I came back." Tom added: "It was a really strange experience. I kept looking over and thinking, 'Where's Ed?' " Ed also got the chance to be in the crowd for a Chemical Brothers show in France. He recalled: "I saw my band play in Paris. It was interesting. You imagine that people are rapt, taking it all in but actually they're all like, 'Are you going to get a drink? Where's Pierre gone?'"



Brian Johnson to tour again with AC/DC?

Brian Johnson is reportedly set to tour again with AC/DC. The 71-year-old rock star was forced to quit the band in 2016 after suffering hearing loss, but according to radio DJ Eddie Trunk, a source close to the group has told him that Brian will rejoin them to tour their upcoming album. He said: "I think AC/DC - it's pretty much a done deal that these guys are gonna make a record, or have made a record, and a record is gonna come out "I have sources that have told me that they are absolutely going to tour with Brian back again. That's all unconfirmed from their camp, but I had it from some reliable sources." The well-known DJ explained that the band are planning to record a new record in tribute to songwriter Malcolm Young, who passed away in 2017. He shared: "I think it's pretty much a done deal that AC/DC at the very least are going to release some sort of record and it'll be some sort of record and it'll be some sort of tribute to Malcolm [Young] just like 'Back In Black' was a tribute to Bon [Scott]." "So I have no doubt about that and I'm pretty confident they're probably going to do shows as well. But I think at this point it's pretty much just when they announce it."

Cardi B hopes to release a new album in 2019

Cardi B hopes to release her next album later this year. The chart-topping rap star - who released her debut album, 'Invasion of Privacy', in 2018 - has revealed she is currently working on new material and is hopeful she'll be able to release it before the end of 2019. She told Variety: "I'm starting to prepare myself now because I'm really trying to put out an album for this year." However, Cardi is feeling under pressure to deliver something that compares favorably to her hugely popular debut effort. She shared: "My last album, 'Invasion of Privacy', it just went three times platinum, so now it's just like, 'Aw snap. It's big pressure on me.' It's like, 'Aw snap, what the hell am I going to come up with?'" Meanwhile, Cardi recently confessed she's become more money-focused since she became a mother. The outspoken star - who has an eight-month-old daughter called Kulture with Migos rapper husband Offset - said she's now got a burning ambition to become as rich as she can. She explained: "I can never be comfortable. I used to think my mom was paranoid. But as you get older you understand what your mom be talking to you about. "I always dated guys that had money. But I didn't have the money. What happens if we separate? I don't want to be asking you for stuff - no, that's not my style."

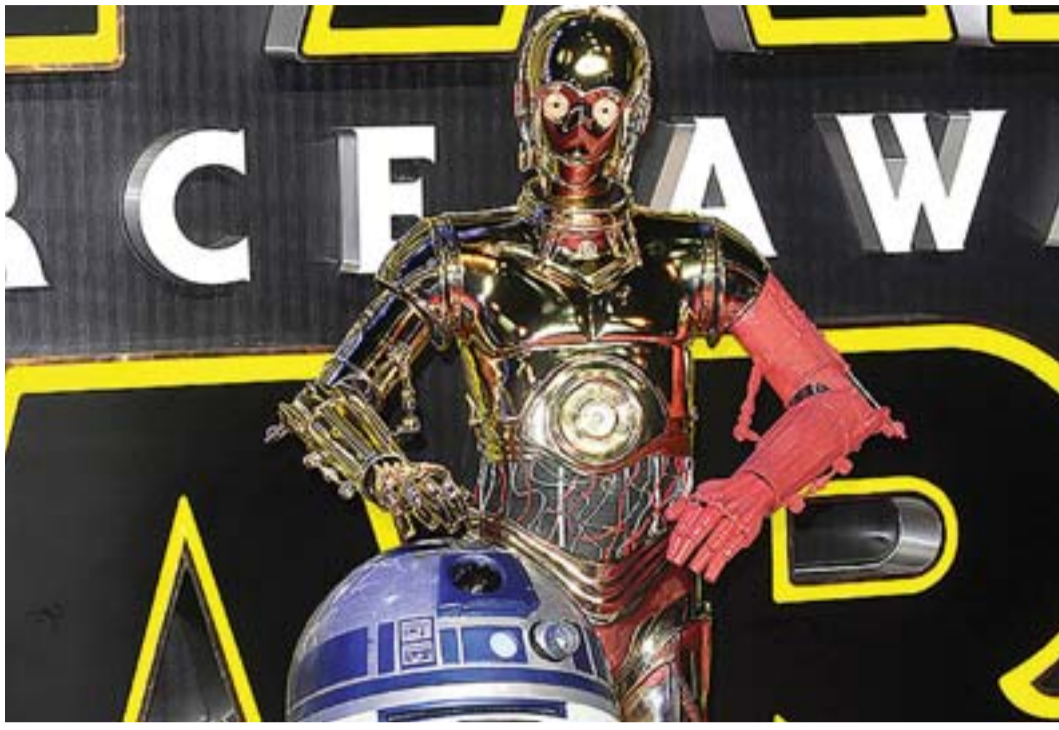
Stansfield complains she has been groped at fan meet and greets

Lisa Stansfield has claimed she is groped at meet and greets with fans "all the time". The 52-year-old singer often experiences inappropriate sexual behavior from fans when she is at organized events, and the songstress revealed that she has had to tell individuals to "get their hands off" her body when she is posing for photos with them. Appearing as a guest on Yahoo's 'White Wine Question Time' podcast, she said: "Try having your picture taken at a meet and greet when someone tries to feel your t*ts all the time. No, it happens all the time. I actually say, 'Could you get your hands off my t*ts?'" The 'Been Around The World' hitmaker also explained that she thinks men are treated very differently to women in the record industry and experienced sexism first hand when she was in a meeting with two promoters. She added: "I was with these two promoters and they were doing this San Remo festival in Italy ... I didn't want to do [a duet they were suggesting]. I thought it was really naff to do this song with this Italian star, and I said, 'No, I really don't want to do it.' What they didn't know

was that I spoke Italian. So over dinner they start slagging me off - you've never heard the end of it - 'she's crap anyway', 'stupid English woman'. After all this I just said, 'Excuse me gentlemen, but if you want to talk about me, please do it in my own language!'" Podcast host Kate Thornton then asked: "Would they have done that if the artist had been male?" Stansfield replied: "No, they probably wouldn't have." The British musician supports the #MeToo movement, however, she insisted that it can be "extreme" in some cases because sometimes human nature can be "flirtatious". She mused: "I do hope that it gets back to the middle ground, where it's not so extreme that you can go into your own workplace and you can be flirtatious with each other and not be taken to court. That's a part of human nature that men and women, women and women, whatever your sexuality, you flirt with each other and it's completely harmless and it doesn't really mean it crosses a line ... You can tell where it is."



Lifestyle | Gossip



Star Wars set for a hiatus, says Disney boss

Star Wars' films are set for a "hiatus". Disney boss Robert Iger has confirmed that the money-spinning franchise's production schedule will slow down dramatically after the release of the J.J. Abrams-directed 'Star Wars: The Rise of Skywalker'. He told Bloomberg: "We will take a pause, some time, and reset, because the Skywalker saga comes to an end with this ninth movie. There will be other 'Star Wars' movies, but there will be a bit of a hiatus." It's been suggested that Disney's decision has been influenced by the underwhelming box-office performance of 2018's 'Solo: A Star Wars Story'. What's more, plans for further spin-off movies have been thrown into doubt as Disney considers how it plans to progress with the iconic franchise. Iger added: "We have not announced any specific plans for movies thereafter. There are movies in development, but we have not announced them." Iger made the statement shortly after

producer Kathleen Kennedy insisted that although 'Star Wars: The Rise of Skywalker' is "the culmination of the Skywalker Saga", it is not the end of 'Star Wars'. She said: "This [movie] is the culmination of the Skywalker Saga; it's by no means the culmination of 'Star Wars'. "I'm sitting down now with Dan Weiss and David Benioff ... and Rian Johnson. We're all sitting down to talk about, where do we go next? We've all had conversations about what the possibilities might be, but now we're locking it down. "We knew we were going to close this up, we knew that even before we started 'The Force Awakens'. We are looking at the next saga. We are not just looking at another trilogy, we're really looking at the next 10 years or more."

Hemsworth cast in Jay and Silent Bob Strike Back reboot

Chris Hemsworth has been cast in the 'Jay and Silent Bob Strike Back' reboot. The 35-year-old actor - who is best-known for starring as Thor in the Marvel superhero movies - has been added to the cast of Kevin Smith's upcoming comedy movie, which is a reboot of 2001's 'Jay and Silent Bob Strike Back'. The new film will see the two main characters attempt to stop Hollywood from rebooting 'Bluntman and Chronic'. Chris will appear in the film alongside a host of other big-name Hollywood stars, including Joe Manganiello, Rosario Dawson, and Jason Lee. Meanwhile, Chris recently confessed he would "love" to play James Bond. The actor admitted would relish the chance to replace Daniel Craig as the iconic character. He said: "I don't think you'll ever meet anyone who doesn't want to have a crack at James Bond. I'd love to do it. "But that's up



to so many elements and is way beyond myself; it's not one you can pitch yourself on to either. It's something that the community of Bond fans, Barbara Broccoli and the whole crew there agree on, and it has to be a very organic decision from them. "There have been a lot of names thrown out there and a lot of brilliant people can tackle that one."

Chopra and Kaling's Indian wedding comedy

Priyanka Chopra and Mindy Kaling are working on a new comedy about Indian weddings. Mindy will write the as-yet-untitled movie with Dan Goor, the co-creator and executive producer of 'Brooklyn Nine-Nine' and she also has the option to direct. Kaling and Goor will produce the movie with Chopra's Purple Pebble Pictures. According to Deadline, the movie will revolve around a huge wedding in India and has been called "Crazy Rich Asians meets 'My Big Fat Greek Wedding'." It is a star vehicle for both Kaling and Chopra, and the movie will be set in America and India. Priyanka, 36, shared the news on Instagram and wrote: "Two women with a passion for telling good stories, just got the green light to THEIR story THEIR way. So proud of this incredible partnership with @mindykaling and #dangoor! We are about to show you what it means to be modern, global, and Indian. See you at the cinema!"



