

Friday Times

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Local

The delight of the strange



SCRIBBLER'S NOTEBOOK

By Jamie Etheridge

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The shoe sits on the sidewalk, slightly askew. A well worn trainer, perhaps Nike or Adidas, with lemon yellow laces and a hole near the toe. No one is around and I stop in the middle of my morning walk to take a photo, wondering: How did one shoe end up here? Where's its partner? Did the person wearing this shoe walk home barefoot? Were they still wearing the other shoe? Did they limp/hop back to their car? Strange.

I'm a person who notices strange things. A random shoe abandoned on a sidewalk. A playing card, often an Ace or a Queen found on the side of the road. For some reason it's always just one playing card, never the entire pack scattered. How can someone lose just one playing card? Are that many people walking around Kuwait with playing cards so loosely tucked into their pocket that one falls out so easily?

Once I found a straight back chair sitting upright smack in the middle of the road. I was driving home late from work, it was dark and this stretch of road had no lights, the houses set far back off the highway, city heading into suburb. Only by luck and a quick swerve did I manage to avoid hitting the chair with my car.

"What the heck!?" I screamed out loud as I swerved back into the right lane. Thank God no traffic had been coming from the other direction. I could have ended up in

the ditch on the roadside, tall grass and weeds burying my shattered car.

How did that chair get there? Did it fall off a truck filled with kitchen chairs on its way to a party? Or more likely, did some bored teenager place in it in the middle of a quiet road in the middle of the night in hopes of causing a crash? Ten years later and I'm still wondering...

Last week while shopping, my daughters and I came out from a store and were shocked to find a taxi with two shrunken turtle shells in the back window. "Gross!" my older daughter yelled. "Ewww," her sister chimed in. Why would anyone display such grotesqueries in the back dash of their taxi window? On closer inspection, we realized that the shrunken turtle shells were actually deflated, brown leather soccer balls. They had been placed, one on each end, of the taxi's back window dash and likely deflated by the heat. They were also covered in dust, sunken in and frankly gross to behold.

We went on about our day, finished our shopping and enjoyed some ice cream and didn't give the yucky soccer balls a second thought. But the next day on my way to work, I noticed that the taxi in front of me also had soccer balls in the back dash window. This one looked like a fairly new soccer ball, still white and inflated properly. "Odd," I thought. Then a few days later, another taxi, another two soccer balls. These were black and gray triangled. So is this a trend? Taxi and bus drivers often decorate their vehicles. Most of you have probably noticed the rainbow colored caterpillar or the fake flowers stuck in the grill of the bus or taped to the back windows. Soccer balls are a new phenomenon, though, or at least new to me.

Curiosities are delightful. They add interest and texture to our days. They surprise us in unexpected and wonderful ways. They often lead us to pause and reconsider

something ordinary that we otherwise would move past without a second thought.

Take for example Kuwait's Mirror House. This unique and unusual work of art, also a functioning home and museum, is one of my favorite tourist destinations in Kuwait. Entirely bedecked with murals made from broken mirrors, it combines art and whimsy with the practical. I always take visitors from abroad to see it, and if we're lucky, meet and talk with the artist, Lidia Al-Qattan, who has spent a lifetime creating it. There are many lovely museums in Kuwait but the Mirror House delights in an entirely different way because it is so unique and unexpected.

Finding a solitary shoe on the sidewalk similarly delights. It's odd, out of the ordinary. A curiosity to ponder. A child's shoe, I can understand. It's easy to imagine a scenario where a mom was pushing the child in a stroller and the toddler kicked one of her shoes off and mom didn't notice until they reached home. This makes sense, there's a ready and simple explanation.

But an adult shoe? In the middle of the sidewalk? I'm not talking about one washed up on the beach (though there is sadly a horrifically bizarre story of single shoes with the feet still in them washing up on beaches in the Pacific Northwest. So far at least 15 lone feet, most of them ensconced in an athletic shoe or sneaker, have been found this past decade. Google it.)

Thankfully for me, the shoe I found on the corniche had no foot attached. The size 10 Nike was fairly clean, fairly new looking but wholly abandoned and without a partner. I picked it up and checked the label and then planted it on the concrete bench facing the water. Perhaps its owner will return, looking for it, and if not, others may also notice the solitary sneaker, looking out to sea.

Medical fees



Local Spotlight

By Muna Al-Fuzai

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In 2017, two ministerial decrees were issued to review the health service fees in hospitals and specialized centers for expats registered in the health insurance system, and revise the fees for non-Kuwaitis who come to Kuwait on visit visas. The first decision stipulated an expatriate should pay KD 2 for a visit to a clinic instead of KD 1 and KD 5 at hospitals instead of KD 2. The fees include the disbursement of medicines, regular x-rays and regular analyses. Visiting an outpatient clinic will cost KD 10 and a stay in the public ward will cost KD 10 per day.

The decision provoked widespread outrage among expatriates, who considered the new fees exorbitant and beyond the financial capacity of many of them. Some expatriates sent their families back home and remained alone in Kuwait due to the increases in health fees, in addition to the increase in apartment rentals, skyrocketing school fees and the high cost of living in recent years.

Last week, the health minister issued another ministerial decree to amend some health fees for non-Kuwaiti residents registered with the health insurance system. According to the new decision, visits to public and spe-

cialized hospitals will now cost KD 10, including medicines, regular x-rays and regular analyses.

This is a matter of concern. Kuwait is among the countries that has attracted expatriate workers since ages. Workers are divided into two categories - those who work in the government sector, such as teachers and doctors, and those working in the private sector. Workers in the latter category earn modest salaries amid the high cost of living. With prices of food and consumer goods also increasing, it's a daily suffering, especially for those who have families in Kuwait.

I believe that the right to fair and just treatment is an inherent human right, as stated in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and in many international conventions, notably the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights. The expat is compelled to pay for health insurance, so they are entitled to obtain necessary medical services. Such decisions add pressure on expatriates and make it almost impossible for most of them to keep or bring their families here, making Kuwait an unattractive environment for skilled and creative workers, who are needed.

Workers are forced to send their savings abroad instead of spending on their families in Kuwait, leading to a recession in many commercial sectors. I do not want Kuwait to become a male-only society for expatriates. All business owners in the private sector must be responsible for their staff and their health insurance and its costs in full. Only then will they realize how hard the life of an expat is in Kuwait.

PHOTO OF THE DAY



A buzzard feeds on its prey during a migration through Kuwait. - Photo by Hamad Bureslee/KUNA

Kuwait Times

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Local



Photo Feature

DRIED GRASSES: A POTENTIAL FIRE HAZARD FOR KUWAIT?



The unprecedented rainfall Kuwait experienced this year was seen by many as a blessing and its impacts are still being felt across the country. Many of the 'lakes' in the desert may have disappeared but acres and acres of dried out scrub brush, weeds and grasses that grew up all over the country during the rainy season are now dried out and dead, choking empty sand lots, roadside verges, highway meridians and junctions.

Join the Fifth Ring Road from Airport Road and in the cloverleaf junction you will find bushes grown knee high but all dried out and, possibly, a tinderbox fire hazard.

Similar patches of dried out grasses can be found all over Kuwait including in residential and commercial areas and along most of the main highways. These dried out grasses will only grow drier as the summer heat intensifies and even the smallest spark, a lit cigarette tossed from the window of a passing car, for instance, could ignite a blaze.

Kuwait Times asked the Fire Services Directorate for their view on the fire hazard. In response, the department informed Kuwait Times that the Ministry of Public Works was responsible for the issue. Calls to the Ministry of Public Works were not returned before this publication went to print.

— Photos by Yasser Al-Zayyat and Joseph Shagra



Local



By Ben Garcia

Every year hundreds of undocumented children are born in Kuwait. Some are born out of wedlock - a crime in this conservative Muslim country. Some are born to low earning parents who either cannot afford to sponsor children due to low salaries or because they are living and working illegally here. Among the highest numbers of undocumented children are Filipino children due to the large Filipino population in the country.

In 2018, 484 undocumented Filipino children were repatriated from Kuwait to the Philippines.

and will certainly be arrested. So some illegal couples resort to extreme methods like abortion or giving birth at home. "Aside from illegal abortions, the most practical solution for an unmarried pregnant woman is to leave Kuwait," a Filipino community leader told Kuwait Times on the condition of anonymity.

Illegal relationships

"I have witnessed many Filipino couples in Kuwait who faced several issues related to illegal relationships. Most of them marry immediately to avoid getting jailed. I have even helped to cut the umbilical cord of a baby because a woman gave

Navida detailed four categories of undocumented children assisted by the embassy with the help of her office: (1) Totally abandoned - left by one of the parents or left homeless because their parents have been arrested by the authorities; (2) Illegitimate children of parents who are not legally married; (3) Children whose parents do not meet the required salary cap set by Kuwait; and (4) Children whose parents were laid off from work or have no job at all.

Repatriation

Repatriated children are assisted from the time they seek help from the embassy to the last stage of their journey back home. "Normally, our embassy advises parents to accompany their minors if they are sent back to Manila. The Assistance to Nationals Unit (ATNU) and DSWD office in Kuwait jointly help to secure their repatriation. When the parents are not able to provide plane tickets, we request the department back home to shoulder the cost of the tickets. At the airport in Manila, they will be received by our personnel and given transport money so they can go back to their provinces if they are living outside Manila. Through our intervention, we also assist children so they are accepted in schools back home," Navida said.

In Kuwait, these undocumented children are usually denied a formal education as they are not accepted in any school if they have no residency permit. The repatriation program, which has been going on for years now, takes place on a regular basis. Navida explained the step-by-step process by the embassy to repatriate undocumented Filipino children.

"Parents normally come to us seeking help. If their child was born without medical intervention, usually they have no birth certificate or record. We advise parents to report the circumstances of the birth of their child to the department handling records of births in Kuwait. They will ask for an affidavit from the parents, who will be summoned by the police for fingerprinting. The parents should also provide six photographs of the minor. The photos will be forwarded by the embassy to the ministry of interior - an interview of the parents will follow to investigate the birth. They should wait for the result of the investigation, which normally takes weeks. If there is no onward record, the child will be allowed to leave. But the authorities here are very strict when the fathers are Arabs, especially Kuwaiti, because they will never allow a child of a Kuwaiti man to leave Kuwait," Navida said.

The program to repatriate undocumented Filipino children has been possible through the help of the ministry of interior. Navida advises parents of undocumented children to always cooperate and consider the welfare of these kids. "I call upon parents of undocumented children to always consider their kids' welfare. We are here tasked by the government to help. Do not delay the repatriation for your children's sake. Bring them to our attention and we will assist you till the end. Without our endorsement, no approval will be given by the authorities, so I urge you to come and coordinate with us with regards to your undocumented children. Do not be afraid because we are doing our best for all our fellow kababayans. Do not worry, we will not hand you over to the authorities - we will accompany you so you won't get into trouble," she assured.

Undocumented children in Kuwait



Only a small percentage of these are born out of wedlock, explains Victoria Navida, an attache at the Philippine Embassy in Kuwait who works under the Department of Social Welfare and Development (DSWD), an agency attached to the Department of Labor and Employment (DOLE). "A majority of those 484 children were born here legally; however, due to circumstances within their families, for example some of their parents were laid off or their contracts expired, so automatically the children's residencies were affected," Navida told Kuwait Times.

Navida said another reason for children becoming illegal is because sometimes the parents' salary is lower than the KD 450 cap set by the Kuwaiti government. "They are unable to renew their children's visas if there are issues of the salary cap," she explained.

In Kuwait, it's illegal for unmarried couples to live together. However a woman who delivers in hospital without being married can face jail time

birth inside a flat and could not be taken to the hospital because she was unmarried. If an unmarried woman gives birth in a hospital, she can be arrested and put in solitary confinement until the trial is complete," she said.

Expatriate workers can get married in Kuwait, provided they meet the civil and religious requirements of their home countries. Embassy and consulate staff can perform civil marriage ceremonies. Peter (not his real name) is a married man from the Philippines. He has a child with his first wife. After he came to Kuwait, he felt lonely and began a relationship with a household worker in early 2000. They eventually got married in a Muslim ceremony in 2005. They had a child, but since Peter was unable to obtain a visa for them (due to the salary cap issue), he had to send them home during an amnesty. Peter once again felt lonely, so he got "married" for the third time. "I found a new partner and got a fake marriage certificate from someone. I now have three kids with my new wife," he said.

“If an unmarried woman gives birth in a hospital, she can be arrested”

Local



Kuwaitis' passion for reading began during early times

The Kuwaiti society has witnessed, throughout history, many social, economic, cultural and political changes that contributed to the country's superiority and prosperity on all levels. One of the most important periods of time that left the greatest impact on the Kuwaiti society was during the reign of Sheikh Mubarak Al-Sabah (Mubarak Al-Kabeer) from 1896 to 1915.

Because of the commercial activity seen by the country during that period and the expansion of Kuwaitis' cultural perceptions and their links with neighboring peoples such as Iraq and Iran, together with India and Africa, they became more aware of the need to expand their knowledge and learning.

A study published by Kuwait Center For Research and Studies (CRSK) in 2005 said books, magazines and manuscripts at that time were the most important sources of knowledge, as they indicated the interest of the people of Kuwait in spreading knowledge and religious culture at the time. During the reign of Sheikh Mubarak Al-Sabah, the biggest private library, owned by Sheikh Nasser Mubarak Al-Sabah, was founded, according to CRSK.