ANYA TAYLOR-JOY HAS GREAT MENTORS

Anya Taylor-Joy feels "lucky" to have been mentored by a number of older actors. The 22-year-old star has received a lot of helpful advice from her co-stars over the years and some of it has proven to be vital. She said: "I'm lucky actors who are older than me seem to take me under their wing. Jennifer Jason Leigh [co-star in 'Morgan'] once said to me, 'Even if you don't understand a script or what's going on, if you love the director, just jump, because they're going to do something right.' "Romola Garai [The Miniaturist] co-star] gave me a book that killed me. Inside she wrote, 'Make sure your voice is heard; take a seat at the table.' "The 'Split' actress was scouted as a model by famous agency Storm when she was just 16 but never felt comfortable in the fashion world so will always be grateful to 'Downton Abbey' actor Allen Leech for helping set her on the path to acting. She told Britain's Marie Claire magazine: "From the second I walked into Storm, I thought, 'I want to be an actor.' I didn't think I could be a model. I grew up as a tomboy and never saw myself as pretty. "I met Allen Leech on my third ever job and he took my name and number. A couple of weeks later, I got a call from his (and my now) agent. Allen jokes that he should be getting commission from all my movies. I'm like, 'Dude, you're not wrong!' "While she's happy with her success, Anya thinks it's hilarious she's been in so many horror movies. She said: "If you had told baby me that I would be known as a scream queen or as horror's It girl, I would have laughed so hard. That is so not me: I've never even seen a horror movie. I've never actually looked at genres."



Mindy wrote: "It's happening" and added: "My dream team is making a movie. Can't wait for this one!" Universal has secured the rights to the movie after a hotly contested bidding war with Legendary, Sony, Netflix and Amazon Studios. Meanwhile, it was recently revealed that Mindy's new comedy 'Late Night' will be released this summer. The upcoming film - which explores sexism and diversity in the workplace - was penned by the 39-year-old actress and comedian, helmed by Nisha Ganatra and will be released by Amazon Studios across the US on June 7, 2019. Mindy will star in the movie alongside Emma Thompson, 59, as Katherine Newbury, a legendary late-night talk show host who's struggling to maintain the attention of her audience. Newbury's world is turned upside down when she hires her only female staff writer (Mindy) and the cast includes John Lithgow, Max Casella, Hugh Dancy, Denis O'Hare, Reid Scott, Ike Barinholtz, John Early, Paul Walter Hauser, and Amy Ryan. Speaking in a video for the official Amazon Studios YouTube account, the 'Office' star said: "I have some major news my movie 'Late Night' is going to premiere in theatres June 7th the last season of 'Game of Thrones' will be done by then so you have no reason not to see it." The movie scored the biggest domestic distribution deal at this year's Sundance Festival for US rights with a massive \$13 million pact.

Tomb Raider sequel moving forward

A'Tomb Raider' sequel is being planned. According to The Hollywood Reporter, 'Fire' writer Amy Jump is penning the follow-up to the 2018 movie, which starred Alicia Vikander and earned over \$270 million at the global box office. Meanwhile, Alicia, 30, previously said becoming Lara Croft in the 'Tomb Raider' reboot was a "very empowering" experience. The actress gained extra muscle for the all-action role in the Roar Uthaug-directed movie, and Alicia admitted to relishing going outside of her comfort zone for the coveted part. She shared: "I don't know when in life I would have been exposed to try so many new things, if it weren't for this role. I found it very empowering." The Academy Award-winning star replaced Angelina Jolie as the English archaeologist in the franchise, and Alicia revealed she felt a pressure to get herself in tip-top condition for the role. In fact, Alicia - who is married to fellow Hollywood star Michael Fassbender - said she took inspiration from the "female athletes and stunt women" currently working in the movie business. She explained: "I looked at female athletes and stunt women in my industry and I thought, 'I need to have that kind of physique for it to be plausible.'" Alicia also revealed she was inspired by Angelina's appearance as Lara Croft during her younger years. The Swedish star said that seeing such a brave, athletic woman on screen in 'Lara Croft: Tomb Raider' and 'Lara Croft: Tomb Raider - The Cradle of Life' fuelled her interest in action movies. She said: "Angelina Jolie, when she stepped into the shoes of Lara Croft, it was the first time I had seen a woman being the centrepiece of this kind of action story. "I've grown up loving these kinds of films and I've always wondered what it's like to create these big stunts, sequences and action adventures. So, I really was intrigued to do the physical part of stepping into this role."



J.J. Abrams spoke to Lucas about Star Wars: The Rise of Skywalker

J.J. Abrams consulted George Lucas before writing 'Star Wars: The Rise of Skywalker'. The acclaimed filmmaker - who has also directed the much-anticipated sci-fi movie - has revealed he discussed his ideas and ambitions for the project with the 'Star Wars' creator. Speaking to IGN, J.J. explained: "This movie had a very, very specific challenge, which was to take eight films and give an ending to three trilogies, and so we had to look at, what is the bigger story? We had conversations amongst ourselves, we met with George Lucas before writing the script. "These were things that were in real, not debate, but looking at the vastness of the story and trying to figure out, what is the way to conclude this? But it has to work on its own as a movie, it has to be its own thing, it has to be surprising and funny and you have to understand it." Earlier this month, J.J. admitted he felt emotional when he was asked to direct 'Star Wars: The Rise of Skywalker'. The filmmaker - who directed 2015's 'The Force Awakens' - was brought on to the project to replace Colin Trevorrow in September 2017 and J.J. jumped at the chance to complete the trilogy, which also includes 'The Last Jedi'. He shared: "When Kathy [Lucasfilm's Kathleen Kennedy] called and asked if I'd be interested in coming aboard this movie, I was surprised by how emotional I felt about it. I didn't expect to feel the way I did, and the opportunity to finish the story we started was something I couldn't resist."

Okonedo's family excited by Hellboy

Sophie Okonedo's family are more "excited" about her role in 'Hellboy' than anything she's ever done. The 50-year-old actress - who has daughter Aiofe, 28, from a previous relationship - plays seer Lady Hatton in the upcoming comic book movie and while she "didn't know much" about the series until she signed up, everyone she knew was thrilled about the role. She said: "I just felt, 'I'm playing a blind seer called Lady Hatton. I get to be very glamorous, and I get to be in a 'Hellboy' movie, what's not to like?' "I just really liked the script, I thought it was really fun. "My family had more of a strong reaction about me being in a 'Hellboy'

movie than anything I've ever done they were beyond excited, the kids and my neighbors. "I didn't know much about them because I'm a bit green, I don't know loads about superhero comics." Sophie had a "blast" working alongside David Harbour on the film, especially because she didn't have to tone down anything about her performance. She added to SciFiNow magazine: "I had an absolute blast. David is such a brilliant actor, I was working with a really good cast and had a rip-roaring time. "I just got to be huge. I couldn't be too happy. Big broad strokes, I got to yell and scream and be frightening. It was good fun." And the actress had a lot of praise for her co-

star's physical transformation, admitting she was "shocked" when she saw him on set for the first time. She said: "He thought very deeply about the physicality and what was going on inside him and I thought that really showed. "I was so shocked on the first day I got there because I didn't really know how it all worked and I imagined there'd be a lot more CGI and stuff, but then I saw him. "I'd read stuff about Hellboy and I couldn't believe it, in real life he looks exactly like him, the prosthetics they did is a complete replica. "So you had this giant red beast in front of you who you are acting to, you're not having to imagine it."



'Gangnam style' sex crime: K-pop scandals uncover dark side of Seoul's flashiest district

On a recent weekend night, the dance floor at one of the hottest clubs in Seoul's swanky Gangnam district held only a few dozen people surrounded by mostly empty tables. A few months ago, the nightclub would have been packed with hundreds of gyrating men and women, and full tables, many costing 650,000 won (\$570) or more for a night of drinking and dancing. The world was introduced to Gangnam by the 2012 K-pop hit "Gangnam Style," a parody of the South Korean highlife with a viral tune and amusing dancing that became the first video to reach a billion views on YouTube.

But a wave of sex crimes and other illegal activity has revealed a dark underbelly in the district, driving club-goers and celebrities away. According to police investigators, a network of pop stars, businessmen and cops are alleged to have colluded and enabled tax evasion, bribery, and prostitution at some of Gangnam's glitziest clubs. Most seriously, some are being investigated over the use of date rape drugs to incapacitate women and assault them, sometimes filmed by hidden cameras. "There aren't many people coming to Gangnam (clubs) right now," a worker told Reuters at a club that was relatively quiet, despite not being implicated in any of the allegations. "There's an investigation on."

The scandals have already led to the resignation of four K-pop stars, the closure of one of Gangnam's most lucrative club, and investigations into at least six police officers suspected of colluding with club operators. President Moon Jae-in called for a thorough investigation, saying the Gangnam club cases suggest possible collusion between police, tax authorities and a new privileged class

including celebrities to engage in illegal operations. More than 500 people have been investigated for drug use and sexual assault and more than 200 arrested in a nationwide roundup since Feb 25. Tax authorities have launched investigations into 21 clubs and host bars for possible evasion. "If we don't set this right, we cannot call this a just society," Moon said.

Sex crime concerns

The investigations, revolving around two Gangnam clubs, Burning Sun and Arena, began late last year when 29-year-old film art director Kim Sang-kyo says he tried to stop an incident of sexual harassment and was attacked by Burning Sun staff, and then abused by police who instead arrested him. A government commission concluded that police in Gangnam violated Kim's rights during his arrest, but Kim is still being investigated for sexual harassment and defamation. He denies any wrongdoing. Calls to Burning Sun, which closed down after the scandal broke, were not answered, while a man who answered the number listed for Arena hung up when asked for comment. Arena has also been closed since early March for what it said were renovations. Gangnam police declined to comment. Kim said once he shared his story he began to receive messages from other people who said they had been victimized in Gangnam clubs, and he realised the scope of the problem.

"When people saw me raising questions, they said 'why you? Why now?'" Kim said. "This has been going on for 10 years, 15 years, and you can't touch it. You can't win. I've heard a lot of people say this, and I think



Seungri, a member of South Korean K-pop band Big Bang, arrives to be questioned over a sex bribery case at the Seoul Metropolitan Police Agency in Seoul, South Korea, yesterday. — Reuters

it's really scary." The string of scandals gained wider attention when several K-pop stars who had ties to some of the clubs were implicated in crimes unrelated to Kim's arrest.

Singer Lee Seung-hyun, 28, better known by the stage name Seungri, is under investigation for paying for prostitutes in return for favours from foreign businessmen at Arena. He is also accused of embezzlement at another club he was involved with until last year. Lee has denied all wrongdoing, but resigned from his position as a member of the boy band BIGBANG. Lee's lawyer told Reuters this week his client maintains his innocence.

At least three other K-pop stars resigned after they were accused by police of sharing illicitly filmed sex tapes. It is not yet clear

whether any of the shared videos and photos were taken at either nightclub. One singer, Jung Joon-young admitted to having shared videos he took secretly while having sex with women. "I am truly sorry. I committed a crime that cannot be forgiven," Jung read from a handwritten statement on March 21.

Web of connections

Besides Seungri, who was an internal director at Burning Sun and previously helped run the club, police are investigating two of the club's co-presidents and an operating director for various crimes including distributing drugs, assaulting a customer, and bribing police. Investigators have also questioned 15 people and arrested four people with links to Burning Sun on drug charges. At least one club promoter was arrested for dis-

tributing illegal sex videos. A man identified as the de facto owner of Arena, surnamed Kang, was arrested in late March, a Seoul Central District Court spokesman said.

Kang and other Arena executives are accused of tax evasion by avoiding paying 16.2 billion won (\$14.31 million) in taxes between 2014-2017. Kang refused to answer questions on March 25 as he emerged from court. He could not be reached for comment. Authorities are also investigating allegations that club officials provided bribes to police officers.

Six officers are now under investigation for possible collusion with the clubs, including a senior superintendent, lawmakers briefed by Police Commissioner General Min Gab-ryong said. The superintendent, surnamed Yoon, admitted playing golf and sharing meals with a man known to be Seungri's business partner, but denies all allegations of corruption.

He is accused of leaking confidential information and accepting bribes, including K-pop concert tickets from singer Seungri, an official at the Seoul Metropolitan Police Agency said. In Gangnam, former patrons and workers lament the impact the scandals have had on the clubs and the broader entertainment industry, a key identity and export for South Korea. Kim Se-rim, 27, said she no longer goes to clubs. "People are like, why would you go when you know there are so much drugs, GHB, rape going on?" she said, referring to a known date-rape drug. "And they have a point." — Reuters



Middle East Film & Comic Con

Cosplayers attend the Middle East Film & Comic Con on April 13, 2019, in Dubai. — AFP photos



Beekeeper Yip Ki-hok holding a framed honeycomb at his apiary in Hong Kong.



Beekeeper Yip Ki-hok pulls out handfuls of bees from a drawstring bag before placing them into a Langstroth hive at his apiary in Hong Kong, after he removed their honey-filled nest from a hillside using his bare hands.



Bees on a framed honeycomb at beekeeper Yip Ki-hok's apiary in Hong Kong. — AFP photos

The Hong Kong beekeeper harvesting hives barehanded

High up in the hills above Hong Kong, Yip Ki-hok uses nothing but his bare hands to remove a honey-filled nest of swarming bees—a remarkable skill he learned after the hardship of China's famine years. While most new beekeepers buy insects from those with already established colonies, Yip prefers a more organic method, trekking into the hills and catching wild bees using skills he developed through trial and error from the age of seven. The 62-year-old effortlessly moves through bush and dense thickets, far from the official hiking trails, and pauses at a hole in the hillside he knows will contain a bee colony.

Lighting five incense sticks to placate the bees, he waits for the smoke to take effect and then reaches into the hole, removing chunks of the hive along with handfuls of bees. Remarkably he is only stung twice. The trick, he explains, is to remove as much of the hive as possible without killing or losing the vital queen. "If you wear gloves, then you don't know how much strength you're using," he tells AFP. "If you use too much strength and accidentally kill the queen, it's very troublesome, it'll be very hard to take the hive back."

Moving slowly and carefully, he blows on the hive to herd the bees into a wire cage covered with a white drawstring bag. He searches for the queen as stragglers buzz around him—a crucial part of the operation as the other bees in the hive are fiercely attracted to her. "Without the queen, they will get angry and go looking for her everywhere. If they can't find her they will fly right back out of the cage. They'll fly around everywhere to find her and start stinging like crazy," he said.

Although he was once stung more than 200 times when he lost the queen during an extraction, Yip says he has no need for gloves or other protective gear. "Why would I need those things? I know their nature like I know my own hand. No matter how mean they are I still have a way to tame them," he explained. Back at his farm, Yip uses wire to attach the honeycomb to wooden frames, which are then slotted into wooden crates. Then he pulls out handfuls of bees from the drawstring bag and places them gently in their new home. Yip generally collects honey three times a year from over 200 hives, extracting the golden liquid by spinning each frame in a metal drum.

Hard times

It was on the Chinese mainland Yip learned his skills, in the wake of Mao's famine when millions starved and people took whatever steps they could to survive. Yip worked as a teacher in Guangdong province, supplementing his meagre income by trad-



Beekeeper Yip Ki-hok using his bare hands to delicately remove a section of a honey-filled bees nest on a hillside.



Beekeeper Yip Ki-hok pouring freshly extracted honey from a honeycomb spinner drum as his son Hugo filters it into a plastic jug at their apiary.

Rising temperatures

But as the global climate warms and fuels bigger storms, his livelihood—and Hong Kong's bee population—face increasing challenges to their survival. Ever expanding urban developments in the densely populated city already threaten wild bees and their food supply. And ever stronger tropical storms are exacerbating the damage. Last year Typhoon Mangkhut—the most intense storm on record in Hong Kong—tore through the city, knocking down tens of thousands of trees and flattening huge swathes of pollinating flowers.

"Last year this hole was full of bursting, but it wasn't like that this year," he said, referencing the hillside where he had just plucked out the hive. Another colony he visited earlier that day had also fared badly. "That first hive I picked up has not recovered at all," he lamented. "Typhoon Mangkhut was too strong, it felled over half of the trees and flowers... without the plants, the bees naturally reproduced more slowly." Scientists warn rising temperatures will increase the frequency of more powerful storms like Mangkhut. While Yip plans to continue trekking into the hills as long as he can, he hopes the typhoons of the future will give Hong Kong and his favorite bee colonies a miss. — AFP



Beekeeper Yip Ki-hok, 62, holding a Langstroth hive at his apiary in Hong Kong, after he removed a honey-filled bees nest from a hillside using his bare hands.



A person is seen on a road in a snow-covered landscape yesterday in Oberstdorf in southern Germany. — AFP

White House denies Trump inciting violence against Omar

WASHINGTON: White House press secretary Sarah Sanders yesterday defended Donald Trump against accusations that he was inciting violence against a Muslim congresswoman after the president tweeted a video of her spliced with footage of the 9/11 attacks. Ilhan Omar, a Democratic lawmaker from Minnesota, has been at the center of an escalating row following a speech she made about Islamophobia in which she was accused by conservatives of downplaying the deadliest attacks on US soil by characterizing the event as "some people did something."

Trump on Friday tweeted a video that juxtaposed the

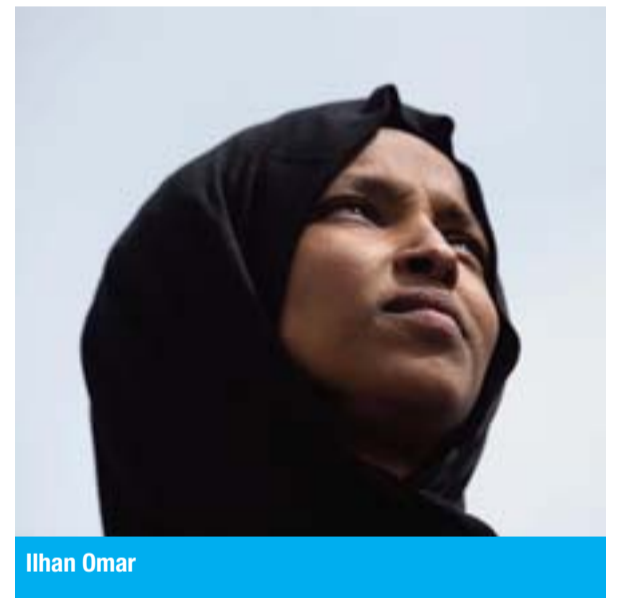
snippet, to a backdrop of menacing music, with images of the destruction wrought by the hijacked planes slamming into the Twin Towers which once dominated New York's skyline. The clip, which has been viewed more than nine million times as of yesterday, ends with the words: "SEPTEMBER 11 2001 WE REMEMBER."

Prominent Democrats including Beto O'Rourke, Kamala Harris and Omar's fellow first-time Congresswoman Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez have rushed to Omar's defense, accusing the president and other Republicans of deliberately taking her remarks out of context and endangering her life. Sanders however defended Trump yesterday, telling ABC news: "The president is wishing no ill will and certainly not violence towards anyone."

But, she added: "The president is absolutely and should be calling out the congresswoman for her not only onetime but history of anti-Semitic comments." Sanders was referencing a previous controversy sparked by Omar speaking out against the influence of the American Israel Public Affairs Committee lobby group in US politics. The lawmaker has mounted her

own trenchant fightback, tweeting Saturday: "No one person - no matter how corrupt, inept, or vicious - can threaten my unwavering love for America. I stand undeterred to continue fighting for equal opportunity in our pursuit of happiness for all Americans."

The controversy arose after Omar delivered a 20-minute address to the Council on American Islamic Relations (CAIR) shortly after the New Zealand mosque attacks in March. "For far too long, we have lived with the discomfort of being a second-class citizen and, frankly, I'm tired of it, and every single Muslim in this country should be tired of it," she said. "CAIR was founded after 9/11," she added, "because they recognized that some people did something and that all of us were starting to lose access to our civil liberties." The civil rights group was in fact founded in 1994 but grew significantly after 2001. The speech did not initially receive significant attention until the snippet in question was highlighted weeks later by controversial Australian personality Mohammad Tawhidi who refers to himself as the "Imam of Peace". — AFP



Ilhan Omar

Palestinian ministers sworn in again after oath foul-up

RAMALLAH: Palestinian government ministers were sworn in for a second time yesterday after a lawyer noticed that the oath they took the day before had been missing a phrase. Lawyer Nael Al-Hawah spotted the

omission after Palestinian Prime Minister Mohammad Shtayyeh's new government was sworn in before president Mahmoud Abbas on Saturday. The oath had dropped a clause where ministers swear to be loyal "to the people and its national heritage", the lawyer said. "I noticed the error and I posted a status update on Facebook," he told AFP.

Shtayyeh called Hawah to acknowledge the error and inform him that the oath would be repeated in its entirety yesterday, he said. Official Palestinian news agency Wafa said the oath was indeed repeated, adding that the mistake had been caused by a "typing error". Hawah

said he was familiar with the vow having closely followed Palestinian governments and because it was part of his teaching for law trainees. He said the error could have placed the government's legality in doubt.

According to Wafa, the full oath reads: "I swear by Almighty God to be loyal to the homeland and its sanctities, to the people and its national heritage, to respect the constitutional order and the law, and to take full care of the interests of the Palestinian people." The new ministers took office following a change of government that several analysts said was made to further isolate Hamas, at odds with the Fatah party of Abbas for more than a decade.