The library boasted more than 3,000 important sources and references collected by Sheikh Nasser himself, along with 80 poetic volumes, religious, literary and language books as well as rare manuscripts. The study referred to other private libraries that were inside Kuwaiti houses which represented great sources of science and culture, such as Sheikh Abdullah Khalaf Al-Dahian's library, which contained over 500 rare manuscripts.

As for magazines and newspapers, CRSK said Kuwaitis were familiar with what was published in Arab newspapers and magazines in the early twentieth century, including Egyptian, Lebanese



and Iraqi newspapers containing administrative, political and commercial news and various public announcements. As for commercial libraries, Kuwait National Library was the first to open to the public; it contained newspapers and magazines from Cairo, Damascus, Baghdad and Beirut. It was founded by Sheikh Yousef Al-Qenai and financed by the Kuwaiti people, and played a cultural role in that period to satisfy Kuwaitis' passion for reading. — KUNA

ACK holds exhibition of engineering projects

By Faten Omar

The Australian College of Kuwait (ACK) held the 10th Engineering Students' Graduation Project Exhibition yesterday at Salwa Sabah Al-Ahmad Theater and Hall in Salmiya, where students from four engineering programs - mechanical, electrical, civil and petroleum - showcased their final graduation projects. The exhibition was developed as a platform to provide students with the opportunity to present their innovative concepts, reflecting their knowledge, competency and special technical skills acquired during their studies at the School of Engineering.

Dr Mohammed Abdul-Niby, Dean of the School of Engineering, said that the exhibition has 47 outstanding projects conducted by 181 students this semester. "We are proud of the results achieved by our students who joined forces in teams to fulfill the projects' requirements under the supervision and guidance of our faculty members. Our students' projects are from different engineering departments including civil, electrical, mechanical, and petroleum specializations," he said. "These projects are amazing and can be improved by time with the right experience. Many companies can adopt some projects and turn them into reality, which may save millions of dinars for Kuwait. Also, we are cooperating with Sabah Al-Ahmad Center for Giftedness and Creativity to apply for patents for some of the ideas and projects," Abdul-Niby added.



Local

Analysts predict Kuwait oil price of \$65-75 till year end

Experts believe US measures will not lead to complete suspension of Iran oil exports

KUWAIT: Two Kuwaiti analysts anticipated that Kuwaiti crude oil prices would be in the vicinity of \$65-75 per barrel till the end of this year, as global Brent prices would range between \$70 and \$80 per barrel. The predications came after the US announced recently that waivers for Iranian oil exports will expire on May 2.

Some Gulf countries, including Saudi Arabia and UAE, can offset a potential oil supply crush due to US measures, believing that the world oil price would hinge upon the compliance of the importers of Iranian oil to US sanctions and a looming decision by OPEC and non-OPEC members to boost production, they told KUNA.

Dr Khaled Bodi, an oil analyst and chairman of an administrative consulting center, said Iran will be affected by the recent US decision to drop exemptions given to eight buyers of Iranian

oil, should the latter commit to US sanctions. Bodi expected global oil prices will be negatively affected by the US measures, regarding the recent jump in oil prices as a normal, albeit temporary, reaction. Accordingly, the price will be back to the level that preceded the cancellation of waivers, hitting nearly \$70 per barrel until the year end, he pointed out.

However, the expert disparaged the impact of the US decision on Kuwaiti oil production and prices as "limited" due to expectations that there would be no remarkable oil shortage. At least one third of buyers of Iranian oil are anticipated not to comply with US sanctions, while OPEC may not do something in a formal and collective mode to make up for a looming oil crunch.

Mohammad Al-Shatti, another Kuwaiti oil expert, said some observers, including Citibank,

believed that US measures will not lead to a complete suspension of Iranian oil exports. He believed that the US sanctions could only lead to a 50 percent drop in Iranian oil exports, which hit 1.2-1.3 million barrels per day in the first quarter of 2019.

The latest US move will be in effect as of May 2, he said, noting that Iranian oil output, according to OPEC figures, fell from 3.8 million bpd in June 2018 to 2.7 million bpd in March 2019, down 1.1 million bpd. On oil price levels, the Kuwaiti expert said they are expected to go up to \$70 per barrel in the coming month, while Kuwaiti crude will be in the vicinity of \$65-75 per barrel.

The US administration on Monday said it will not renew exemptions granted last year to buyers of Iranian oil, a more stringent than expected decision that caught several key importers who

have been pleading with Washington to continue buying Iranian oil sanctions-free. In November, Washington renewed the oil sanctions on Iran six months after the US pulled out from the landmark JCPOA clear deal, and gave eight countries - China, India, South Korea, Japan, Taiwan, Turkey, Italy and Greece - a six-month waiver from the measures.

Iranian Foreign Minister Mohammad Javad Zarif warned the United States against attempting to close the Strait of Hormuz between the Arabian Gulf and the Gulf of Oman. If the United States tries to stop Iran from using the Strait of Hormuz to transport its oil exports, Tehran will continue to find international buyers for its oil and Washington "should prepare for consequences," he stressed during a recent UN conference. —KUNA

Kuwait stresses multilateral diplomacy

NEW YORK: Kuwait stressed the importance of multilateral diplomacy at regional and international levels and the need to strengthen collective action to face regional and global challenges. This came in a speech delivered by Kuwait's Deputy Permanent Representative to the UN Bader Al-Munayekh at the High-Level Plenary Meeting



Kuwait's Deputy Permanent Representative to the UN Bader Al-Munayekh.

of the General Assembly to Commemorate the International Day of Multilateralism and Diplomacy for Peace. He underlined the UN role in leading a global action to face the world challenges, including a humanitarian action to alleviate the suffering of people during armed conflicts and natural disasters.

Munayekh said the UN also plays a role in facing the effects of climate change, the promotion of human rights and the rule of law, adding that there can be no progress on these issues without engaging effectively in collective action and constructive dialogue. "The world today faces contemporary challenges and trans-boundary threats, more complex than in the past," he said, adding that peace and security threats have been in a rising pattern over the past years.

"To achieve the goals of sustainable development, climate change and other issues, we need global concerted efforts," he said. "Multilateralism is the core of the global system", he confirmed, adding that the cornerstone of this multilateral system is the Charter of the United Nations, which sets out a clear framework for regulating relations between nations. Munayekh referred to Kuwait's liberation in 1991, which is "an example of what can be achieved when the efforts of the international community come together under the umbrella of the United Nations, and through legitimate resolutions of the Security Council", he said. —KUNA

Kuwait urges securing humanitarian aid delivery to Syrians

KUWAIT: Kuwait's Permanent Representative at the UN Ambassador Mansour Al-Otaibi stressed yesterday the importance of securing safe, perpetual, and obstacle-free delivery of humanitarian aid to all Syrian areas. Otaibi made his remarks while addressing a UNSC session on the humanitarian situation in Syria on behalf of humanitarian partners of the Syrian humanitarian file; Belgium, Germany and Kuwait.

He reminded all warring parties in Syria of UNSC Resolution 2449 (2018), which authorizes a one-year extension of cross-border aid deliveries targeting 13 million people in Syria, which has been effective for more than four months. The resolution also calls on all sides to secure providing safe, unimpeded, and sustained access for the humanitarian convoys of UN and its partners, including medical and surgical supplies, to Syria in 2019, said the Kuwaiti diplomat. It is about time for all warring parties to honor such a commitment and exert further efforts to guarantee an uninterrupted delivery of humanitarian assistance to the needy ones in all Syrian areas, he added.

Meanwhile, Otaibi indicated that the Syrian crisis, which has entered its ninth year, has seen some of the worst-ever conflicts in modern time, adding the humanitarian situation there is still cruel and that over 12 million people are currently in a desperate need for humanitarian aid and protection. "We are very worried about the recent escalation of air strikes and shelling in northwestern Syria, which has impacted the civilian population there and forced the displacement of over 110,000 people since February," he said.

Such an escalation has led to deterioration of the humanitarian situation tragically in the de-escalation zone in northwestern Syria, Otaibi noted, adding several civilians were killed and wounded as a result of this tension. He expressed Kuwait's condemnation of such a loss of human lives due to the recent increase of violence, reminding all parties in Syria of their commitments to the international humanitarian law and international human rights law on protecting civilians and the country's infrastructure.

He mentioned UNSC Resolution 2286 (2016), which strongly condemns attacks against medical facilities and personnel in conflict situations, and Resolution 2427 (2018), which calls on all parties to armed conflict to comply strictly with the obligations applicable to them under international law for the protection of children in armed conflict situations.

Furthermore, the Kuwaiti diplomat noted that anti-terrorism efforts should not hinder humanitarian action in Syria, reiterating call for a full implementation of the memorandum of understand-



Kuwait's Permanent Representative at the UN Ambassador Mansour Al-Otaibi.

ing signed between Russia and Turkey in Idlib, which calls for a ceasefire in around Syria in accordance with UNSC 2401.

He also voiced his country's major concern over the current situation at Al-Houl refugee camp, noting that refugees' number jumped to over 70,000 in April, compared to 10,000 in December, 2018, and that women and children comprise 92 percent of the camp's residents, most of whom were victims of terrorist groups' violence, including the so-called Islamic State.

Otaibi also urged UNSC to expeditiously meet the special needs of refugees, particularly the elders and handicapped persons, calling on parties to armed conflict to allow humanitarian missions, including UN and its partners, to permanently access refugees' camps without delays or bureaucratic procedures. At Rukban refugee camp, some 40,000 people are still in desperate need for humanitarian aid and medical attention, he said, noting that the last aid provided by a humanitarian convoy to the camp's residents last February is beginning to run out.

There are reports on lack of commodities and necessities at the camp, particularly health services and safe clean water, in addition to scattered ammunition in the area, which pose a grave threat to the refugees' safety, said the Kuwaiti diplomat. According to the international law, Syria has seen some of the most dangerous crimes since the outbreak of the conflict that were committed by violators of the international humanitarian law and international human rights law, he mentioned, reiterating Kuwait's firm commitment to anti-impunity.

Refugees should be granted safe, unconditional, and honorable return to their homelands, Otaibi affirmed, reiterating Kuwait's compliance to all commitments made at the conference to support Syrian humanitarian response, and urged all donors to honor their financial commitments as soon as possible. —KUNA

Local

News in brief

Driving test appointments go online

KUWAIT: The traffic department said appointments for driving tests will be done through the interior ministry website (www.moi.gov.kw) from Sunday, April 28, 2019. It added the working hours at the test departments are from 8 am until 5 pm. —Hanan Al-Saadoun

Work ban on five nationalities

KUWAIT: According to media reports, the residency affairs department of the interior ministry has banned the entry of nationals from five African countries to work in Kuwait: Burkina Faso, Djibouti, Ethiopia, Guinea and Guinea-Bissau.

Jilted boyfriend makes a scene

KUWAIT: A Kuwaiti attempted to break the door of the house of his ex-girlfriend while in an abnormal condition. The woman had dumped the suspect after she discovered he was a drug addict. He kept calling her for two weeks, but she ignored him. She was then surprised when he banged her door at dawn, screaming hysterically. The woman called police, who responded and found the man in an abnormal condition. The woman lodged a complaint against him and criminal detectives are handling the case. —Al-Rai

No plans to relocate smart city project

By Meshaal Al-Enezi

KUWAIT: Official spokesman of the housing authority Ibrahim Al-Nashi categorically denied a newspaper report that the South Saad Al-Abdullah project will be moved to another location. He stressed nothing about moving the project was presented to the Korean contractor. He said the housing authority continues the implementation of the project, which is considered as Kuwait's first smart city. The environmentally-friendly city will be built through partnership between Kuwait and South Korea.

Clinics selling illegal meds

The health ministry's assistant undersecretary for drug and food control Dr Abdullah Al-Bader said a private clinic and a center were found selling drugs in violation of the law and ministerial decisions controlling the process of dealing with medicines. Inspection committees that inspected a private polyclinic and a private clinic discovered a large quantity of medicines, some of which are not approved by the health ministry and smuggled from neighboring and Southeast Asian countries. He said the case will be sent to the public prosecution.

Exams to begin at 10 am

Informed educational sources said exams of the second semester of the current academic year 2018/2019 will begin at 10 am during the month of Ramadan. The decision came after the Civil Service Commission set the working hours of government bodies including the educational ministry to begin at 9:30 am. The sources said it is difficult to start the tests at the same time as school staff are reporting to work.

Negative impact of street vendors



KUWAIT: The phenomenon of street vendors on main roads and underpasses and in squares and marketplaces causes negative hygienic, economic and social effects. Street hawkers usually offer foodstuff that does not fulfill relevant health requirements and poses health hazards. However, municipal inspectors are doing their best to curtail this uncivilized phenomenon in an effort to enforce the law and protect consumers. —KUNA





Biden announces
 2020 run for
 White House

Top Sri Lanka defense official resigns over blasts



VLADIVOSTOK: Russian President Vladimir Putin meets with North Korean leader Kim Jong Un at the Far Eastern Federal University campus on Russky Island in the far-eastern Russian port of Vladivostok. —AFP

Kim, Putin vow to seek closer ties

Moscow supports efforts to prevent nuclear conflicts

VLADIVOSTOK: North Korea's Kim Jong Un and Russia's Vladimir Putin vowed to seek closer ties as they met for the first time yesterday, in talks aimed at countering US influence. Putin emerged from the meeting in Russia's Vladivostok saying that like Washington, Moscow supports efforts to reduce tensions on the Korean peninsula and prevent nuclear conflicts. But he insisted that Pyongyang "needs guarantees of its security, the preservation of its sovereignty", and took a veiled swipe at the US for trying to strong-arm North Korea.