Abbas, 84, is seen as retaining the real decision-making authority. While his term was meant to expire in 2009, Abbas has remained in office in the absence of elections since the Fatah-Hamas split. The Palestinian Authority government is based in the occupied West Bank, while Islamist movement Hamas rules the Gaza Strip. Hamas said in a statement that the new government "resorts to unilateralism and monopoly of power". The new appointments "widen the Palestinian division at the expense of the Palestinian people's interests," it said, calling for a unity government that includes Hamas. — AFP

120 killed in Libya; Sisi meets...

Continued from Page 1

That came as the strongman met in Cairo with key backer Egyptian President Abdel Fatah Al-Sisi, who pledged support for "efforts to fight terrorism and extremist militias to achieve security and stability... throughout the country", Sisi's office said. Haftar also has the support of key Gulf Arab states and Russia. With gunfire echoing through city blocks and tanks rumbling through towns and districts south of Tripoli, many panicked residents have fled their homes. More than 13,500 people have been displaced and over 900 are now living in shelters, OCHA said.

Both sides have launched daily air raids and accuse each other of targeting civilians. One air strike the GNA blamed on Haftar's forces hit a school in Ain Zara, south of Tripoli, which has been the scene of violent clashes for days. Yesterday, the UN mission in Libya warned that international humanitarian law "prohibits the bombing of schools, hospitals, ambulances and civilian areas". The mission warned that it would document all breaches in order to inform the UN Security Council

and the International Criminal Court.

The LNA meanwhile accused the Tripoli-based forces of an air raid "targeting civilians" in the Gasr Ben Ghachir region south of Tripoli. GNA spokesman Mohamed Gnounou said his forces had carried out 21 air strikes targeting LNA positions and supply lines between Friday and Saturday. Gnounou late on Saturday claimed "great advances on all fronts", including in Al-Aziziya, a city about 50 km south of Tripoli. "We have not started this war," he said, "but we will decide the time and place of its end."

On the LNA's side meanwhile, spokesman Ahmad Al-Mesmari said the attacking forces were also "moving forward on all fronts". He reiterated his claim that "terrorists" and "criminals" were fighting on the side of the UN-backed GNA forces. "The decision is no longer in Sarraj's hands," he said. "It is in the hands of terrorists now." The European Union also expressed its "concern" on Thursday at the involvement of "terrorist and criminal elements" in the fighting.

Sarraj on Saturday denounced the "misinformation campaign by some parties that our forces include fighters belonging to terrorist organizations and groups". In a statement, he "strongly denied" the claim and insisted that it was the LNA attack on the capital that was "paving the way the way for dormant terrorist cells" to attack Libyans. — AFP

Qatar proposal, strongly supported by Infantino, is expected at a FIFA meeting in Paris in June.

The increase in the number of teams would automatically raise the number of both games and fans, presenting new logistical challenges to Qatar. Further complicating the matter is the Gulf diplomatic crisis, a nearly two-year-old diplomatic freeze between Qatar and its rivals, led by Saudi Arabia, Saudi Arabia, the UAE, Egypt and Bahrain cut all ties with Doha in June 2017, accusing Qatar of supporting Iran and Islamist groups.

Qatar denies the charges and says Saudi and its allies aim to incite government change in the emirate, the world's largest exporter of liquefied natural gas. Gulf states Kuwait and Oman have not taken sides in the crisis. Oman announced last week it was "not ready" to host matches in the 2022 cup. — AFP

World's largest plane makes...

Continued from Page 1

"Today's flight furthers our mission to provide a flexible alternative to ground launched systems, Floyd said. "We are incredibly proud of the Stratolaunch team, today's flight crew, our partners at Northrup Grumman's Scaled Composites and the Mojave Air and Space Port."

The plane is designed to drop rockets and other space vehicles weighing up to 500,000 pounds at an altitude of 35,000 feet and has been billed by the company as making satellite deployment as "easy as booking an airline flight". Saturday's flight, which saw the plane reach a maximum speed of 189 miles per hour and altitudes of 17,000 feet, was meant to test its per-

formance and handling qualities, according to Stratolaunch.

Allen, who co-founded Microsoft with Bill Gates in 1975, announced in 2011 that he had formed the privately funded Stratolaunch. The company seeks to cash in on higher demand in coming years for vessels that can put satellites in orbit, competing in the United States with other space entrepreneurs and industry stalwarts such as Elon Musk's SpaceX and United Launch Alliance - a partnership between Boeing and Lockheed Martin.

Stratolaunch has said that it intends to launch its first rockets from the Roc in 2020 at the earliest. Allen died in October 2018 while suffering from non-Hodgkins' lymphoma, just months after the plane's development was unveiled. "We all know Paul would have been proud to witness today's historic achievement," said Jody Allen, Chair of Vulcan Inc and Trustee of the Paul G Allen Trust. "The aircraft is a remarkable engineering achievement and we congratulate everyone involved." — Reuters

Israeli delegation cancels Bahrain...

Continued from Page 1

A source close to the matter told Reuters that three Israeli speakers had cancelled because they were unable to obtain visas while the rest of the delegation had "decided not to go". The Bahraini government said the delegation had been invited at the sole initiative of the Global Entrepreneurship Network. "Our responsibility is to ensure a safe and supportive environment for the attending delegations," the government said in a statement. In 2018, Bahrain hosted a UNESCO conference attended by an Israeli delegation.

However, acting Israeli Foreign Minister Israel Katz, who also holds the intelligence portfolio, denied that the cancellation of Cohen's trip was due to security

concerns. "The head of the delegation is busy with political matters right now," Katz told Israel's Reshet 13 TV, referring to talks on a new coalition government under Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu, who won reelection in the April 9 ballot. "Cohen had to choose between travelling to Bahrain - a very important trip - and exploiting the election gains."

Last week a group of Bahraini lawyers tried unsuccessfully to get a court to stop immigration authorities from issuing visas to the delegation, while parliament condemned the visit. "Bahrain's parliament announces that the people of Bahrain reject any Israeli presence on its territory and its lands and any decision allowing this presence is unacceptable," lawmakers said in a statement. Israel has formal diplomatic relations with only two Arab states, neighboring Egypt and Jordan. But an Israeli cabinet minister visited Abu Dhabi's Grand Mosque last year and fellow Gulf state Oman hosted Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu on a surprise trip, the first time an Israeli leader had visited the sultanate in 22 years. — Reuters

Kuwait urged to host World Cup matches...

Continued from Page 1

Kuwait to host some matches if the 2022 Qatar World Cup is expanded.

FIFA has decided to increase the number of teams in the World Cup from 32 to 48 come 2026 in the United States, Canada and Mexico - but last month voted in favor of the increase being implemented starting in Qatar, which would likely require that neighboring countries host some games. A final decision on the

Sports

Davis finally breaks out as Orioles win over host Red Sox

Padres hold off D-backs, win fourth straight

BOSTON: Chris Davis had three hits and four RBIs to end his record skid with a flourish as the Baltimore Orioles snapped a four-game losing streak with a 9-5 win over the host Boston Red Sox on Saturday. Davis, who entered the contest hitless in his last 54 at-bats dating to last season, hit a two-run single in the first inning to end his hitting drought. He added a tiebreaking double in the fifth inning and another double in the eighth, his first three-hit game since Aug 28. Andrew Cashner (3-1) once again played stopper for the Orioles, giving up three runs on three hits in five-plus innings. It was the third straight win for Cashner, who similarly ended a four-game Orioles' losing streak his last time out against the Oakland A's. Christian Vazquez hit a two-run home run and had four RBIs for the Red Sox, whose first winning streak of the season was snapped at two games. Rick Porcello (0-3) struggled with his command through four-plus innings, walking five and allowing three runs on six hits.

PADRES 5, DIAMONDBACKS 4

Franmil Reyes hit a tiebreaking homer in the seventh inning, and Kirby Yates picked up his ninth save after fellow reliever Trey Wingenter worked out of a wild, seventh-inning jam as San Diego defeated Arizona to stretch its winning streak to four straight games. Reyes hit a towering drive to off Matt Andriese that landed in the stands in right-center field, just beyond the reach of Diamondbacks center fielder Ketel Marte. It was Reyes' second game-winning homer on the Padres' 7-2 road trip, which ends Sunday. Arizona drew three walks and had a hit batter in the bottom of the seventh against Padres relievers Robert Stock and Wingenter but failed to score.

YANKEES 4, WHITE SOX 0

CC Sabathia pitched five sharp innings in his season debut, Luke Voit delivered a pinch-hit bases-loaded RBI single, Aaron Judge added his first homer of the season at Yankee Stadium and New York halted a four-game losing streak with a shutout victory over Chicago. Sabathia was activated Saturday from the injured list and held the White Sox to one hit. He struck out three, did not issue a walk and retired 15 of the 16 hitters he faced in a 62-pitch outing. The veteran Sabathia had knee surgery and angioplasty in the offseason.

ASTROS 3, MARINERS 1

Jose Altuve homered for the fifth consecutive game, and Justin Verlander pitched six dominant innings as Houston defeated host Seattle. Robinson Chirinos also homered for Houston, which won its eighth consecutive game. The Mariners lost their second in a row following a six-game winning streak. The two teams wrap up their three-game series Sunday afternoon. Verlander (2-0) allowed one run—a solo homer by Mitch Haniger—on two hits. The right-hander didn't walk a batter and struck out 11. He threw 105 pitches, 76 for strikes.

REDS 5, CARDINALS 2

Derek Dietrich hit a home run to lead off the seventh inning and drove in three runs as Cincinnati recorded its fourth straight win, defeating St. Louis in Monterrey, Mexico. Jesse Winker launched an opposite-field solo

homer with one out in the sixth inning for Cincinnati's first hit of the contest. Scott Schebler ripped an RBI single, and Joey Votto had a double to reach base for the 17th straight game against St. Louis. Jared Hughes (1-0) struck out one in two-thirds of an inning to secure the win for the Reds, who have outscored the opposition 26-3 during their winning streak.

BLUE JAYS 3, RAYS 1

Lourdes Gurriel Jr. hit a two-run double in the seventh inning and Toronto came back to defeat visiting Tampa Bay. Teoscar Hernandez added an RBI single in the eighth for Toronto. The teams have split the first two games of the three-game set. Thomas Pannone (1-2) pitched around two errors in the seventh inning to earn the win in relief. Ken Giles pitched around a single in the ninth and had two strikeouts to earn his fourth save in five opportunities.

ROYALS 3, INDIANS 0

Homer Bailey threw seven sterling innings for Kansas City in a victory over visiting Cleveland. The Royals won back-to-back games after snapping a 10-game losing streak with an 8-1 win on Friday. Bailey entered the game with just one win in his last 22 home starts, compiling a 1-14 record with a 7.49 ERA over that span. He had not won in an American League ballpark since May 19, 2012, when he was victorious at Yankee Stadium as a member of the Cincinnati Reds. Bailey gave up only a single and a double to No. 8 hitter Brad Miller. He threw 102 pitches. Bailey allowed seven runs on eight hits and two walks in five innings Monday vs. Seattle in his previous start.

GIANTS 5, ROCKIES 2

Kevin Pillar hit his fourth home run in the last six games and Madison Bumgarner (1-2) carried a lead into the eighth inning as San Francisco made it three in a row over visiting Colorado which has lost eight straight. Reyes Moronta stranded the potential tying run in scoring position in the eighth before the Giants tacked on two insurance runs in the bottom of the inning, sending San Francisco to a triumph in a game that began barely 12 hours after a marathon 18-inning Giants win had ended earlier in the morning. Pillar, acquired in-season from Toronto, contributed a sacrifice fly to a two-run third inning against Rockies starter Kyle Freeland (1-3) before adding a solo shot in the fifth, taking the left-hander into the left field bleachers for his fourth home run of the season.

MARLINS 10, PHILLIES 3

Rookie Austin Dean went 4-for-4 with a homer and five RBIs as host Miami broke out of a slump and defeated Philadelphia. Caleb Smith (1-0) pitched six scoreless innings, overcoming a shaky first frame in which he tossed 29 pitches. In all, he threw 99 pitches and allowed three walks and just one hit—a double by Andrew McCutchen—while striking out six. Dean, who was recalled from Triple-A on Friday, fell a triple short of the cycle and helped the Marlins snap a five-game losing streak, as Miami belted a season-high 18 hits. Miami had scored just twice in its previous four games but plated four runs in Saturday's third inning on



BOSTON: Cedric Mullins #3 of the Baltimore Orioles attempts to steal third base and is tagged out by Rafael Devers #11 of the Boston Red Sox at the top of the ninth inning of the game at Fenway Park in Boston, Massachusetts. —AFP

homers by Brian Anderson, Neil Walker and Dean.

TWINS 4, TIGERS 3

Eddie Rosario had two hits and drove in two runs, and three relievers combined to pitch three shutout innings to help lead Minnesota to a victory over visiting Detroit. Michael Pineda (2-0) picked up the win, allowing three runs on eight hits over six innings while striking out five. Trevor Hildenberger and Taylor Rogers each followed with a scoreless inning of relief. Blake Parker overcame a one-out walk to Gordon Beckham and a wild pitch in the ninth by striking out JaCoby Jones and Josh Harrison to pick up his third save of the season.

ANGELS 6, CUBS 5

Zack Cozart had three hits, and closer Cody Allen notched an adventurous four-out save to help Los Angeles to a victory against host Chicago. Allen worked around a walk, a double and a run-scoring outfield fielding error in the ninth, ending the game with strikeouts of Willson Contreras and Kyle Schwarber with runners at second and third. Schwarber was called out on a checked swing, and teammates restrained him from charging after third base umpire Gabe Morales as the game ended. Justin Bour and Brian Goodwin added two hits apiece for the Angels, who evened the three-game series at 1-1. Javier Baez doubled three times for the Cubs, and Jason Heyward had two hits.

BRAVES 11, METS 7

Touki Toussaint earned the win by tossing six solid innings of one-run relief in his season debut as host Atlanta scored four runs apiece in the first and second innings of a victory over New York. The Braves, who lost the first two games of the four-game series, have won four of six. The Mets had a three-game winning streak snapped despite scoring at least six runs for a

team-record seventh straight game. Both starters were chased early Saturday. Mets left-hander Jason Vargas recorded just one out in the first inning and Braves southpaw Sean Newcomb exited after 1 1/3 innings.

NATIONALS 3, PIRATES 2

Adam Eaton hit his first homer of the season and Howie Kendrick also added a blast with two outs in the bottom of the eighth inning as Washington rallied to beat visiting Pittsburgh. Eaton (three hits) and Kendrick went back-to-back against Richard Rodriguez (0-1), who took over for starter Chris Archer. The winning pitcher was Wander Suero (1-0), who pitched a scoreless eighth, while Sean Doolittle got the save despite allowing two baserunners in the ninth. Melky Cabrera hit a solo homer off Washington starter Anibal Sanchez in the sixth to break a 1-1 tie.

BREWERS 4, DODGERS 1

Mike Moustakas and Orlando Arcia hit solo home runs and visiting Milwaukee handed Los Angeles its sixth straight loss. Brewers starter Zach Davies (2-0) threw seven innings in the second game of the three-game series, allowing one run and eight hits. He struck out six and didn't walk a batter while lowering his ERA to 1.53. Davies benefited from three double plays in the first five innings. Dodgers left-hander Caleb Ferguson (0-1) came out of the bullpen to make his fourth major league start and went 2 2/3 innings, allowing one run and four hits.

RANGERS, ATHLETICS, PPD.

Saturday night's game between Texas and visiting Oakland was postponed after a nearly hour-long rain delay, before it ever got started. The game will be made up as part of a split day-night doubleheader on Saturday, June 8. In between those games, the Rangers will retire Adrian Beltré's No. 29. —Reuters

Paper planes defy laws of physics in Kuwait

KUWAIT: In front of hundreds of spectators and rival participants, Mohamed Abdelkarim and Mustafa Hasan clinched the win to head to the Red Bull Paper Wings World Final in Austria. Red Bull Paper Wings is the world's largest paper plane competition. The idea is simple and ingenious at the same time: students must make a plain sheet of paper fly as far, as long or as artistically through the air as possible.

Some of the world's best student pilots in Kuwait took on their rivals for the chance of winning a spot in the Red Bull Paper Wings World Final, taking place in May in Austria.

This year, tens of thousands of self-trained, student pilots, will put their outstanding creative skills, in 64 qualifiers across the globe, to the test to enter the world's leading paper plane contest.

Kuwait's qualifier took place on April 13th at 360 Mall, impressing participants and spectators alike. To take part in the competition, students had to make a single piece of paper fly as far and as long as artistically possible through the air. The Kuwait winners of two categories - Longest Distance and Longest Airtime - have been invited to the World Final in Austria.

The judging criteria differs based on the category. The winner of the longest distance category is the plane that flies the longest distance between the lift-off and the landing point while the winner of the longest airtime is the plane that manages to stay in the air the longest, counted to the tenth of seconds.

Mustafa Hasan flew his paper plane for 9.22 seconds while Mohamed Abdelkarim achieved a distance of 19.3 meters. The Kuwait finalists will descend on Salzburg's Hangar-7 for the World Final. Each pilot will be armed with a single A4 sheet of paper, ready to impress fans and judges across the three distinct categories.

Global winners for Distance, Airtime,



Aerobatics and Best ranked player of the AR game will get as a prize a Red Bull Air Race Weekend Experience consisting of flight tickets, accommodation, full pass to watch the

training and race over the weekend, access to sky lounge depending on the race, tour and meet & greet with one of the pilots of Red Bull Air Race.

McKenzie adds to growing All Blacks injury toll

WELLINGTON: The All Blacks go into their first pre-World Cup camp today hampered by a rising injury toll and expecting more casualties before they begin their title defence in Japan in September. Damian McKenzie is the latest to be sidelined after limping off with knee damage during Saturday's bruising Super Rugby derby match between the Waikato Chiefs and Auckland Blues.

The utility back joins at least nine other All Blacks on an injury list headed by Sonny Bill Williams and Owen Franks, who were both members of the successful New Zealand sides that won the last two World Cups in 2011 and 2015.

The Chiefs were reluctant to speculate on the extent of McKenzie's injury but said in a brief statement that he would be having an MRI scan and will be assessed further in the coming days.

His fellow All Blacks Brodie Retallick and Nathan Harris also took severe knocks in the Chiefs' 33-29 victory but their injuries were said to be not serious.

World Cup years add an extra urgency to the high-stakes New Zealand derbies, which are seen as unofficial All Blacks trials and the ferocity of play leads to injuries. "We know there will be (more) injuries in the next two or three months so our whole planning now is based on what happens when this happens," All Blacks assistant coach Ian Foster told Radio Sport.

"We don't like it but we've just got to make sure we control what we can control and have the best possible medical programme that gives them a fighting chance to come back strong." Most of the currently injured All Blacks are among the 41 players

named to attend the day-long camp which will "provide an opportunity for All Blacks management and our leading players to start building towards what is a huge year ahead", said New Zealand Rugby's high performance chief Mike Anthony.

Williams, who has been plagued by injury in recent years, has undergone knee surgery which will keep him out for about six weeks. The full extent of Franks' shoulder injury remains unknown but at the very least he will miss the next few weeks.

"We're going to rescan in two weeks to see how the healing is going, to see how serious it is. But, at the moment, he won't play for the next few weeks," Canterbury Crusaders coach Scott Robertson said.

Foster said that while injuries are a problem, there was still plenty of time for players to prove their fitness. "We have five Test matches before the World Cup. There may be some players who may not get a lot of chance through injury to come back into Super Rugby but may get an opportunity to show they are at the right level after that," he said.

All Blacks openside flanker Sam Cane has not played since suffering a broken neck against South Africa last year and has only just been cleared to resume contact training. Also out with injury are scrum-half Aaron Smith, loose forwards Liam Squire and Luke Whitelock, hooker Codie Taylor, and wings Waisake Naholo and George Bridge.

Israel Dagg, one of the stars of the 2011 campaign, was forced to retire early this month because of a persistent knee injury that has troubled him for the past two years. — AFP

Sports

Magic upset Raptors on Augustin's three-pointer

DeRozan, Spurs hold off Nuggets for Game 1 upset

TORONTO: D.J. Augustin scored the final five points of the game, including a tiebreaking 3-pointer with 3.4 seconds left, as the Orlando Magic upset the host Toronto Raptors 104-101 in Game 1 of the Eastern Conference first-round series Saturday. The Magic, the seventh seed in the East, won their first playoff game since their most recent postseason appearance in 2012. The Raptors, the second seed, fell to 2-14 all time in series-opening games. Kawhi Leonard scored four straight points to give the Raptors a 101-99 lead with 1:02 left. After Augustin tied the score with a driving layup with 44.9 seconds left, Marc Gasol's open 3-pointer from the corner rimmed out. The Magic didn't call timeout on their way up the floor, and Augustin sank the go-ahead basket as the shot clock dwindled. The Raptors then called timeout, after which Leonard lofted an air ball from 3-point range from beyond the top of the key. Following a timeout, the Magic inbounded the ball without issue to end the game.

NETS 111, 76ERS 102

D'Angelo Russell scored 26 points, Caris LeVert added 23 and visiting Brooklyn defeated Philadelphia in Game 1. Spencer Dinwiddie contributed 18, and Ed Davis had 12 points and 16 rebounds for the sixth-seeded Nets, who competed in their first playoff game in four years after finishing the regular season at 42-40. Jimmy Butler led the third-seeded Sixers with a career-high 36-point performance in the playoffs. Joel Embiid had been doubtful with left knee soreness and

was cleared to play less than 10 minutes before the game. Embiid, who missed 14 of the team's final 24 games, finished with 22 points and 15 rebounds but clearly looked bothered by his injury.