"We need to... return to a state where international law, not the law of the strongest, determines the situation in the world," Putin said. The summit in the Far Eastern port city came with Kim locked in a nuclear stand-off with the United States and Putin keen to put Moscow forward as a player in another global flashpoint. The two leaders greeted each other warmly, shaking hands and sharing smiles, at the start of meetings on an island off Vladivostok that lasted nearly five hours.

Putin, known for delaying meetings with international guests, was waiting for Kim when he emerged from his limousine. Both men said they were looking to strengthen ties that date back to the Soviet Union's support for the founder of North Korea, Kim's grandfather Kim Il Sung.

Borscht, crab, dumplings

Kim said he hoped to turn the modern relationship with Moscow into a "more stable and sound one" while Putin said the visit would give a boost to diplomatic and economic ties. Putin said he supported Kim's efforts to normalize relations with the United States and hoped to find out "what Russian can do" to help with the issue of denuclearization. The two later shared a lunch that included borscht, crab salad and venison dumplings, Russian news agency TASS reported.

Putin told reporters after Kim departed that he would fill in Washington on the results of the talks. "There are no secrets here, no conspiracies... Chairman Kim himself asked us to inform the American side of our position," said Putin, who was due to fly on to Beijing for another summit. Kim, who arrived a day earlier in his armored train, was expected to stay in Vladivostok until Friday for cultural events that Russian media have reported will include a ballet and a visit to the city's aquarium.

The meeting was Kim's first with another head of state since returning from his Hanoi summit with US President Donald Trump, which broke down in February without a deal on North Korea's nuclear arsenal. It followed repeated invitations from Putin after Kim embarked on a

series of diplomatic overtures last year. Since March 2018, the North Korean leader has held four meetings with Chinese President Xi Jinping, three with South Korea's Moon Jae-in, two with Trump and one with Vietnam's president.

At the meeting with Trump in Hanoi, the cash-strapped North demanded immediate relief from sanctions, but the talks broke up in disagreement over what Pyongyang was prepared to give up in return. Russia has already called for the sanctions to be eased, while the US has accused it of trying to help Pyongyang evade some of the measures-accusations Russia denies. There were no concrete announcements or agreements, but analysts said yesterday's meeting was valuable to both sides.

"For North Korea, it's all about securing another exit. China talks about sanctions relief but it doesn't really put it into action," said Koo Kab-woo, a professor at the University of North Korean Studies in Seoul. "For Russia, North Korea is elevating it back to one of the direct parties, on the same footing as China."

North Korean laborers

Among the issues that were likely discussed was the fate of some 10,000 North Korean laborers working in Russia and due to leave by the end of this year under sanctions. Labor is

one of North Korea's key exports and sources of cash. Pyongyang has reportedly asked Russia to continue to employ its workers after the deadline. Moscow was a crucial backer of Pyongyang for decades and their ties go back to the founding of North Korea, when the Soviet Union installed Kim Il Sung as leader.

The USSR reduced funding to the North as it began to seek reconciliation with Seoul in the 1980s, but Pyongyang was hit hard by its demise in 1991. Soon after his first election as Russian president, Putin sought to normalize relations and met Kim Jong Il-the current leader's father and predecessor-three times, including a 2002 meeting also held in Vladivostok.

China has since cemented its role as the isolated North's most important ally, its largest trading partner and crucial fuel supplier, and analysts say Kim could be looking to balance Beijing's influence. While ties between Moscow and Pyongyang have remained cordial, the last meeting between their leaders came in 2011, when Kim Jong Il told then-president Dmitry Medvedev that he was prepared to renounce nuclear testing. His son has since overseen by far the country's most powerful blast to date, and launch of missiles which Pyongyang says are capable of reaching the entire US mainland.—AFP

International

Sudan braces for 'million-strong' protest demanding civilian rule

Three military council members resign

KHARTOUM: Sudanese protesters began gathering for a "million-strong" march yesterday to turn up the heat on the ruling military council after three of its members resigned following talks on handing over power. The rally outside the army headquarters comes after the military rulers and protest leaders agreed to set up a joint committee, to chart the way forward two weeks after the ouster of veteran president Omar al-Bashir.

"We call on our people, who have been demanding a transitional civilian rule, to participate in the million-strong march," said the Alliance for Freedom and Change, the umbrella group leading the protests. "Our sit-in will continue to protect our revolution and to ensure that all our demands are achieved," the alliance said in a statement. As yesterday's protest got underway, witnesses in downtown Khartoum said crowds of protesters gathered outside the Egyptian consulate and embassy which were surrounded by riot police.

Several people held banners calling on Egyptian President Abdel Fattah al-Sisi not to "interfere in our affairs", after Cairo hosted a summit of African leaders calling for more time for a transition to civilian rule in Sudan. Others held signs reading "no to military rulers", while across the city demonstrators began arriving at the army headquarters from the states of Jazera and White Nile. The planned mass march follows a late-night meeting between the military council and leaders of the protest movement's umbrella group. "We have an agreement on most demands presented in the document of the Alliance for Freedom and Change," Lieutenant General Shamseddine Kabbashi, spokesman of the military council, told reporters afterwards.

He did not elaborate on the key demand of handing power to a civilian government, but said there "were no big disputes". The Sudanese Professionals Association, which spearheaded months of protests against Bashir, described the meeting as a step towards "confidence-building". "Both sides agreed on the importance of joint cooperation to steer the country towards peace and stability," the SPA said yesterday. Writing on Twitter, the association said a "joint committee" was being set up to "discuss outstanding disputes" as part of efforts to reach a "comprehensive agreement".

Middle path

After returning from the protest site yesterday, activist Ahmed Najdi said he was expecting "a joint military-civilian sovereign council, which I think is the middle path and most protesters would agree to that". Wednesday's meeting was followed by the military council announcing three members of the ruling body had stepped down after demands from protesters. They were Lieutenant General Omar Zain al-Abdin, Lieutenant General Jalaluddin Al-Sheikh and Lieutenant General Al-Tayieb Babikir.

The late night developments came as Siddiq Farouk, one of the leaders of the protests, said the demonstrators were also preparing for a general strike if the military council refuses to hand power to a civilian administration. The council, led by General Abdel Fattah al-Burhan since his predecessor quit after barely 24 hours in the post, says it has assumed power for a two-year transitional period. Despite Bashir's fall, demonstrators have kept up their encampment outside the military headquarters to press their



KHARTOUM: Sudanese protesters wave the national flag during a 'million-strong' march outside the army headquarters in the capital Khartoum. — AFP

demands. For the first time, Sudanese judges said they would join the sit-in on Thursday "to support change and for an independent judiciary".

Revolutionaries want civil rule

Protesters in Khartoum were joined Wednesday by hundreds of demonstrators from the central town of Madani, the second major batch of new arrivals from outside the capital in as many days. "Revolutionaries from Madani want civilian rule," they chanted, according to witnesses. The previous day a train laden with demonstrators rolled from Atbara, where protests began on De-

ember 19 against a decision by Bashir's government to triple bread prices.

They swiftly turned into nationwide rallies against his rule and that of the military council that took his place. The protesters have found support in Washington, which has backed their call for civilian rule. "We support the legitimate demand of the people of Sudan for a civilian-led government, and we are here to urge and to encourage parties to work together to advance that agenda as soon as possible," State Department official Makila James said on Tuesday.—AFP

Disabled Syrian woman makes UN plea for the invisible

UNITED NATIONS: A young Syrian with cerebral palsy, who trekked with a wheelchair from her homeland all the way to Germany as a refugee, on Wednesday urged the UN Security Council to focus more on Syria's "invisible" disabled people. It was the first time the council has formally considered the rights of disabled people affected by conflict, a rights watchdog said.

"I call on all members of the council to do more to make sure (of) humanitarian access to address the urgent needs of the people affected by the conflict, particularly people with disabilities," said Nujeen Mustafa, 20. She reached Germany in September 2015 after an arduous month-long 2,000-kilometer journey with family members that included a terrifying boat trip to Greece, after it became too dangerous for them to stay in Aleppo.

Mustafa, who dreamed of becoming an astronaut, wrote a memoir of her experience and even Nobel Peace Prize laureate Malala Yousafzai hailed her as an inspiration. A student in Germany, Mustafa has become an advocate for the rights of disabled people in conflict, trying to get states and UN agencies to include them in humanitarian aid. "There is very little data on how many people with disabilities live in Syria or have fled to neighboring countries and what our needs are," she said. "And without this



SYRIA: Members of the Syrian Civil Defense, also known as the 'White Helmets', search the rubble of a collapsed building following an explosion in the town of Jisr al-Shughur, in the west of the mostly rebel-held Syrian province of Idlib. — AFP

data, the programs and policies just don't meet our needs. We're invisible." New York-based Human Rights Watch backed Mustafa's call, saying the Security Council "should urgently act to improve the protection of people with disabilities in armed conflict." Mustafa drew the council's attention to the situation in Syria's jihadist-controlled Idlib region, home to about three million people and which has come under increasing bombardment since former Al-Qaeda affiliate Hayat Tahrir al-Sham took full control of it in January.—AFP

US bars Chechnya PM over human rights

WASHINGTON: The United States said yesterday it would bar the entry of Chechnya's prime minister for allegedly orchestrating human rights violations in the Russian republic. Under a US law that requires action against foreign officials over human rights concerns, the United States announced that Chairman Muslim Khuchiyev and his immediate family will be ineligible for US visas if they apply.

The State Department said in a statement that it had "credible information that Muslim Khuchiyev was involved in torture." Chechnya's pro-Moscow authoritarian leader Ramzan Kadyrov last year elevated Khuchiyev, previously the mayor of the Chechen capital Grozny which was reduced to rubble when Russia crushed two separatist wars that left tens of thousands dead.

While the Muslim-majority republic has largely been pacified, Chechen authorities have still engaged in unlawful arrests, torture and extrajudicial killings, according to a report last year by the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe. The public designation comes amid a slew of rifts between Russia and the United States, which has pressed President Vladimir Putin over Moscow's support for separatists in Ukraine and alleged interference in US elections.—AFP

International

In N Syria, skin disease ravages young and old

'Leishmaniasis cases to rise as weather becomes warmer:' WHO

AL KARAMAH, Syria: Inside a dank clinic in the north of war-torn Syria, a girl covered in scabs wails and tries to wriggle out of her mother's arms to escape a nurse's needle. Gently holding fluffy cotton wool over her eyes, the male health worker injects a transparent liquid into the crusty blemishes on the tip of her nose. She is one of hundreds in the northern province of Raqa to be suffering from leishmaniasis, a skin disease caused by a microscopic parasite spread by sand flies.

The illness is endemic to Syria, the World Health Organization (WHO) says, but has become more prevalent during the eight-year civil war. Dozens of children and adults are seeking treatment between the damp-smelling walls of the health centre in the northern town of Karama. Among them, 15-year-old Shaza al-Omar awaits her turn. "I've got some on my leg, my sister's got 11 lesions on her face, and my brother has some on his eye," says the teenager, draped from head to toe in black.

Not far off, a father tries in vain to pacify his toddler daughter, who screams as the nurse injects solution into lesions on her face. Once it is over, he carries her out of the clinic clutching a large packet of potato crisps. A woman sits on a stretcher, an ailing leg stretched out in front on her, as a nurse injects medicine into one blemish after another.

Marshes, rubbish

The number of leishmaniasis cases in Syria doubled from 2010 to 2018 to more than 80,000

patients, WHO says. Many were in northern and northeastern areas rocked in recent years by clashes to expel the Islamic State group. At the health centre in Karama, Wadha al-Jarrad, 55, has rushed in to ask about treatment for her family—her grandchildren, her daughter-in-law, and even her elderly husband. "He's always scratching it until it bleeds," she says of her husband's sore on his hand. "He itches it, and I tell him not to," says Jarrad, a black and white scarf wrapped around her graying hair. "We can't sleep at night because of all the flies," she adds.

Leishmaniasis is usually linked to poverty, poor sanitation, and malnutrition, WHO says, factors likely compounded by the war. Across Karama, insects hover over piles of rubbish between rows of modest houses, some still bearing scars of battles that resulted in Kurdish-led forces kicking IS out in 2017. Younes al-Naeemi, the manager of the Karama health centre, says the clinic has received 4,000 cases of leishmaniasis from the town and surrounding villages since April last year.

"Marshes, humidity, the house's proximity to farming land, as well as widespread rubbish" have fuelled the spread of the skin condition, he says. But lack of awareness has also compounded the problem. Some people "come immediately after discovering they have been affected, while others don't do anything until it gets worse and treatment becomes much harder," he says. "Treatment is available, but awareness is more important," he says.



AL KARAMAH, Syria: A doctor injects a Syrian child with a treatment for leishmaniasis skin disease at a health centre in Karama, in northern Syria, about 26 kilometers east of Raqa. — AFP

Nobody cares

After a peak of almost 6,800 cases in Raqa province last year, WHO says there has been a decline in cases at the start of this year. The international organization has distributed mosquito nets, provided medicine to treat the

disease, and supports six health centers in Raqa, including in Karama. But it warns the rates could again rise as the weather becomes warmer. "Sandfly breeding usually peaks when the temperature starts to rise in spring and summer," WHO spokesman Yahya Bouzo said. —AFP

'Spy vulture' held in war-torn Yemen

SANAA: Griffon vulture Nelson crossed into war-torn Yemen in search of food but ended up in the hands of Yemeni fighters—and temporarily in jail for suspected espionage. The sand-colored bird came down in the country's third city of Ta'ez, an unusual move for a young vulture that can soar for long distances across continents in search of food and moderate weather.

Nelson, approximately two years old, embarked on his journey in September 2018 from Bulgaria, where his wing was tagged and equipped with a satellite transmitter by the Fund for Wild Fauna and Flora (FWFF). But he seems to have lost his way, eventually coming down into Ta'ez—under siege by Huthi rebels but controlled by pro-government forces, who mistook Nelson's satellite transmitter for an espionage device and detained the bird.

Spy device

Forces loyal to the government believed that the GPS tracker attached to the bird may have been a spy device for the rebels. Hisham al-Hoot, who represents the FWFF in Yemen,



SANAA: A Bulgarian Griffon vulture, called Nelson, is seen in the Yemeni capital Sanaa. — AFP

travelled from the rebel-held capital Sanaa to Ta'ez to plead with local officials to release the helpless animal. "It took about 12 days to get the bird," he told AFP. "The Bulgarian foreign ministry reached out to the Yemeni ambassador, who in turn contacted local officials (in Ta'ez) and told them to immediately give the organization the vulture."

Hoot said that the bird migrated from Bulgaria, to Turkey, to Jordan, Saudi Arabia and then Yemen—where the FWFF lost track of the bird. Nelson was MIA until April 5, when the conservation group received hundreds of messages from Yemenis concerned about the creatures' welfare. Today, the locally-famous vulture is being properly fed and getting stronger every day. —AFP

African migrants left in limbo at Yemen stadium

ADEN: In a disused football stadium in the Yemeni city of Aden, hundreds of African migrants find themselves in limbo—banned from onward travel, but unable to return home. The majority from Ethiopia, the migrants are facing tough conditions after being confined to the stadium in the government bastion, according to the United Nations' migration agency. "The site is not fit to be hosting anyone, not even one person, let alone thousands," said Olivia Headon, the International Organization for Migration's (IOM) Yemen spokeswoman.

While most of the 1,789 migrants are adult men, they also include 389 boys and 28 girls under the age of 18, Headon said. The youngest is believed to be 11 years old. Yemen has descended into chaos over the past four years of conflict, with both the Iran-backed Huthi rebels and a rival pro-government military alliance led by Saudi Arabia accused of acts that could amount to war crimes. But the country remains on an established route for migrants from the Horn of Africa, who typically first travel by land through Djibouti before eventually undergoing perilous boat journeys across

the Gulf of Aden to Yemen. Mohammed Nour took the well-worn route recently from his native Ethiopia, hoping Yemen would be a temporary stop en route to Saudi. "I don't want to work in Yemen. I want to work in Saudi Arabia," he told AFP at the makeshift camp. Many migrants try to make their way through Yemen to Gulf nations such as Saudi Arabia, often looking for work. But many do not even survive the journey, dying at sea or at the hands of panicked smugglers.

Massive health concern

Nearly 150,000 migrants arrived in Yemen last year, according to the UN. The IOM has said that around 92 percent of the migrants were Ethiopian, while the rest were from Somalia. Southern port Aden—home to the beleaguered government—is currently not on the front line of Yemen's war, but still wracked by economic problems and poverty. Security forces in the city have launched a campaign to repatriate all migrants over the past week, a police source told AFP.

After placing them in makeshift camps in residential areas across the city, most have been relocated to the stadium in the May 22 neighborhood, the source said. There, they sit in the open-air arena, picking at bread, pleading with officers or closing their eyes under the hot sun. "There's no food or drink. There are no bathrooms or showers. We are hungry—they're killing us with hunger. I told them death is better," Mohammed Nour told AFP. —AFP

Climate protests hit London's bustling financial hub

Environmentalists aim to slash greenhouse gas emissions

LONDON: Environmentalists glued themselves to the London Stock Exchange entrance and staged impromptu concerts in the middle of traffic on the final day of a campaign that brought parts of the UK capital to a standstill. Activists from Extinction Rebellion—a fast-growing movement founded last year by British academics—have used 11 days of festive but highly disruptive rallies to focus global attention on climate change.

Their ultimate goal is to slash greenhouse gas emissions to a net level of zero by 2025 and bring biodiversity loss to a halt. But their immediate aim was to get UK politicians to look past hot-button issues such as Brexit and think of ways to save the planet from irreparable damage that younger generations think will hurt them the most. Extinction Rebellion members said their campaign received a great deal of public attention but failed to get the government to budge.

“The traffic disruptions have really, really brought the whole climate and environment out from being a niche issue,” guitarist Nick Onley said while leading a group of 20 through a Beatles song performance in the middle of a busy London intersection. “But it hasn’t been a complete success. We haven’t got to that point where the government says yes, please talk to us,” Onley said as drivers stuck in the heart of London’s bustling financial district furiously honked their horns.

The protest outside the London Stock Ex-

change building that stand in the shadow of St. Paul’s Cathedral saw several glue themselves to the pavement in front of one of the glass entrance turnstiles. One person wearing a gas mask also chained himself to one of the sleek building’s stone columns. “Many of the most environmentally destructive companies in the world have their stock market listings at the London Stock Exchange (LSE),” the group said in a statement. “This institution literally trades in the devastation of our planet.” AFP reporters counted seven campaigners at the building’s entrance. Police eventually separated them and trading opened as usual.

‘Not here to be liked’

Activists had earlier targeted high-profile and tourist-heavy locations such as the Oxford and Piccadilly Circus intersections. They also camped out on a statue-filled square facing the grand parliament building and potted plants and flowers on a central bridge. Their tactics of sitting down in the middle of busy roads and refusing peacefully to move have proved remarkably effective at generating media headlines.

But some activists admitted that Londoners often seemed befuddled about why the group thinks such tactics will help stop climate change. “Some people don’t like our methods but do like our message,” retiree Trudy Warner said. “What



LONDON: Climate change activists hold a banner as they block traffic during a demonstration next to the Bank of England, right, in the City of London financial district in London during environmental protests by the Extinction Rebellion group. — AFP

we say is: We’re not here to be liked. We’re here to get attention.” The entire campaign saw police make 1,130 arrests and press charges against 69 people. Retired engineer Godfrey Whitehouse said he spent three nights in a police sta-

tion holding cell. “I am just an ordinary member of the public who is absolutely terrified of the climate,” Whitehouse said. “And we would like to apologize to the public for the disruptions,” he added softly. — AFP

S Africa floods toll ‘around 70’

DURBAN: Around 70 people have been killed in devastating floods in South Africa, an official said yesterday, while 1,000 people have been forced from their homes. Heavy rains have lashed the southeast of the country, tearing down homes and ravaging infrastructure in KwaZulu-Natal (KZN) and Eastern Cape provinces. The acting leader of KZN province, which includes port city Durban, Sihle Zikalala said “we are worried and quite devastated by the increase of the number of fatalities”.

“We’re now told that the number (of fatalities) is getting around 70. The final figure will be released during the day,” he said at a media briefing. “It is the first time in KZN that we experience such a loss of people, that we lose people in such a great number.” President Cyril Ramaphosa visited the deluged province on Wednesday and pledged government funds to help those affected by the extreme weather.

Emergency responders have reported collapsed buildings and flooded roads, blocked sewer lines and toppled electricity pylons. “So all this part it just fell... We only have two survivors, one of them is my son and the other friend,” said Ntombi Ztombi Zama whose sister was killed in a landslide at a property in Chatsworth, south of Durban. “When I came and I see everything demolished it just broke me. It was bad.” South African military personnel have been dispatched to help rescue and evacuation efforts. The South African Weather Service has warned that more heavy rain and gale force winds are on the way. — AFP

Spain PM won’t rule out post-poll alliance with centre-right

MADRID: Spain’s Socialist prime minister refused yesterday to rule out including centre-right group Ciudadanos in any governing alliance if his party wins a weekend general election. Polls suggest the Socialists will win the most seats in Sunday’s snap polls but will lack a majority to govern on their own and will once again have to form alliances with other parties to stay in power. “My commitment is to talk to all political parties, within democracy... democracy is not ‘vetocracy,’” Prime Minister Pedro Sanchez said during an interview with public television TVE when asked if he would be willing to govern with Ciudadanos.

Sanchez came to power in June 2018 after winning a surprise no-confidence vote against his conservative predecessor with the support of far-left party Podemos and Catalan separatists and Basque nationalist parties. But several surveys show the Socialists and Ciudadanos could together win a majority of seats in Spain’s lower house of parliament on Sunday. Ciudadanos leader Albert Rivera has ruled out an alliance, repeatedly urging voters to “oust Sanchez” because of his willingness to seek dialogue with Catalan separatist parties who attempted to break Catalonia away from Spain in 2017.

Ciudadanos has governed at the local level with both the Socialists and the conservative Popular Party (PP). Rivera’s party allied with the PP and upstart far-right formation Vox to remove the Socialists from power in Andalusia following a regional election there in December. But before the election Ciudadanos had propped up the minority Socialist government in the southern region. The Socialists and Ciudadanos tried and failed to form a governing alliance following an inconclusive general election in 2016. —AFP

EU slams Russian ‘attack’ after passport change for Ukraine

BRUSSELS: The European Union condemned Moscow yesterday for making it easier for people in separatist areas of east Ukraine to obtain Russian passports, calling it a fresh assault on the war-torn country’s sovereignty. The controversial decree signed by President Vladimir Putin “is another attack on Ukraine’s sovereignty by Russia”, a spokeswoman for EU foreign affairs chief Federica Mogherini said in a statement.

“The timing of such a decision immediately after Ukraine’s presidential election... shows Russia’s intention to further destabilize Ukraine and to exacerbate the conflict,” the spokeswoman added. The EU urged Russia “to refrain from actions that are against the Minsk agreements and impede the full reintegration of the non-government controlled areas into Ukraine”. Germany and France yesterday also condemned Moscow, saying the move undermined the Minsk peace agreements.

That deal was signed by the leaders of Russia, Ukraine, France and Germany in the Belarus capital of Minsk in 2015. Putin’s decree was signed three days after Ukraine elected a new president and is aimed at residents of the unrecognized Donetsk and Lugansk republics that broke away from Kiev in 2014 and are governed by Moscow-backed rebels. People living in the separatist regions will now be entitled to receive a Russian passport within three months of applying for one. —AFP

Forest fires blight Europe amid drought fears

Lack of rain turns forests into potential tinderboxes

BERLIN: Weather experts warn of drought in Europe over its summer as firefighters tackled forest fires yesterday, and farmers fretted over wilting crops and a repeat of 2018's arid conditions. In Germany, Europe's biggest economy, farmers are fearful at the start of the growing season following below-average rainfall earlier this year—bad news after last year's drought. Unless significant rain falls in May, experts say there is little chance of decent crops. "If the dry weather continues in the coming months, the drought of 2018 could be repeated or even exceeded," warned Udo Busch, head of the German weather service's agricultural section.

A lack of rain has turned some forests into potential tinderboxes. Over the past few days, German firefighters have tackled blazing forest fires in the states of Hessen, Brandenburg and Thuringia. A senior fire chief has even asked authorities, including the army, to lend helicopters in order to "react adequately". Scandinavia has also been hit, with Swedish firefighters currently tackling 10 to 15 forest fires a day after precious little rain this month. The most serious blaze broke out over 300 hectares in the southern district of Hassleholm, forcing 49 people to be evacuated.

Decisive month is May

Last year nearly 25,000 hectares of land was ravaged by fires in Sweden. In neighboring Norway, a forest fire narrowly missed the community of Sokndal, but around 70 firefighters were still extinguishing flames yesterday over an area of 750 hectares. Dry conditions are a headache for northern Europe's farmers. Phil Hogan, the European Union's agriculture commissioner, yesterday

promised farmers and rural communities in member states will get EU support should drought strike again. In the German state of Brandenburg, surrounding Berlin, barren fields resemble desert landscapes. There are fears of a repeat of last year's poor harvest, when crops were down between 30 to 80 percent, threatening the livelihoods of many German farmers. Across Brandenburg's 780 farms, reported losses for 2018 topped 93 million euros and the state had to provide 72 million euros in aid.

Rain is forecast for the coming days. But it is expected to be far insufficient for what is needed to mitigate a worrying situation. "We sincerely hope for rain—the decisive month for us is May," said farmers' association spokesman Tino Erstling. In neighboring Austria, the first signs of drought have already appeared in the east and north, raising fears of another bleak harvest. Rainfall is already down to just a quarter of the 10-year average in recent weeks.

Signs point to suffering

Potato growers are demanding a relaxation of pesticide regulations to better control numbers of wireworm, which they say are flourishing because of drought. "The current signs point to suffering for agriculture," said Hagelversicherung, a specialist insurance company. The situation is even more shocking in the Czech Republic, where 99 percent of the country has already been hit by drought over the last five weeks.