SPURS 101, NUGGETS 96

DeMar DeRozan had 18 points and 12 rebounds, Derrick White scored 16 and San Antonio beat host Denver in Game 1. LaMarcus Aldridge and Bryn Forbes scored 15 each for the seventh-seeded Spurs, who grabbed the lead early and never relinquished it. Nikola Jokic had 10 points, 14 rebounds and 14 assists for a triple-double in his first playoff game for Denver. Gary Harris had a game-high 20 points, and Jamal Murray scored 17.

WARRIORS 121, CLIPPERS 104

Stephen Curry complemented a game-high 38 points with a career-playoff-high 15 rebounds in a historic performance as Golden State opened defense of its NBA title with a win over Los Angeles in a volatile Game 1 in Oakland, Calif. The matchup of familiar Pacific Division rivals featured the ejections of the Warriors' Kevin Durant and Clippers' Patrick Beverley, each of whom was nailed with a second technical foul for a verbal altercation near midcourt midway through the fourth quarter.

Curry's 38 points included 8-for-12 shooting on 3-pointers on a night when he passed Ray Allen (385) for the NBA all-time career playoff record. Curry finished the game with 386 career threes. — Reuters



TORONTO: D.J. Augustin #14 of the Orlando Magic dribbles the ball as Danny Green #14 of the Toronto Raptors defends during Game One of the first round of the NBA playoffs at Scotiabank Arena in Toronto, Canada. —AFP

Kohli finally gets IPL win after six straight defeats

MOHALI: Captain Virat Kohli hit a crucial 67 to guide his Royal Challengers side to their first win of the IPL season Saturday after six straight defeats. Chris Gayle smashed an unbeaten 99 to take Kings XI Punjab to 173-4 off their 20 overs, putting extra pressure on Kohli's team who have made an error-strewn start to the campaign.

But the India skipper plundered early runs to put Bangalore on course. Even after the run rate eased, South African veteran AB de Villiers (59) and Australian Marcus Stoinis (28) reached the target in the final over to provide a morale-boosting eight-wicket win.

"It is a great feeling to get across the line," said Kohli, who has criticised his players for their mistakes and attitude in past defeats. Bangalore's six earlier losses had equalled the record for the worst start to an IPL season.

"We have been unlucky in a couple of games," he added. "But after so many setbacks the players showed they still have desire." Kohli's innings included eight fours, but he said the key to the victory was his bowlers taking four Punjab wickets in the middle of their innings to restrict their score.

Only Gayle's concentration—and his five sixes and 10 fours—ensured Punjab put up a competitive score. After Rajasthan Royals beat Mumbai Indians by four wickets earlier Saturday for their second win of the season, Bangalore, who have never won an IPL title, remain rooted to the bottom of the table and needing a miracle to qualify for the playoffs. England's Jos Buttler struck 89 including 28 — two sixes and four fours—off an over by West Indies fast bowler Alzarri Joseph in Rajasthan's win. — AFP

Tiger tees off as dramatic Masters final round begins

AUGUSTA: Tiger Woods teed off in final round of the Masters chasing his 15th major title, trying to capture his fifth green jacket to end an 11-year major drought. The 43-year-old American superstar, back on form after 2017 spinal fusion surgery following years of nagging back pain, played alongside compatriot Tony Finau and Italy's Francesco Molinari in the last group at Augusta National Golf Club.

Reigning British Open champion Molinari seized the 54-hole lead on 13-under par 203 with Woods and Finau two strokes behind. Brooks Koepka, last year's US Open and PGA Championship winner, began three adrift with fellow American Webb Simpson, the 2012 US Open, and England's Ian Poulter four off the pace.

"It's golf, so the favorite is probably the golf course out there waiting for us," Molinari said. "We're all very close. It's nice to be a little bit ahead, but you might just need one hole to change. You never know how it's going to go, especially around a course like here."

Augusta National advanced the final round in a safety move with thunderstorms expected to arrive Sunday afternoon, when leaders would typically be battling for the Masters crown. The storms, with hail and high winds producing tornadoes, led to three deaths and severe damage in moving across the southeastern United States. The Masters, which has not had a Monday conclusion since 1983, decided to cancel its green jacket ceremony after the finish in order to hurry spectators to the exits faster due to the approaching storm.

Racing nature's fury to finish on the weekend added more tension to the unfolding Masters drama, which centered on Woods and his chance to win his first major title since the 2008 US Open on the same course where he won his first-ever major in 1997.

"At 23, I had a lot more years in front of me," Woods said. "At 43 I don't. It's just reality." Woods, who could move nearer Jack Nicklaus's the all-time major win record of 18, contended last year at the British Open



AUGUSTA: Tiger Woods of the United States plays a shot from the fifth tee during the final round of the Masters at Augusta National Golf Club yesterday in Augusta, Georgia. —AFP

and PGA before snapping a five-year win drought by capturing the Tour Championship, his 80th career US PGA title leaving him two shy of matching Sam Snead's all-time record.

Electrifying shotmaking this week at Augusta National, cheered on by supportive crowds anxious to witness history, has Woods on the verge of a fairytale conclusion to a fightback from back pain so crippling he was unable to play with his children. Woods has never fired so low in a Masters and not won the title but he has also never won a major title when not leading after 54 holes. Plenty of rivals were in place to deny Woods his long-sought next major trophy.

Molinari, whose first Masters appearance was as a caddie to older brother Edoardo in 2006, outfought Woods last year at Carnoustie to win his first major title. The Italian then went 5-0 in a heroic Ryder Cup turn in France over an American team on which

Woods went 0-5.

"The key for me is really going to go out and just do my thing. Staying aggressive," Molinari said. "Hit the shots. Hit the middle of the clubface as often as I can and make smart decisions, and we'll just take it from there."

Finau, the US PGA's first player of Tongan and Samoan heritage, leads the week in driving distance with 318.8 yards. "I'm driving the ball nicely," Finau said. "And on this golf course, I can attack the golf course if I'm hitting my driver well."

Lurking as well is Koepka, who seeks his third victory in the past four majors—a success rate seen only by Ben Hogan's three in a row in 1953 and the "Tiger Slam" four in a row by Woods in 2000-01. "I'm pretty comfortable being up there on the leaderboard in a major come," Koepka said. "I feel good and I like my chances." —AFP

Caps beat Hurricanes in OT, take series lead

WASHINGTON: Defenseman Brooks Orpik scored 1:48 into overtime to give the Washington Capitals a 4-3 victory over the visiting Carolina Hurricanes in Game 2 of an Eastern Conference first-round series Saturday afternoon. The Capitals have a 2-0 lead in this series, which shifts to Carolina for the next two games, starting Monday. Orpik's game-winner was just his fourth goal in 151 NHL playoff games. His timing was perfect on Saturday as Evgeny Kuznetsov found him from behind the cage coming off the bench, and Orpik got an opening because the Carolina player defending him didn't have a stick. He then fired a shot past goalie Petr Mrazek (29 saves). Washington took a 3-2 lead when Tom Wilson took an Alex Ovechkin pass and scored 8:55 into the third period. But the Capitals couldn't hold it as the Hurricanes' Jordan Staal redirected a Dougie Hamilton shot past Braden Holtby (25 saves) with five minutes left for a game-tying power-play goal that tied the score at 3 and forced overtime.

AVALANCHE 3, FLAMES 2 (OT)

Nathan MacKinnon scored the overtime winner as visiting Colorado claimed a victory over Calgary to even their opening-round series at one win apiece. Right after Calgary's Michael Frolik was stymied on a glorious opportunity, MacKinnon took a pass from Mikko Rantanen, sped down his off-wing and wired a glove-side wrist shot for the winner at 8:27 of the extra frame. The Flames had taken a 2-1 lead with 7:33 remaining in regulation on a goal by Sean Monahan, but J.T. Compher tied it up with 2:39 left, shortly after the Avalanche pulled Philipp Grubauer for an extra attacker. Grubauer finished with 35 saves, while Mike Smith made 36 for Calgary.

PREDATORS 2, STARS 1 (OT)

Craig Smith scored at 5:00 of overtime in Game 2 as Nashville defeated visiting Dallas. Rocco Grimaldi also scored for the Predators, who evened the first-round Western Conference playoff series at a game apiece. Game 3 is scheduled for Monday night in Dallas. Goaltender Pekka Rinne made 22 saves. Jamie Benn scored the lone goal for the Stars, who won 3-2 in Game 1 and were looking to return home with a two-game edge. Goalie Ben Bishop stopped 40 of 42 shots but suffered the first overtime playoff defeat of his career after five straight wins. —Reuters

Nishikori tips Federer for clay comeback success

MONTE CARLO: Roger Federer may not be playing at the Monte Carlo Masters but the Swiss legend was still at the forefront of 2018 finalist Key Nishikori's thoughts yesterday. "Everything is possible (for Federer)," Asia's top player predicted.

Federer is due for a return to the dirt after two seasons completely off the surface in three weeks at Madrid, his lone scheduled tune-up prior to the French Open, which he last played in 2015. "It (winning Roland Garros) might be tougher for him than winning the Australian Open or Wimbledon, but I'm sure he can do anything if he tries 100 per cent," said Nishikori.

"He's a lot different than anyone else on the Tour," added the world number three who lost the final here a year ago as Rafael Nadal won his 11th title in the principality. "I'm sure Roger can do very well on clay. He's still my idol, he's the best player in history."

"I'm happy to see him playing more tournaments, I hope I can play him again," said the player who has beaten the 37-year-old Swiss three times and most recently last November at the year-end ATP Finals. "He came from injury and won the Australian Open (2017). I'm sure he works harder than anyone else off court. I hope he does well," Nishikori said. — AFP

India's Rahul, Pant await World Cup fate

NEW DELHI: Opener Lokesh Rahul and stumper-batsman Rishabh Pant are unlikely to sleep much of the night as India selectors prepare to reveal their 15-man squad for the Cricket World Cup. Chief selector M.S.K. Prasad has told reporters that most of the current side picks itself and there were only a couple of spots left up for grabs for the May 30 to July 14 showpiece in England and Wales.

So while there is not a great deal of suspense hanging over today's scheduled news conference in Mumbai, speculation remains over who will fill at least two positions in the squad. While India boast a formidable top order that includes captain Virat Kohli, the search continues for a reliable number four batsman.