A third of the country is classed among the worst two drought categories on a six-level scale, according to the Intersucho (Interdrought) portal,



SWEDEN: A picture in Tulatorp near Hastveda, in the Hassleholm region in southern Sweden, shows tractors with fertilizer tanks filled with water working to put out a forest fire. — AFP

which monitors drought in central Europe. The drought has come a month earlier than last year. In many Czech villages, the wells are already dry, forcing the population to find other ways to get water. Forecasters predict rain this weekend which may help save some crops, but farmers remain sceptical.

Hardest hit will be the regions northwest of Prague, where hops crucial to the Czech beer industry are grown, and in the southeast, famous for

its wine and grain. A couple of windy days over the past weeks haven't helped as the wind has dried the top layer of soil.

The drought is also devastating Czech forests as it encourages breeding of the bark beetle with damage this year projected to top one billion euros. The Czech Republic has been grappling with bark beetle infestation for several years and experts say the current situation is the worst in Czech history. — AFP

Mozambique braces for Cyclone Kenneth

MAPUTO: A powerful cyclone was set to make landfall in northern Mozambique yesterday, barely a month after a super-storm slammed into the country's centre, leaving hundreds dead and causing devastation. As Cyclone Kenneth barreled towards the northeastern coast after swiping the Comoros, the UN warned of flash flooding and landslides. Dozens of schools were closed and all flights between the capital Maputo and Pemba were cancelled.

Forecasters at Meteo-France warned that Kenneth could trigger waves off Mozambique's northeastern shore as much as five meters higher than usual. The Red Cross warned it was "especially concerned" about the storm's impact, as many communities in Mozambique are still recovering from a cyclone that hit on the night of March 14-15. The most powerful storm to strike the region in decades, Cyclone Idai cut a path of destruction through Mozambique, Malawi and Zimbabwe. It left more than a thousand dead and causing damage estimated at around \$2 billion.

Kenneth passed by the Indian Ocean archipelago nation Comoros yesterday, battering it with high winds and heavy rains, the country's Meteorological Office wrote on Facebook. "We must stay alert, avoid touching fallen power cables, wait for permission before driving and keep children at home," it said. An AFP team in the Comoran capital Moroni saw shacks destroyed by the rain and wind, and high seas as a result of the cyclone. "I have three children, one is small, just one month and 10 days



MAPUTO: People stand by damaged houses and fallen trees in Moroni after tropical storm Kenneth hit Comoros before heading to recently cyclone-ravaged Mozambique. — AFP

(old). We were here until 11 p.m. last night when things deteriorated," local resident Abdillah Alaoui told AFP. "It was our neighbors who evacuated us."

Tanzanian authorities ordered schools and businesses shut in some southern districts on Thursday and urged people to brace for extreme winds and rain. The Tanzanian provinces of Mtwara, Lindi and Ruvuma were at highest risk and could experience strong winds and downpours from the middle of yesterday, the country's meteorological agency said. Residents in Mtwara were already leaving the coastal enclave with their families, some on foot, for emergency shelters, witnesses told AFP by phone.

Gelasius Byakanwa, the governor of Mtwara, ordered schools closed in his province and asked "students to stay home and employees not to go to their offices". — AFP

Ukraine passes law strengthening Ukrainian language use

KIEV: Ukraine's parliament yesterday passed a law enforcing the use of the Ukrainian language in official settings, a move likely to rile Russian-speaking areas of the country and Moscow. Lawmakers approved the measure, which also increases the quota for Ukrainian-language television and radio programming, just days after Russian-speaking Volodymyr Zelensky was elected president. Officials at all levels as well as doctors, teachers, lawyers and others, will have to speak Ukrainian or face fines. The law will not apply to private communications or religious rites, media reported.

The law will not be enforced for three years as centers are set up around the country to support the learning of Ukrainian language and culture, MP Nikolai Knyazhitsky told the Interfax-Ukraine news agency. Outgoing President Petro Poroshenko on Twitter called the vote a "historic event", comparing it to the regeneration of the army and the creation of a unified Ukrainian Orthodox church during his term in office. President-elect Zelensky, a comedian who has played the role of president in a Russian-language drama but until now has had no political experience, often speaks in Russian. — AFP

International

Biden announces 2020 run for White House

Former US vice president challenges Trump

WASHINGTON: Former US Vice President Joe Biden jumped into the race for the White House yesterday, positioning the veteran Democrat as a frontrunner among the many candidates seeking to challenge Donald Trump in 2020. The party's 76-year-old senior statesman is the most experienced and recognized Democrat in the race, a popular former vice president who has been dominating early polls following months-even years-of campaign planning.

In a tweet accompanied by a three-and-a-half minute video, Biden said he could not stand idly by as US President Donald Trump "fundamentally altered the character of this nation". "The core values of this nation... our standing in the world... our very democracy... everything that has made America-America-is at stake," he wrote in the post. "That's why today I'm announcing my candidacy for President of the United States."

Biden, whose working-class appeal remains intact despite nearly half a century in Washington politics, is seen as a comforting, known quantity for American voters who will be vetting some 20 Democrats now officially in the presidential field. But recent controversy over his tactile style, particularly with women, could dampen a rollout that he envisioned as the final main entry to the Democratic primary battle. Even before his official announcement, Biden, who served eight years as Barack Obama's vice president, led most surveys of Democratic voters.

The RealClearPolitics poll aggregate puts him as favorite with 29.3 percent support, followed by independent Senator Bernie Sanders at 23 percent. The record number of candidates means

Biden finds himself in a field of unprecedented diversity as he makes his third run for president, following two unsuccessful attempts in 1988 and 2008. After the death of his son Beau from cancer, Biden opted out of a presidential campaign in 2016. As he let the suspense over his political plans drag out for months, his broad lead however has been whittled down, with newer and notably young faces gaining ground including moderate South Bend, Indiana Mayor Pete Buttigieg, who at 37 is less than half Biden's age.

Atop the polls

Complicating matters, the last weeks of waiting have been clouded by revelations from multiple women accusing Biden of touching them inappropriately or making them feel uncomfortable with his shows of affection. Biden, an old-school politician who acknowledges he is quick to offer hugs and shoulder rubs as he forges connections with voters, has not outright apologized for his behavior, but he pledged earlier this month to be "more mindful" about society's changing boundaries. After Biden and Sanders in the Democrat race, Senator Kamala Harris is third on 8.3 percent, followed by Buttigieg with 7.5 percent, progressive Senator Elizabeth Warren on 6.5 percent and former Texas congressman Beto O'Rourke 6.3 percent. Biden leads the pack largely on the strength of his lifelong political experience—he was elected to the US Senate at just 29 — and his name recognition. But in the early stages of what will be a heated primary battle, the status of frontrunner is by no means assured.

"The key question is whether Biden's current support represents more of a floor for him than

fore chaining him by his ankles to the back of the truck. Byrd was alive for some two miles (3.2 kilometers) while being dragged along the road, a pathologist testified during King's trial.

He was decapitated when his body hit a concrete drain pipe, the pathologist said. Byrd's dismembered body was found outside a black church in the small town of Jasper, Texas, near the border with Louisiana. The killing horrified the US public and kindled memories of the era of racist lynchings of African Americans in the South. Ten years after King's conviction, President Barack Obama signed a law aimed at preventing hate crimes which was named after Byrd and Matthew Shepard, a young gay man murdered the same year.

In a request for a stay of execution filed with the Supreme Court late Tuesday—which was ultimately denied—King's lawyer, A. Richard Ellis, claimed that King's attorney during his 1999 trial ignored his request to plead not guilty. "From the time of indictment through his trial, Mr King maintained his absolute innocence, claiming that he had left his co-defendants and Mr Byrd some time prior to his death and was not present at the scene of the victim's murder," Ellis said. "Despite Mr King's explicit and repeated requests, his counsel conceded his guilt to murder at trial." Repeated efforts to have King's conviction overturned had failed, with the Supreme Court refusing to examine the case in 2018. —AFP



WASHINGTON: In this still image taken from video released by the Joe Biden 2020 Presidential Campaign, former US Vice President Joe Biden announces his bid for the presidency in the 2020 elections. — AFP

a ceiling," Kyle Kondik of the University of Virginia's Center for Politics told AFP. "If it's a floor, he's in great shape. If it's a ceiling, his candidacy could fall apart quickly." Shortly after the announcement, Obama praised Biden but avoided endorsing him. Obama spokeswoman Katie Hill said: "President Obama has long said that selecting Joe Biden as his running mate in 2008 was

one of the best decisions he ever made. He relied on the Vice President's knowledge, insight, and judgment throughout both campaigns and the entire presidency. The two forged a special bond over the last 10 years and remain close today." However, a source familiar with Obama's thinking said the former president is not yet ready to endorse Biden. — AFP

US white supremacist who lynched black man executed

WASHINGTON: An avowed white supremacist convicted of a notorious racist murder—chaining a black man to the back of a pickup truck and dragging him to his death—was executed on Wednesday in the US state of Texas. John William King, 44, was put to death by lethal injection at 7:08 pm Central Time at the Texas State Penitentiary in Huntsville, Texas. King was one of three white men convicted of carrying out the 1998 murder of James Byrd Jr, one of the most gruesome racist killings in recent US history.

Lawrence Brewer was executed in 2011 while Shawn Berry—who cooperated with investigators—was given life in prison. Berry testified during his trial that he and the two others were out drinking beer and cruising in a 1982 Ford pickup truck when they picked up Byrd, who was hitchhiking, and drove him to a remote country road. The men severely beat the 49-year-old Byrd be-

US measles cases highest since 2000

NEW YORK: The US recorded 695 cases of measles in 2019, the most of any year since the disease was declared eliminated at the turn of the century, officials said Wednesday, ahead of a campaign to reinforce the message that vaccines are safe. The surge comes amid a growing global movement against inoculation, with an estimated 169 million children missing out on the vital first dose of the measles vaccine between 2010 and 2017, according to a UNICEF report.

The UN Children's Fund found the United States topping the list of high-income countries where children had not received their first round of immunization, at over 2.5 million. It was followed by France and Britain, with over 600,000 and 500,000 unvaccinated infants respectively over the same period. The new tally of American cases confirmed by US authorities surpassed the previous high of 667 reached in 2014.

Anti-vaxxers

Resurgence of the once-eradicated, highly-contagious disease is linked to the

growing anti-vaccine movement in richer nations, which the World Health Organization (WHO) has identified as a major global health threat. The anti-vax phenomenon has adherents across Western countries but is particularly high profile in the US, where it has been fueled by medically baseless claims spread on social media.

"The high number of cases in 2019 is primarily the result of a few large outbreaks—one in Washington State and two large outbreaks in New York that started in late 2018," the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention said in a statement. People infected with the virus brought it to the United States from Israel and Ukraine and passed it on to members of their communities, many of whom had not been vaccinated.

Although New York and Washington State have been the main areas affected cases have been found in 22 states. "A significant factor contributing to the outbreaks in New York is misinformation in the communities about the safety of the measles/mumps/rubella vaccine," CDC said. In a separate statement confirming the new record, Health and Human Services Secretary Alex Azar said "measles vaccines are among the most extensively studied medical products we have, and their safety has been firmly established over many years." — AFP

International

India's Modi faces fight in Maharashtra state that could decide majority

Unemployment, rural distress dents ruling parties' popularity

NASHIK, India: Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi's ruling party and a Hindu nationalist ally face a big electoral challenge in the critical western state of Maharashtra where rural distress, unemployment and drought may hurt Modi's bid for a second term. Strategists already expect Modi's Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) to lose ground in the most populous state of Uttar Pradesh in the north, as voting is underway in a general election that began on April 11 and ends on May 19.

That coupled with possible losses in Maharashtra, home to India's financial capital, Mumbai, and the second most seats in parliament after Uttar Pradesh, would make it harder for the BJP-led coalition to win a governing majority, they say. The BJP and its regional ally, Shiv Sena, won 41 of 48 seats in Maharashtra in the 2014 election. There are 545 seats in the lower house of parliament.

How rural India votes will largely determine the outcome. Nearly two-thirds of its 1.3 billion people live in the towns and villages in the countryside. Only a few weeks ago, Modi appeared to have turned back the opposition tide in Maharashtra with his tough line on Pakistan after Islamist militants based there killed 40 Indian police in a suicide attack in the disputed Kashmir region.

Modi ordered an air strike on a suspected militant camp in Pakistan, and doubled down on security as a campaign issue. "In March, it looked like the BJP-Shiv Sena alliance in Maharashtra had an edge due to the air strikes," said

Pratap Asbe, a political commentator based in Mumbai. "But in the past few weeks the opposition has seized on issues such as unemployment and lower crop prices that have hurt voters," he said.

Farm suicides

Reuters interviewed 148 farmers from 11 districts in the state in March and April, and nearly two-thirds said their incomes had fallen and they blamed the government for not doing enough to support crop prices. The BJP-led state government's slow response to the farm crisis has inflamed the anti-incumbency mood ahead of a state election due by October, Abse said. Protests by farmers in the state have grown in the last two years as crop prices plunged, while some gave up hope.

There were 3,661 farm suicides in Maharashtra in 2016, nearly a third of the national toll that year, according to government data. Recent numbers are not available. The farm crisis is acutely felt in the sugar industry. Sugar mills in the state, India's second-biggest producer of sugar, cotton and soybeans, have run up a record \$614.8 million in arrears to cane farmers due to poor sales amid a sugar glut.

"Sugar mills are not paying government-mandated prices for cane and have also been delaying payments for months," said Madhav Pawase, a farmer in Nashik district, nearly 175 km (110 miles) north of Mumbai. Modi's administration has done little to ensure mills pay the right price to farmers on time, added Pawase,

said. This is in contrast to the federal housing scheme, which offers subsidized loans for home purchases.

Nation on the move

With rapid urbanization, a shortage of affordable homes has spurred the growth of slums and informal settlements in cities across India. There are 1.77 million homeless people nationwide, according to the 2011 census data, although rights groups say the actual figure is at least three times higher. The government plan, Housing for All, is meant to create 20 million new urban housing units and 30 million rural homes by 2022. But the rollout has been slow, and campaigners say it will not fix the issue of homelessness and informal settlements.

Some states are improving slum conditions, and assuring residents they will not be evicted for some years. In eastern Odisha state, authorities have promised land titles to 200,000 households in urban slums and those on city outskirts, as well as loans to build homes. But for others, evictions are a daily threat. At least 11 million people in India risk being uprooted from their homes and land as authorities build highways and airports and cordon off forests, according to advocacy group Housing and Land Rights Network (HLRN).

Kerala's model is the only viable solution to end homelessness, said Shivani Chaudhry, executive director of HLRN. —Reuters



BHOPAL: Supporters of the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) wear T-shirts supporting Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi in Bhopal. — AFP

who voted for Shiv Sena in the 2014 election. Poor rains have added to farmers' woes. Rainfall in the state was 23 percent below normal in 2018, wilting crops and causing water shortages.

Farmers say the government is reluctant to open cattle shelters where livestock can get free water and fodder. The lack of jobs is also major

issue for voters in Maharashtra, where competition for government positions has fuelled community tensions. The state's dominant Maratha community has organized protests and shutdowns, including marches to Mumbai in recent years, to demand that government posts are reserved for them. —Reuters

Indian state vows to end homelessness with free flats

BANGKOK: The Indian state of Kerala is offering free flats to homeless people, an ambitious model that activists say other states must follow as a nationwide "Housing for All" plan falls short. The first 145 families moved into their newly constructed flats in a 270-unit complex in Adimali town in southern India this month, a state official said. The state has surveyed its homeless population, and will build more than 400,000 homes for those who qualify, said UV Jose, chief executive of the LIFE Mission, a government agency overseeing the project.

"Those without a home are the poorest, most vulnerable. Many cannot afford to buy a home, no matter how cheap it is," Jose said yesterday. "A home is a basic necessity. With a home, they can feel more secure and confident, and they can focus on other matters, which can improve the quality of their life," he said. Each unit will cost about 400,000 rupees (\$5,700) to build, and will be wholly funded by the government, Jose

India court reverses TikTok app restrictions

NEW DELHI: An Indian court has reversed a decision that ordered Google and Apple to take down Chinese-owned video app TikTok over the spread of pornographic material, local media said. The controversial but wildly popular app allows users to upload and share short 15 second clips from their phones and claims to have 500 million users worldwide—more than 120 million of them in India. It is already banned in neighboring Bangladesh and was hit with an enormous fine in the United States for illegally collecting information from children.

The Wednesday ruling by the Madras High Court in India's southern Tamil Nadu state requires the popular platform to prevent "obscene videos" from being posted. "(The court) warned if any controversial video violating its conditions were found uploaded using the app, it would be considered a contempt of court," a report by the Press Trust of India agency said. On April 16, India's government demanded Google and Apple remove the service from

its app stores, though the order did not stop those who had already downloaded the app from using it.

The case against TikTok was launched by an activist group that said the app encouraged pedophiles and pornography. India's government told the court on Wednesday that they had formed a committee to suggest ways to regulate apps like TikTok, PTI said. TikTok told the court that they had removed around six million controversial videos from the platform since the order was announced banning new downloads last week.

The app hit the headlines in India earlier in April after a 19-year-old man was accidentally shot dead by a friend in Delhi as they posed with a pistol to make a video on the platform. TikTok has become a major rival to Facebook, Instagram and other social network sites among teenaged smartphone users in the past year.

Bangladesh banned TikTok in February as part of a clampdown on internet pornography. The same month, the US Federal Trade Commission (FTC) said a \$5.7 million fine ordered against the company was the largest imposed in a child privacy investigation. The social network failed to obtain parental consent from underage users as required by the US Children's Online Privacy Protection Act, FTC officials said. — AFP

Top Sri Lanka defense official resigns over blasts

Catholic churches close, suspend all public services

COLOMBO: Sri Lanka's top defense official resigned yesterday over security failures that led to the deadly Easter bombings, as Catholic churches suspended all services fearing further attacks. Sri Lanka's government has come under increasing pressure over the revelation it failed to act on intelligence about planned attacks, which claimed nearly 360 lives, and Hemasiri Fernando had been widely expected to step down.

A defense ministry official said Fernando had submitted a letter of resignation to head-of-state Maithripala Sirisena. "He told the president that he was accepting responsibility and resigning so that the president can make a new appointment," the official said, speaking on condition of anonymity. Indian intelligence shared several specific warnings about attacks with Sri Lankan authorities, an Indian source said, but the information was not given to ministers, in what the government has called a "major" lapse.

Authorities are now in a desperate hunt for suspects linked to the attacks, and police yesterday released the names and photos of three men and three women they want to question. Tensions remain high, with the capital on alert over rumors of fresh bombs, but police said there had been no credible reports of explosive devices. Sri Lanka's Catholic church nonetheless suspended all public services and closed

churches "on the advice of security forces". Private burials will still be carried out. Sirisena met with political party leaders on Thursday and announced he would revive a military-police body last used during the country's fight against Tamil insurgents to coordinate operations after the bombings. In the past, the joint operations command was headed by a senior military figure and included members of the military as well as police and intelligence.

Visa-free plan halted

Security forces using state of emergency powers arrested 16 more suspects overnight, bringing the total in custody to 74. The army, navy and air force poured more than 3,000 additional troops onto the streets to help police. Authorities have banned drone flights and the government suspended plans to implement visa-free travel for tourists from 39 countries-including European Union nations, Australia and the United States-for six months from May 1.

Sri Lanka's police chief warned on April 11 of possible suicide bombings against churches by local Islamist group National Thowheeth Jama'ath (NTJ), citing information from a foreign intelligence agency. India warned Sri Lanka several times of possible attacks, based on information from suspects arrested in India over links to the Islamic State group, a source close to the In-



COLOMBO: Soldiers stand guard outside St. Anthony's Shrine in Colombo following a series of bomb blasts targeting churches and luxury hotels on the Easter Sunday in Sri Lanka. — AFP

dian investigation told AFP. But that information was not shared with top ministers in Sri Lanka, the Colombo government has conceded.

"It was a major lapse in the sharing of information," deputy defense minister Ruwan Wijewardene said Wednesday. Sirisena, who is also defense and law and order minister, has pledged to make "major changes in the leadership of the security forces and additional resignations were expected after Fernando's. —AFP

Nepal marks quake anniversary as rebuilding continues

KATHMANDU: Nepal yesterday marked the fourth anniversary of a massive earthquake that killed almost 9,000 people and left millions homeless, some of whom are still living in temporary shelters. Nepal's prime minister K P Sharma Oli joined locals and civil servants at a memorial in the Kathmandu Durbar Square, a UNESCO world heritage site being rebuilt after it was badly damaged in the April 2015 quake.

"I would like to offer my condolences to those all who lost their lives," Oli said. "We are here remembering the pain of that day... and it is also important to examine how much work we have been able to do in the last four years to restore and rebuild what we lost." A minute's silence was observed around 11:56 am—the time the 7.8-magnitude quake hit, triggering avalanches and landslides across the Himalayan nation and destroying schools and hospitals.

The disaster also reduced more than a hundred monuments to rubble, including centuries-old temples and royal palaces in the Kathmandu valley that attracted visitors from around the world. The National Reconstruction Authority, the government body overseeing rebuilding, says that half of the families left homeless in the quake have already completed reconstruction and started living in their new homes. Another 30 percent are currently building new homes.

Families were given about \$3000 in government grants over three installments to rebuild. "We still have a lot to do and we will complete it in the next 20 months," said Sushil Gyawali, chief of the authority, whose five-year mandate ends at the end of 2020. But a \$9 billion reconstruction effort has been plagued by political



KATHMANDU: Nepali Prime Minister Khadga Prasad Sharma Oli known as KP Sharma Oli, center, visits the reconstruction site of Kathmandu Durbar Square which was damaged by the 2015 earthquake, on the fourth anniversary of the disaster in Kathmandu. — AFP

infighting, bureaucracy and confusion among quake victims over how to obtain the grants. The government also faces an estimated \$4 billion shortfall in reconstruction funds.

Experts also fear that a rush to rebuild has put pressure on quake survivors to take out expensive loans and build homes that may be too small to be functional for families. "We are now sharing a three-roomed flat. Even this was built with a loan. Quake victims need more support from the government," said Sri Ram Shrestha, 48, who lost his two-storey house in the quake. Nepal rests on a major fault line between two tectonic plates. On the eve of the anniversary, the country was hit with three tremors, the strongest of which was 5.2 magnitude. — AFP

Pakistan polio vaccine teams on edge after fatal attacks

CHAMAN, Pakistan: Polio workers across Pakistan were told to remain vigilant yesterday after multiple attacks on vaccination teams killed at least three people this week during an ongoing push to eradicate the disease from the restive country. The latest victim, a polio worker, was shot in southwestern Balochistan province yesterday morning, following separate attacks targeting health workers in the country's northwest earlier this week that left two police officers dead.

"The attack has taken place in a remote area, and we have received reports that one female polio worker has been killed," Attaullah Shah, a district police chief, said, saying a second health worker was also critically injured in the attack. Security officials in Pakistan said that authorities have instructed polio teams to remain 'vigilant' amid the violence. The attacks come days after more than 25,000 children were rushed to hospitals in northwestern Pakistan after rumors spread some had suffered reactions to a polio vaccine.

The panic came as health workers were carrying out a three-day vaccination campaign in northwestern Khyber Pakhtunkhwa province, with authorities saying dozens of polio workers have been beaten or harassed. Ongoing suspicion of the polio vaccine in Pakistan has been compounded recently by anti-vaccination videos circulating on social media. — AFP

International

Prince William attends emotional Anzac Day ceremony in New Zealand

Britain's Prince meets survivors of Christchurch mosques massacre

WELLINGTON: Britain's Prince William paid tribute to Australian and New Zealand troops yesterday at an emotional Anzac Day ceremony, six weeks after the Christchurch mosques massacre. The Prince, in New Zealand to meet survivors of the March 15 shooting in which 50 people were killed, laid a wreath at the annual service honoring those who have served in the two countries' armed forces.

Prime Minister Jacinda Ardern told an Anzac day dawn service the March 15 massacre showed "there is still much division to overcome" in the world and called for a recommitment "to the principles of freedom, democracy and peace that the country had fought for". New Zealand last week lowered its terror threat level from high to medium, meaning another attack was judged "feasible" rather than "very likely".

Still, the number of Anzac services in Auckland was reduced to avoid overstressing security forces. Anzac Day marks the April 25, 1915 landing of Australian and New Zealand troops at Gallipoli on the Turkish peninsula in an ill-fated WWI campaign against the German-backed Ottoman forces.

More than 10,000 Australian and New Zealand servicemen died in the campaign, and while it failed in its military objectives, it gave rise to commemorations of the courage and close friendship that bind the two countries. Prince William sat alongside Ardern during a wreath-laying ceremony at the Auckland War Memorial Museum while dozens of

armed police officers kept guard and snipers could be seen on the building's roof.

Shared humanity

Hundreds of Australians and New Zealanders travel to Gallipoli each year to attend a dawn commemoration at Anzac Cove, where the troops landed. Similar dawn services were held in Australia where Prime Minister Scott Morrison played down reports of a plot to target the Gallipoli event following the arrest in Turkey of a suspected Islamic State member.

Australian Veteran Affairs Minister Darren Chester had earlier told broadcaster ABC that Turkish police arrested someone "alleged to be involved in activities that were designed to disrupt the Anzac day services at Gallipoli". But Morrison later said the arrest was a "routine thing that we've seen happen with Turkish authorities". "We could not say at all that there is any link between that arrest and any planned event at Gallipoli," he told reporters.

In New Zealand, Muslim youth association leader Azeem Zafarullah said it was important for the Muslim community to take part in the Anzac Day services, following the carnage in Christchurch. "It's important that we show the public that we're here to represent our country—we are loyal citizens," he told reporters. Zafarullah said the Muslim community had received a lot of support after the mosque massacres, noting: "It's important that we



AUCKLAND: This handout picture shows Britain's Prince William, right, and New Zealand's Prime Minister Jacinda Ardern, second right, attending Anzac Day services at the Auckland War Memorial Museum. —AFP

show that support back."