Pant, Ambati Rayudu, Vijay Shankar, Ajinkya Rahane, Manish Pandey and Dinesh Karthik have all been auditioned in the slot and all have been found wanting. Rahul will fancy his chances as a back-up opener who can also bat at number four and his four 50-plus scores in the ongoing Indian Premier League could not have come at a better time.

Pant is also angling for a back-up

role, behind the stumps, with Mahendra Singh Dhoni installed as India's first choice wicketkeeper. A hard-hitter who can also be played as a specialist batsman, the 21-year-old faces competition from Karthik, whose ability to bat anywhere in the batting order makes him a limited-overs asset.

However, Karthik, 33, was left out of the home series against Australia, India's final dress rehearsal for the World Cup, which could signal a slide down the pecking order. Former Test stumper Kiran More says Pant should be on the plane to England.

"If I am the selector, I will take Pant to the World Cup," More told ESPNcricinfo. "I will punt on him, definitely, only because he is a match-winner. That is what he has done in Test matches, he can win you games single-handedly."

"He is a big-occasion player. He has got the guts to go for his shots, he is ruthless. If it clicks, it will benefit India immensely," said More, a former chief selector. Prasad and his selection committee colleagues will also weigh the relative merit of Shankar's medium pace and Jadeja's left-arm spin before naming the second all-rounder.

Hardik Pandya remains India's first choice all-rounder while wrist-spinners Kuldeep Yadav and Yuzvendra Chahal are expected to share the slow bowling duties. India begin their bid for a third World Cup against South Africa in Southampton on June 5. — Reuters

Sports

Bayern ease past Duesseldorf 4-1 to reclaim top spot

Bayern Reeper Neuer taken off injured

BERLIN: Champions Bayern Munich eased past hosts Fortuna Duesseldorf 4-1 yesterday with winger Kingsley Coman scoring twice, to go a point clear at the top of the Bundesliga. The Bavarians are on 67 points, with Borussia Dortmund on 66 after their 2-1 win over Mainz 05 on Saturday, and five games left in the title race. RB Leipzig are in third place on 58.

"I think we approached this game in a very serious way and we deserved to win by this score," said Bayern coach Niko Kovac, who used the same starting 11 as in their 5-0 demolition of Dortmund last week.

There were some bad news for Bayern, however, with keeper Manuel Neuer taken off in the 53rd minute with a calf muscle injury. "It is the same calf which had caused him problems recently," said Kovac. "We will check it tomorrow and hope it is not a serious injury."

Bayern, in no mood to experience another 3-3 draw against Duesseldorf from earlier in the season, did not underestimate them this time and pressed high from the start. It paid off when Coman found space to cross into the

box, Thomas Mueller failed get a foot on it and the ball sailed past keeper Michael Rensing into goal in the 15th minute. Bundesliga leading scorer Robert Lewandowski came close to adding another one in the 23rd but his free kick from the edge of the back flew narrowly wide. Despite more than 60 percent possession, the visitors struggled at times with an agile and hard-working Duesseldorf defence until Coman struck again four minutes from half-time for his fifth goal of the season.

The Frenchman drilled in Joshua Kimmich's cutback, his 11th assist this season and the league leaders picked up after the break where they had left off with Serge Gnabry slotting in from a metre out in the 55th to give them a three-goal cushion. Bayern, chasing a record-extending seventh straight league title, could have scored several more in the second half but Rensing, a former Bayern keeper, made a string of superb saves.

The hosts got a late consolation goal with a Dodi Lukebakio penalty from a Mats Hummels handball but Leon Goretzka scored Bayern's fourth in stoppage time. — Reuters



DUESSELDORF: Bayern Munich's Spanish midfielder Thiago Alcantara (L) and Duesseldorf's German midfielder Aymen Barkok (R) vie for the ball during the German first division Bundesliga football match between Fortuna Duesseldorf and FC Bayern Munich in Duesseldorf, western Germany yesterday. — AFP

"I think we approached this game in a serious way"

Pukki edges Norwich closer to Premier League return

LONDON: Prolific striker Teemu Pukki's 27th goal of the season edged Norwich closer to a return to the Premier League as they came from 1-0 down to draw 1-1 with Championship strugglers Wigan. The 29-year-old Finnish international's delightful finish nine minutes from time gives Norwich a four-point advantage over Leeds United with four games remaining.

Leeds—seeking a return to the Premier League for the first time in 15 years—moved into the second and last automatic promotion spot on Saturday due to a deserved 1-0 win over Sheffield Wednesday.

Wednesday's city rivals Sheffield United had been held to a 1-1 draw on Saturday leaving them three points adrift of Leeds. Leeds had been the big winners of the week in the enthralling battle for promotion having won two on the trot whilst Norwich and United dropped four points.

Norwich, though, remain in the box seat and require just six more points from their remaining four games to go back up to the Premier League. "We were struggling a lot today, it was a hard, hard game so it was important to come out with at least one point," Pukki told Sky Sports.

"I don't think it's comfortable. We just need to keep going and it's good we have a game on Friday (they host Sheffield Wednesday) so we can keep winning again." Wigan had broken the deadlock as half-time neared—xx penalised for handball.

Reece James made no mistake from the spot—although keeper Tim Krul went the right way and got a hand to it—for his second goal in three games. The hosts went close to doubling their advantage in the 65th minute on the counter-attack—after Pukki's appeals for a penalty had been turned down—saw Leon Clarke turn

the Norwich defence inside out but Canaries goalkeeper Krul denied him by getting the slightest of touches to his shot to deflect it away for a corner.

James also went close first with a superb long range effort which just scraped the bar and then with a free-kick although Norwich too had their moments largely through Pukki. However, having wasted a few chances Pukki made no mistake when found by Kenny McLean, he outpaced a defender and coolly slid it right-footed past Wigan goalkeeper Christian Walton.

Wigan thought they had taken the three points in time added on but Leon Clarke was adjudged to be off-side. James though was content to have at least a point against the table toppers and give them a two point advantage over third from bottom Rotherham.

Millwall and Reading are also embroiled in the fight to avoid filling the final relegation spot—Bolton look destined to join Ipswich Town in the third tier as they are 10 points adrift of safety.

"The league table is there but anyone can beat anyone," James told Sky Sports. "That's why it's a fantastic league. Points in this league are massive when you're down there fighting." —AFP

Marseille survive late VAR drama to stay in Champions League hunt

PARIS: Marseille kept up their hunt for Champions League football on Saturday despite losing in-form striker Mario Balotelli to injury after VAR saw them escape last-gasp penalty drama to beat Nimes 2-1.

Balotelli has helped kick-start Marseille's chase for European football with seven goals in 11 Ligue 1 appearances since arriving from Nice in January but left the field with a thigh injury 12 minutes before the break.

"He stopped because he wasn't 100 percent," said coach Rudi Garcia. "He wanted to stay on but there was no point playing with a player who is not fully fit." Garcia's side move above Saint-Etienne into the European places after squeaking past Nimes in the enigmatic Italian's absence.

They took the three points thanks to two goals in two second half minutes from Balotelli's replacement Valere Germain and Luiz Gustavo and the video assistant referees ruling out a penalty awarded in the fourth minute of added time that would have given the away side a chance to snatch a dramatic point.

They now sit fourth in Ligue 1's Europa League spot on 51 points, five behind third-placed Lyon—in the final Champions League spot—with six matches left to play after Bruno Genesio's side fell to a shock 2-1 defeat at struggling Nantes on Friday.

Now all eyes are on the clash between the two sides to come at the Stade Velodrome on May 12. "Now is not the time to think about the 36th round of fixtures (when Marseille host Lyon)," added Garcia.

"We've won three points, for now we have returned to fourth place and we will see what Saint-Etienne do tomorrow (against Bordeaux). We had to win after Lyon's defeat yesterday." Nimes sit 10th on 43 points despite Teji Savanier getting the away side back in the game with an 82nd minute penalty following Boubacar Kamara's handball.

Bernard Blaquart thought his side had been given a golden chance for an equaliser in the final seconds when referee Frank Schneider blew for another spot-kick in the fourth minute of added time after Marseille right-back Bouna Sarr handled the ball while falling over in his own area. However after consulting with the video assistant referees Schneider ruled out the penalty for a trip on Sarr.

Blaquart's side are a point behind Strasbourg, who stay ninth, six points behind Marseille after a hugely entertaining 3-3 home draw with Guingamp that does little to lessen the away side's relegation woes. Jeremy Sorbon's leveller three minutes from time after a brace from Ludovic Ajorque and another from Sanjin Prcic looked to have won the day for Strasbourg lifted Guingamp off the bottom and a point above Caen, who lost 1-0 to mid-table Angers.

Those results let Monaco off the hook following their goalless draw at home with Reims, which moves Leonardo Jardim's side to 16th. However they have injury problems to deal with ahead of next week's visit to Paris Saint-Germain, who could wrap up the Ligue 1 title on Sunday with a draw at second-placed Lille.

Midfielder Cesc Fabregas left the field early with a calf injury, while Stevan Jovetic left the Stade Louis II on crutches after Jardim said he had ruptured cruciate ligaments in his left knee. They are two places and seven points clear of the relegation play-off spot after all four of the teams below them failed to win.

That place is occupied by Dijon, who drew 0-0 at home against Amiens on Friday in a match that was interrupted after monkey chants were directed by a home fan towards the away side's captain Prince Gouano. It was the latest in a string of incidents of racist abuse that have blighted football this season, and prompted FIFA head Gianni Infantino to ask football authorities across the world to take a "zero tolerance" stance on racism. — AFP

'Lucky' Man Utd must improve for Barcelona: Ole

MANCHESTER: Ole Gunnar Solskjaer admitted on Saturday that Manchester United will have to improve significantly on their performance against West Ham if they are to knock Barcelona out of the Champions League. A much-changed United were unconvincing as they beat Manuel Pellegrini's side 2-1 at Old Trafford to maintain their hopes of a Premier League top-four finish thanks to two Paul Pogba penalties, three days before they try to overturn a 1-0 first-leg deficit in their Champions League quarter-final decider at the Camp Nou.

"We were lucky it wasn't Barcelona today," said Solskjaer. "They played better than us but we have one of the best goalkeepers in the world." Felipe Anderson, who had earlier had a goal dubiously disallowed for offside, scored early in the second half to make it 1-1 and Michail Antonio went close twice, hitting the bar and watching in disbelief as David de Gea pulled off a wonder save on his header seconds before Pogba's second spot-kick won the game 10 minutes from time.

"That save is unbelievable. He won us the game because at 2-1 down, we would have struggled to create enough," added Solskjaer. "We sit here with three points and we got the points. We were fortunate. I can't hide that."

Solskjaer made five changes to the team that lost to Barca on Wednesday, leaving the rested Marcus Rashford, Scott McTominay and Victor Lindelof on the bench, while Luke Shaw and Ashley Young were suspended.