Prince William did not speak at the Anzac Day service but was expected to give an address when he meets with survivors of the mosque shootings in Christchurch on Friday. At the earlier dawn ceremony, Ardern said "our peace was altered dramati-

cally by the terrorist attacks in Christchurch. "Let us recommit to always remembering our shared humanity, that there is more that unites us than divides us. Our sense of independence is as strong as our sense of responsibility to each other and not just as nation states but as human beings." —AFP

Facebook leads Myanmar police to weed-growing Americans

YANGON: Myanmar police have arrested one American and two locals after photos on Facebook led them to a huge plantation of towering marijuana plants near Mandalay. Pictures of the fields of weed started circulating on the platform last week—a rare sight online in a country where police photos of seized heroin and methamphetamine are far more common. Police raided the 20-acre site in Ngunzun township Monday to find nearly 350,000 marijuana plants—some up to two meters tall—380 kilograms of seeds and 270 kilograms of marijuana, the Central Committee for Drug Abuse Control (CCDAC) announced Wednesday.

A released photo showed arrested US citizen John Fredric Todoroki, 63, standing alongside Myanmar nationals Shein Latt, 37, and Ma Shun Le Myat Noe, 23. Another man, 49-year-old Alexander Skemp Todoroki, is still "at large", the CCDAC said. Police confirmed he is also American. The detainees have been charged under the Anti-Narcotics Drug and Psychotropic Substances Law, though it remains unclear what penalties they will face if found guilty.

"We didn't know this (marijuana plantation) existed," one local police officer told AFP, asking not to be named. "We only found out when we were tipped off about it." Seizures of heroin, pills and crystal meth by authorities are more common in Myanmar, where weak rule of law and conflict-riddled border areas allow for the industrial-scale production of harder drugs. Reaction on Facebook was swift, with some offering high praise for the arrests. —AFP

In rare move, French warship passes through Taiwan Strait

WASHINGTON: A French warship passed through the strategic Taiwan Strait this month, US officials said, a rare voyage by a vessel of a European country that is likely to be welcomed by Washington but increase tension with Beijing. The passage, which was confirmed by China, is a sign that U.S. allies are increasingly asserting freedom of navigation in international waterways near China. It could open the door for other allies, such as Japan and Australia, to consider similar operations.

The French operation comes amid increasing tensions between the United States and China. Taiwan is one of a growing number of flashpoints in the US-China relationship, which also include a trade war, US sanctions and China's increasingly muscular military posture in the South China Sea, where the United States also conducts freedom of navigation patrols. Two officials, speaking on condition of anonymity, said a French military vessel carried out the transit in the narrow waterway between China and Taiwan on April 6.

One of the officials identified the warship as the French frigate Vendemiaire and said it was shadowed by the Chinese military. The official was not aware of any previous French military passage through the Taiwan Strait. The officials said that as a result of the passage, China notified France it was no longer invited to a naval parade to mark the 70 years since the founding of China's Navy. Warships from India, Australia and several other nations participated.

China said yesterday it had lodged "stern representations" with France for what it called an "illegal" passage. "China's military sent navy ships in accordance with the law and the rules to identify the French ship and warn it to leave," defense ministry spokesman Ren Guoqiang told a regularly scheduled media briefing, while declining to say if the sailing had led to the withdrawal of France's

invitation to the parade of ships this week. "China's military will stay alert to firmly safeguard China's sovereignty and security," he said. Colonel Patrik Steiger, the spokesman for France's military chief of staff, declined to comment on an operational mission. The US officials did not speculate on the purpose of the passage or whether it was designed to assert freedom of navigation.

Mounting tensions

The French strait passage comes against the backdrop of increasingly regular passages by U.S. warships through the strategic waterway. Last month, the United States sent Navy and Coast Guard ships through the Taiwan Strait. The passages upset China, which claims self-ruled Taiwan as part of its territory. Beijing has been ramping up pressure to assert its sovereignty over the island.

Chen Chung-chi, spokesman for Taiwan's defense ministry, told Reuters by phone the strait is part of busy international waters and it is "a necessity" for vessels from all countries to transit through it. He said Taiwan's defense ministry will continue to monitor movement of foreign vessels in the region. "This is an important development both because of the transit itself but also because it reflects a more geopolitical approach by France towards China and the broader Asia-Pacific," said Abraham Denmark, a former US deputy assistant secretary of defense for East Asia. The transit is a sign that countries like France are not only looking at China through the lens of trade but from a military standpoint as well, Denmark said. Last month, France and China signed deals worth billions of euros during a visit to Paris by Chinese President Xi Jinping. French President Emmanuel Macron wants to forge a united European front to confront Chinese advances in trade and technology.

"It is important to have other countries operating in Asia to demonstrate that this is just not a matter of competition between Washington and Beijing, that what China has been doing represents a broader challenge to a liberal international order," Denmark, who is with the Woodrow Wilson Center think-tank in Washington, added. Washington has no formal ties with Taiwan but is bound by law to help provide the island with the means to defend itself and is its main source of arms. —Reuters

Friday Times

Lifestyle

FRIDAY, APRIL 26, 2019

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**Daniel Craig makes his
final outing as James Bond**

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'Dallas' TV star **Ken Kercheval** dies

Actor Ken Kercheval, who played the role of Texas oilman Cliff Barnes opposite Larry Hagman's devious J.R. Ewing on the hit TV series "Dallas," has died at age 83. A spokeswoman at Frist Funeral Home in Kercheval's hometown of Clinton, Indiana, confirmed the death to AFP and said his burial will be private. She did not provide further details.

Local news reports said Kercheval died on Sunday at his home after a long illness. The actor played the role of a beleaguered oil tycoon on "Dallas," constantly having to defend himself from the scheming J.R. Ewing.

He said in an interview in 2012 that he liked his character who constantly tried-without success-to outwit J.R. "J.R. was coming after my ass all the time, so I always had to defend myself," he said in a 2012 interview. "If I did something that wasn't quite right, it's because I had to." Both actors were the only stars who stayed with the series throughout



File photos shows Actor Ken Kercheval attends the Television Academy 70th Anniversary Celebration, in Los Angeles, California. — AFP

its 14-year run from 1978 to 1991. Kercheval was also part of a revival of the drama—which revolved around a wealthy feuding Texas family—from 2012 to 2014. Actress Audrey Landers, who played Barnes' girlfriend, Afton Cooper, for several seasons on "Dallas," paid tribute to him in an Instagram post, saying he would always be in her heart. "Thank you for being a great friend, scene partner, and for making history on #Dallas," she wrote. Born in 1935 in Wolcottville, Indiana, Kercheval studied art and drama and began his career as a stage actor. "He was one of those guys who was going to be the next James Dean," David Jacobs, the creator of "Dallas," told the Hollywood Reporter. He appeared with Dustin Hoffman in an off-Broadway production of "Dead End" and had roles in several Broadway musicals in the 1960s including "The Young Abe Lincoln" and "Cabaret." His big-screen credits include "Network," "The Secret Storm," and "The Lincoln Conspiracy." Beyond "Dallas," he had roles in dozens of TV series including "Murder, She Wrote," "Kojak," "L.A. Law" and "ER." —AFP

US actor **Michael Madsen** charged with drunk driving

US actor Michael Madsen, best known for his roles in Quentin Tarantino films including "Kill Bill" and "Reservoir Dogs," has been charged with drunk driving, authorities said Wednesday. The veteran 61-year-old actor was charged with two misdemeanors in connection with a DUI arrest last month in Malibu, where he crashed his Land Rover into a pole, the Los Angeles County District Attorney's Office said in a statement.

It said the incident marked the second time

in 10 years that Madsen has been arrested for drunk driving. The actor, who is scheduled to be arraigned on May 20, appears in Tarantino's latest hotly anticipated film "Once Upon a Time in Hollywood." The film is set to be released in July. — AFP



In this file photo US actor Michael Madsen poses as he arrives for the screening of the film "BlackKlansman" at the 71st edition of the Cannes Film Festival in Cannes, southern France. — AFP



A movie theatre displaying a poster of the latest Avengers movie in Mumbai yesterday. — AFP

'Avengers: Endgame' breaks India booking records

The latest Marvel movie "Avengers: Endgame" has smashed Indian box office records for a foreign film ahead of its Friday release by selling more than 2.5 million advance tickets, the country's main ticket trader said. Demand for the 22nd film in the Marvel series has been so high that some cinemas are planning round the clock screenings, said Ashish Saksena, chief operating officer of BookMyShow, an online booking platform which announced the sales figures.

With a ticket sold every 18 seconds, cinemas across the usually Bollywood-mad country "are doing everything possible to match fans' demand for the film," Saksena said. And with one day to go, the film could be on track to break the record set by the 2017 Indian film "Bahubali 2", which notched up 3.3 million advance sales and went on to become the highest-grossing Indian movie, earning \$156 million worldwide. "Avengers: Endgame" opened in parts of Asia and Europe on Wednesday

and releases in India, the United States and Canada on Friday.

The movie is releasing in multiple languages across India including English, Hindi, Tamil, and Telugu. Trade pundits have said the three-hour epic could become the first billion-dollar opening weekend in history. The first part of the saga, "Avengers: Infinity War", was the previous record holder, with less than two million advanced tickets sold. The previous 21 Marvel films have earned about \$19 billion globally. "Anticipation for Avengers is extremely high and it will record unprecedented numbers in India," Akshaye Rathi, a Mumbai-based trade analyst told AFP. "Craze for the movie is at par with Baahubali 2 and it will break records set by other Hollywood and Bollywood films by a long mile," Rathi added. — AFP

Russia state TV drama follows fate of IS women

A young woman in a headscarf speaks calmly in Russian to the camera, describing herself as a student from Moscow who now serves in a radical Islamist group in Syria. "What are you first and foremost: Russian or Muslim? What is in your heart: Allah or fear?" she asks the viewer. The Russian drama series "On The Edge" is a far cry from state television's often bland romantic or period dramas.

Following the fates of three fictional women who travel to Syria after a seductive young man recruits them to join Islamist fighters, the drama is among the first in Russia to tackle the hot button issue. Director Yevgeny Lavrentyev said it is "absolutely clear" the program is about the Islamic State group—depicting slick multi-lingual recruitment videos, black-and-white flags and

gun-toting child fighters. Due to Russia's strict laws on terrorism, however, the organization is not referred to by its name on screen.

Lavrentyev told AFP that, while he backed these laws, they had created fear among the public and media of open discussion. "It's easy for these radical Islamists to present themselves as some kind of romantic heroes and tell a lot of lies about themselves because no one really knows anything about them and people don't want to talk about this."

'Should go to jail'

Thousands of people from the former USSR have travelled to Syria to fight with Islamists, according to Russian President Vladimir Putin, since Moscow intervened on the side of the Damascus regime in 2015. As in Europe and the US, the country is now grappling with how to reintegrate the families of those Islamist fighters who want to return home. Russia's foreign ministry warned in March that fighters' family members may also have been radicalized and present a risk if they return to Russia. —AFP

Lifestyle | Features

Oscar winner Malek hints at villain role in Bond 25

Oscar winner Rami Malek hinted yesterday he would appear as the villain in a new James Bond thriller that will see Daniel Craig bow out as 007 after eight years. The 25th edition of one of the world's most enduring Hollywood franchises will also see the return of Ralph Fiennes and Lea Seydoux. Malek won this year's Best Actor Oscar for his portrayal of Queen frontman Freddie Mercury in "Bohemian Rhapsody". "I promise you all I will be making sure Mr Bond does not have an easy ride in this," he said in a livestream announcement of the new film's cast.

The big reveal was shot outside Bond creator Ian Fleming's private villa at Goldeneye in Jamaica. Film producer Barbara Broccoli probably disappointed many by refusing to give away the new film's name. The productions has been repeatedly delayed over disputes over the script. It is now due to open in April 2020. But she did reveal one tantalizing plot line. Bond will be in what suspiciously sounds like retirement when the action kicks off at the Goldeneye resort.



In this file photo US actor Rami Malek arrives on the red carpet for the Time 100 Gala at the Lincoln Center in New York. — AFP

"Bond is not on active service when we start," Broccoli said. "He is actually enjoying himself in Jamaica." Craig jocularly played along with Malek's warning about the tough time he faces in his fifth and final appearance as the everyone's favorite British spy. "Scared, a little bit creepy," Craig said of Malek's message. Craig added that he has been a Bond fan since childhood. "I remember going to see them as a kid and they were a moment—a new Bond coming out was incredibly exciting," he recalled.

"We've tried to continue that tradition of just making movies that stand out."

'Quite a ride'

Fiennes will return for another mission as British secret service chief M, as will Jeffrey Wright as the CIA operative who last helped 007 in "Quantum of Solace". Moneypenny will be played by Naomie Harris while Ben Whishaw will come back as the gadget-savvy-and cat-loving-spook Q. "My favourite thing about playing the character of Q is the sort of repartee and the banter I get to have with 007," Whishaw said.

"Q is very fond of cats and he has two feline companions which may or may not appear in this new film. That's all I'm saying." The new production's delays were prompted in part by original director Danny Boyle's replacement by Cary Fukunaga in September. London and Hollywood media reported that Boyle left because producers refused to let him kill the current version of 007 and replace him with a woman or a non-white actor. Boyle said only that revealing the true reason would be "unfair" on his successor. Fukunaga gave little away yesterday. "It's an honor and I'm chomping at the bit," the new director said.