"We had Rashford, McTominay, and Luke Shaw out, and there is intensity and power in those players," added Solskjaer. "It was end-to-end like a basketball game at times. I think the intensity was not bad, if you look at the physical stats—but the control was not good enough." Solskjaer was unhappy at the six-day turn-



MANCHESTER: Manchester United's French midfielder Paul Pogba scores the team's second goal from a second penalty during the English Premier League football match between Manchester United and West Ham United at Old Trafford in Manchester, north west England. — AFP

around between United's two legs against Barcelona, while there are eight days between Manchester City, Tottenham and Liverpool's quarter-final ties.

"Someone needs to explain to me why in the Champions League it is Wednesday and Tuesday matches for us and Tuesday and Wednesday for the others," he added. "We tried to Google it but didn't find anything. UEFA should change that 100 percent."

Those Champions League ties will have VAR on hand for controversial calls and West Ham manager Manuel Pellegrini believes the Hammers would have

won had the technology been available to referee Graham Scott on Saturday.

"With VAR, I am sure we would win the game 1-0. Felipe Anderson was outside. It was not a penalty from Robert (Snodgrass). "The last goal from Manchester United was offside, the last pass. There were a few mistakes but the decisions went for United."

"I am not complaining about the referee because they were not big mistakes, they were 'difficult' mistakes but with technology we have a different score." — AFP

blame for not offering more resistance as both Dominic Ball—sent off for a terrible aerial challenge on Ryan Christie who had to go off and was given medical attention in the dressing room—and Lewis Ferguson were red-carded for ugly challenges.

The coaching staff too felt the wrong end of the officials' tongues too as manager Derek McInnes and assistant Tony Docherty were sent to the stands in a day that the club will want to forget very quickly.

Forrest's excellent goal sent them in at half-time 1-0 up and the ideal launching pad for their dominant second-half performance although it was Ball's 36th minute dismissal that turned the match.

"The red card settled us and we got the goal. Thereafter we were well in control of the game," Celtic midfielder Callum McGregor told BBC Scotland. "James

(Forrest) is a top player and he can produce moments like that when games are tight and it shows what a special player he is." McGregor said the league title remained the priority—they are 11 points clear of bitter rivals Rangers—and the second part of their treble ambitions. "It will be a very tough game against Hearts, but that will be in the back of our minds," he said.

"We have two massive games to secure the league title." As for Christie McGregor said the seriousness of the incident was highlighted by the length of time he was prone on the pitch.

"He took a real sore one, you could see by the length of time he was down it's a serious one," said McGregor. "He was in just getting assessed at half-time by the doctor, so I think he was okay, but they need to take their time and make sure he's okay properly." — AFP

Celtic ease into Scottish Cup final

GLASGOW: Celtic's hopes of a third successive domestic treble is firmly on course after they cruised into the Scottish Cup final with a 3-0 win over an Aberdeen side that imploded yesterday.

Goals by James Forrest, Odsonne Edouard with a penalty and Australian Tom Rogic gave Neil Lennon's team an easy passage into the final where they will meet Hearts, who beat Inverness 3-0 on Saturday.

However, Aberdeen will have only themselves to

25 Davis finally breaks out as Orioles win over host Red Sox



26 Tiger tees off as dramatic Masters final round begins



27 Bayern ease past Duesseldorf 4-1 to reclaim top spot



Salah's strike puts Liverpool back on top

City must win every game to retain title: Guardiola



LONDON: Manchester City's English midfielder Raheem Sterling (L) vies with Crystal Palace's Ivorian striker Wilfried Zaha (R) during the English Premier League football match between Crystal Palace and Manchester City at Selhurst Park in south London yesterday. — AFP

LIVERPOOL: Liverpool powered back to the top of the Premier League after Mohamed Salah's stunning strike clinched a 2-0 win over Chelsea yesterday. Jurgen Klopp's side had surrendered pole position a few hours earlier when Manchester City won 3-1 at Crystal Palace, piling pressure on the Reds to respond as the title race heats up.

Liverpool rose to the challenge as Sadio Mane's opener five minutes after the break and a blistering long-range drive from Salah two minutes later moved them two points clear of second-placed City on a raucous afternoon at Anfield.

City have five games left compared to just four for Liverpool, leaving the destiny of the title in the hands of the champions. But there is a growing feeling at Anfield that this will be the season Liverpool finally end their 29-year wait to be crowned kings of English football.

Chelsea posed the last major threat to Liverpool's title bid, yet the leaders dealt with the challenge impressively to mark Klopp's 200th game as Reds manager in style. With City having difficult league fixtures looming against Tottenham and Manchester

United, Klopp's men are convinced they can hold onto pole position.

Their run-in is undoubtedly less daunting than City's, with Cardiff, Huddersfield and Newcastle on the schedule before a potential title party against Wolves at Anfield. For fourth-placed Chelsea, the loss was a blow to their bid for Champions League football next season and they will drop to fifth if Arsenal win at Watford today.

On the eve of the 30th anniversary of the Hillsborough disaster that killed 96 Liverpool fans and in the week that club legend Tommy Smith passed away, there was even more emotion at Anfield than usual. After a minute's silence featuring mosaics reading "30 years" and "96" held up by fans around the ground, Liverpool's focus was trained on avenging one of the more painful defeats in the club's recent history.

Steven Gerrard's infamous slip in 2014 led to a defeat against Chelsea that effectively gifted the title to Manchester City when Liverpool had looked odds-on to lift the trophy.

But Klopp insisted his players wouldn't be haunted by the ghosts of that collapse and they were true to his

word. Liverpool threatened an early goal when Mane whipped a pin-point cross towards Salah and he fired a volley that Chelsea keeper Kepa Arrizabalaga held well. Manchester City must win their remaining five Premier League games to retain the title, insisted Pep Guardiola as his side took top spot from Liverpool with a 3-1 win at Crystal Palace yesterday. Raheem Sterling scored twice as City rarely looked troubled despite having failed to beat Palace in their last two meetings. "We think Liverpool is able to win all the games," said Guardiola. "In the Premier League the position is in our hands and we need to win all the games. "There is no other chance if we want to make back-to-back (titles)."

Guardiola's men had to see out a nervous finale at Selhurst Park to ramp up the pressure on Liverpool when Luka Milivojevic's free-kick gave Palace hope of a dramatic comeback nine minutes from time.

Instead, City broke to seal the three points on the counter-attack when the outstanding Kevin de Bruyne teed up Gabriel Jesus to make it 3-1. The trip to south London kicked off a massive week for City with Tottenham to visit the Etihad Stadium twice in the next

six days for the second leg of their Champions League quarter-final and a vital Premier League clash with implications for both the title and top four race.

City must overturn a 1-0 first leg deficit against Spurs to progress to the Champions League semi-finals on Wednesday. Yet, Guardiola's starting line-up seemed stronger than the one he named in defeat to Mauricio Pochettino's men in midweek.

Sterling should have opened the scoring on 11 minutes when after a patient build-up, David Silva got to the by-line and picked out the England international, who somehow sliced wide with an open goal at his mercy from close range.

After a similar sitter at Burnley last season, Guardiola quickly hooked Sterling in his frustration. However, Sterling showed his maturity and why he is a contender for player of the year awards by redeeming himself in emphatic fashion just four minutes later.

A rare Palace foray forward left them exposed at the back and De Bruyne's sensational through ball allowed Sterling to break clear before side-footing the ball high beyond Vicente Guaita. "The one at Burnley was worse," added Guardiola with a smile. —AFP

Hamilton wins 1,000th race in Mercedes

SHANGHAI: Lewis Hamilton said that he "redeemed" himself with a lightning start to win the 1,000th Formula One grand prix yesterday in a blustery Shanghai. Hamilton started from second on the grid but grabbed the lead from Mercedes team-mate Valtteri Bottas on the first corner and romped to a victory which gives him the world championship lead.

The title-holder from Britain finished more than 6.5 seconds ahead of Bottas in the third Mercedes one-two in as many races this season, with Ferrari's Sebastian

Vettel third. Max Verstappen of Red Bull was fourth and Charles Leclerc in the second Ferrari was fifth.

Sixth was Verstappen's team-mate Pierre Gasly, the Frenchman earning a bonus point for clocking the quickest lap, one minute 34.742 seconds, in windy and hazy conditions. Hamilton, for whom this was a sixth Chinese Grand Prix win and 75th overall, said that it was "a little bit of a struggle this weekend for me".

The five-time world champion wrestled with his car in qualifying but said that "a shift in driving style enabled me to unlock a bit more the potential of the car". "The start was obviously great, which was really the decisive moment of the race. After that it was fairly straightforward." The 34-year-old, who now leads the Finn Bottas by six points in the standings, said that he has had problems with his starts down the years. "The first few races have been very difficult for me off the line so it's nice to finally redeem myself and rectify that," he added.

Bottas, who pipped Hamilton to pole by just 0.023 seconds, was always playing catch-up after labouring

out of the blocks. "I lost it on the start, honestly, shame about the start, I got some wheel spin on the start line," he said. Talented 21-year-old Leclerc pulled off the same trick at the expense of team-mate Vettel, darting into third, but the German ultimately prevailed in the battle of the Ferraris. Mercedes "were too quick right from the start", said Vettel, who climbed atop the podium for the first time in 2019.

There was more early drama when Toro Rosso's Daniil Kvyat tangled with both McLarens of Lando Norris and Carlos Sainz, earning the Russian a drive-through penalty. On lap 11, four-time world champion Vettel leapfrogged back in front of Monaco's Leclerc into third following radio orders from Ferrari telling the youngster to let him pass.

"We do our job, stay focused," Leclerc-agonisingly denied victory last time out in Bahrain after his Ferrari lost power—was informed on team radio after he briefly protested. Back at the front, Hamilton began pulling away, establishing a more than five-second gap on

Bottas with a third of the race gone.

With Hamilton-winner in Bahrain two weeks ago—serene up top, the real battles unfolded behind him. Vettel, under pressure after a number of unforced errors going back to last season, went wheel-to-wheel with Verstappen after both pitted for fresh tyres.

Vettel, Bottas and then Toro Rosso's Alexander Albon, who missed qualifying after a nasty crash in final practice, all exchanged fastest laps. The Thai-Briton Albon was named "driver of the day" after battling from the pits and into the points.

On lap 38 of the 56 it was Leclerc and Bottas who had a skirmish in the compelling battle for second. Leclerc then pitted and was momentarily held up by a comparatively sluggish change of tyres. Nico Hulkenberg, who qualified eighth for Renault, saw his race come to an early conclusion after the team retired his faltering car. Norris and Kvyat were also forced out before the end. The fourth race of the season takes place on the streets of Baku, in Azerbaijan, in a fortnight. —AFP