"Daniel is my favorite Bond I want to continue that... to make sure this run of films have a really great next chapter, upping the ante and making sure who comes next has a tough job". All the cast members played their cards close to their chest. "I'm very happy to be back and I can't wait to start," Seydoux said. The film is due to feature its familiar mix of exotic locations and those closer to the British spy's London home. It will shoot across the seas from Jamaica to Norway and include some scenes in the cave city of Matera in southern Italy. "We've got quite a ride in store," producer Broccoli said. — AFP



CRAIG MAKES HIS FINAL OUTING AS JAMES BOND

Daniel Craig, whose final outing as 007 was unveiled yesterday, is the longest-serving James Bond—but perhaps not always the most enthusiastic. The 51-year-old's fifth movie as the British super spy is due for release early next year, 14 years after 2006's "Casino Royale". There were initially doubts about the casting of the British actor—not least the fact he was blond.

But he brought both a new ruthlessness and an emotional vulnerability to the character that audiences have warmed to—and have proved box office gold. For a while, it seemed that 2015's "Spectre" would be his last outing as Ian Fleming's super cool intelligence agent. Exhausted by a grueling shoot, he said he would "rather slash my wrists" than be Bond again. The actor, who has required surgery on his shoulder and knees over the years due to injuries sustained by doing his own stunts, later said that he had just "needed a break". But his comments revealed at least an ambivalence about the all-consuming role from a man who guards his privacy closely.

'A pastiche'

When he was first named in 2005 to succeed Pierce Brosnan as the sixth incarnation of Bond, many questioned whether the blond-haired, blue-eyed, gym-sculpted Craig was the right man for the job. Even Sam Mendes, the director of "Spectre" who also worked with Craig on 2002's "Road To Perdition", was skeptical. "I thought Bond had become the opposite of what Daniel is—a slightly disengaged, urbane, jokey, eyebrow-raising, you know, a pastiche in a way," he told the BBC.

But the intensity Craig brings to the part has allowed the multi-million dollar franchise to be rebooted with a harder, more serious edge. The late Roger Moore, who played Bond seven times between 1973 and 1985, called Craig the best Bond ever.

He told Time magazine that his performances had "guaranteed Bond another 50 years of life".

'I'm not James Bond'

Despite the fame that comes with such a huge film role, Craig likes to keep his private life private. He is married to Oscar-winning actress Rachel Weisz, star of "The Constant Gardener" and "The Favorite", with whom he has a daughter. But their wedding in 2011 was attended by just four guests, including his daughter from a previous marriage, and her son with her ex-partner. Born in 1968 in Chester, northwest England, to a pub landlord father and art teacher mother, Craig started acting at an early age. He attended drama school in London and had a string of roles in television, art house cinema and on stage before breaking through in Hollywood with films like 2001's "Lara Croft: Tomb Raider". Craig has always insisted his own personality is a long way from the tuxedo-wearing, Martini-drinking Bond.

In real life, he prefers jeans, a T-shirt and a cold beer in the pub. Shortly after the birth of his daughter with Weisz, he was pictured carrying her in a sling on his front, looking tired and unshaven. British TV host Piers Morgan lashed out at the image, with the Twitter hashtag #emasculatedBond, but his comments sparked a backlash on social media. Between Bond films, Craig has chosen roles far removed from the suave spy, including an acclaimed 2013 Broadway production of Harold Pinter's "Betrayal" with Weisz. "I'm not James Bond," he once told Esquire magazine. "I'm not particularly brave, I'm not particularly cool-headed." He added: "The day I can walk into a pub and someone goes, 'Oh, there's Daniel Craig' and then just leaves me alone, that'll be great." — AFP

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Tokyo Governor Yuriko Koike (left) speaks with the journalists as she stands next to a piece of graffiti believed to be the work of British street artist Banksy, displayed at the Tokyo Metropolitan Government building in Tokyo yesterday. — AFP photos



A piece of graffiti believed to be the work of British street artist Banksy.

A Banksy rat? Tokyo city displays work 'by famous artist'

Tokyo yesterday displayed a drawing thought to be the work of Banksy, as the city's mayor urged the famous and mysterious street artist to get in touch. Curious Tokyoites, tourists and art lovers flocked to see the work depicting a rat holding an umbrella that was spotted on a panel near a monorail station in central Tokyo. As ever, doubts rage over whether it is a genuine work by the secretive artist and Governor Yuriko Koike said: "If there are any problems, I'd very much like Mr Banksy to contact the Tokyo metropolitan government."

It is unclear exactly when the drawing—which Koike described as a "cute rat"—was painted but the city's public safety bureau has known about the graffiti for a long time, seemingly oblivious to its potential. A rat holding an umbrella is one of Banksy's most famous artworks and there are photos on social media dating back several years that appear to show the same drawing.

It was only in December the city government realized it might be a "Banksy" after local residents contacted them. The drawing, behind a protective glass cover, now stands in a corner of the sprawling metropolitan government building. Viewers voiced hopes that it was genuine. "Because he is a much-talked-about

artist, I came here really hoping it's real," said Akihiro Ishikawa, 71. Knut Holth-Larsen, a 70-year-old from Oslo, said he and his wife just happened to spot the display while sightseeing.

He said it was "very interesting" to see the work. "It was an extra plus for the day." "What is good is no-one knows who he is. I like his being mysterious," said Riyuko Sato, a woman in her 50s. Her husband Toshio said the artist was unlikely to contact the government. Tokyo has been consulting experts but the work's authenticity has not been confirmed yet. The city says graffiti in public areas is "not acceptable" but decided to unveil it given the high level of public interest.

Just before the door was taken away in January for storage to protect it from damage, Koike took a photo of the drawing and tweeted: "There's a painting of a cute rat in Tokyo which could be Banksy's work! A gift to Tokyo?" Banksy, whose identity is known to only a handful of friends, caused a sensation in October when one of his paintings began shredding itself, just after selling for \$1.4 million (1.2 million euros).— AFP

that have disappeared have ended up leaving traces in Portuguese as it is spoken in Brazil, such as abacaxi for pineapple, for example."

Resuscitation

In the case of Xipaya, the university's work at resurrecting Xipaya was no small task. The indigenous group had "scattered—most of them were working as farm laborers for large landowners," Santana explained. "They gradually got together in the 1990s and obtained land where they could settle, but they no longer spoke their language," he said. The last known speaker was an elderly woman. "We recorded her talking and singing, and we developed a basic grammar," the professor said.

"Then the Indians organized cooking or craft workshops with her, giving the food or plant names in the ancestral language," he added. "Today about 80 of the Xipaya sing in this language during their festivals, formulating new sentences, and even using it to choose the names of their children."

Britain's Peter Brook wins top Spanish award

Britain's prolific theatre director Peter Brook on Wednesday won Spain's top arts prize, the Princess of Asturias award, as "one of the great renovators of the performing arts". "Peter Brook opened new horizons to contemporary dramaturgy, contributing decisively to the exchange of knowledge between cultures as different as those of Europe, Africa and Asia," the jury said in a statement. Considered "the best theatre director of the 20th century," the 94-year-old recipient of Tony and Emmy awards "continues to intensely move audiences through stagings that display great purity and simplicity," it added.

Best-known for his 1985 masterpiece "The Mahabharata", a nine-hour version of the Indian religious epic, Brook had moved to Paris in the 1970s, where he created the experimental Bouffes du Nord theatre. "It is a great honor to have been chosen for this most prestigious award," Brook said in a statement. "Ever since my first visit many, many years ago, Spain has had a very, very special place in my heart. I have travelled from North to South, from East to West, for work and for pleasure. And with each journey, I have encountered many new and wonderful things."



In this file photo British theatre and film director, playwright and actor, Peter Brook, poses during a photo session at the Bouffes du Nord theatre in Paris. — AFP

Born in London on March 21, 1925, he was directing professionally at the age of 17. Brook was an established director of the works of Shakespeare, George Bernard Shaw and Norwegian playwright Henrik Ibsen by his early 20s, and of Broadway hits when not yet in his 30s. Brook directed productions for London's Royal Opera House, known for putting on Richard Strauss' opera Salome in 1949, with sets and costumes created by Spain's superstar surrealist artist Salvador Dali.—AFP

Reviving Brazil's indigenous languages

Thousands of indigenous languages have disappeared in Brazil since it was colonized by Portugal in the 16th century. But more than 200 still survive in Latin America's biggest country, including one that was "resuscitated"—with the help of its last remaining speaker—by experts at the Federal University of Para in northern Brazil. Nivaldo Cardoso Santana, a linguistics professor, tells AFP how he and his team were able to help 80 Xipaya indigenous people from the Xingu region learn to speak their ancestral language.

Linguistic traces

"People have long thought that only Tupi and Guarani, the two best known indigenous languages, were spoken. But there are many more, with many dialects," explains Santana. "It is estimated that there were more than 3,000 of them before the colonizers arrived," he said.

"Contact with Europeans unleashed the slow death of indigenous languages. But curiously, even some of the languages

Best teaching methods

The next step? While training people to teach the language to new students is an option, Santana says a better plan is to focus on "adult workshops, so that they can talk to their children." "For children to really express themselves in their indigenous language, they need to start speaking it at home from an early age with their parents," he said. But he noted: "As a general rule, it is important for teachers to be indigenous and to be trained in bilingual teaching methods with appropriate textbooks. "For that to happen, it would need real political will, which is lacking here in Para, where the authorities favor teaching Portuguese to the detriment of the indigenous languages." — AFP



A Sudanese protester runs past a recently painted mural during a demonstration near the army headquarters in the capital Khartoum. — AFP photos



Sudanese graffiti artist Belal Abdelrahman sits in front of a recently painted mural made by his team during a protest near the army headquarters in the capital Khartoum.

Bashir's overthrow inspires Sudan graffiti artists

With the fall of veteran leader Omar al-Bashir, Sudan's long stifled graffiti artists are finally able to express their art, painting the country's revolution in murals and portraits flourishing across Khartoum's walls. Inspired by the months-long protest movement that finally toppled Bashir on April 11, several artists are using the walls near the army headquarters as a canvas. The once-grey walls close to the complex, where thousands of protesters remain encamped, are full of large clenched fists and victory signs symbolic of the popular uprising that ended Bashir's rule.

Bright murals of Sudanese flags and portraits of protest leaders have also come up near the complex. "It was unimaginable to paint any wall without a permit, let alone around the army building, but this revolution has changed everything," said Lotfy Abdel Fattah, who specializes in fine art. "Even if it's wiped out some day, the drawings will leave an everlasting mark on people's minds," the 35-year-old told AFP. For years such artwork remained underground amid censorship imposed by heavy-handed security agents, who considered it anti-establishment or pure vandalism.

But artists say everything changed on April 6, when thousands of protesters broke through security cordons and massed outside the army headquarters. They braved volleys of tear gas to demand the military depose Bashir after three decades, while

a day later graffiti artists began publicly exhibiting their work at the protest site and elsewhere in Khartoum.

'Tell the story'

"People welcomed our drawings and we felt we should start painting all the walls," said 26-year-old Amir Saleh, a graffiti artist working on a mural outside the military complex. "All of these walls were empty. We, along with other artists, have filled them with graffiti," added Saleh, who took part in anti-Bashir rallies from December. "We just wanted to tell the story of what's happening here." Saleh said many of the designs reflect the protest movement's catchcry of "freedom, peace, justice".

"The revolution has to keep on going... freedom and security are at the core," he said. Painting fluorescent shades of orange across a wall, 26-year-old Belal Abdelrahman said he was inspired by the protesters' call: "just fall, that's all." Many murals attempt to show the peaceful nature of the protest movement, including one image of a clenched fist facing two large bullets. "This just shows that the people's determination to bring down Bashir was much bigger than the bullets his security met the protests with," Abdelrahman said.

Officials say at least 65 people have died in protest-related violence since December. Artists have blazoned one wall with a rifle-symbolic of the violent crackdown on anti-Bashir demon-

strators—with a red flower protruding from its muzzle. "These are peaceful protests and they will remain so," Abdelrahman said.

'Dressed in bright colors'

Some artists like Abdel Fattah, who has been painting murals for more than a decade, are keen to show the vibrant future of Sudan. "I usually depict Sudan as a country covered in lush greenery and flowers to show that it has a lot to offer," he said. Even as these artists enjoy their first stroke of freedom, they all complain of a shortage of materials. "It is supposed to be done using sprays, but it's unavailable and very expensive to import. What we have is regular paint," said Abdelrahman.

Hit by an acute foreign currency shortage, Sudan's economy has only worsened over the years. The ongoing protest movement threatens to further derail the economy, but demonstrators are firm in their demand that the new military rulers hand over power to civilians. And graffiti artists support the protesters. "We want a more open Sudan, one that accepts art and promotes freedom of expression," said Saleh. "This is just the beginning of the revolution. Hopefully, the whole of Sudan will be dressed in bright colors."—AFP



Sudanese graffiti artist Amir Saleh poses in front of a recently painted mural made by his team.



Sudanese graffiti artists Amir Saleh (right) and Belal Abdelrahman (left) pose in front of a recently painted mural made by their team.



Sudanese protesters sit in front of a recently painted mural during a demonstration.

Lifestyle | Feature

In Baltimore, violins to combat violence



Children cheer for the music as parents, family and friends watch the Baltimore Symphony Orchestra's OrchKids program perform during the String Fling concert at the Lockerman Bundy Elementary School in Baltimore, Maryland. — AFP photos



Stefany Carbajal, a cellist in the Baltimore Symphony Orchestra's OrchKids program, arrives for practice.

As the conductor raises her baton, dozens of children come to order, and their everyday cacophonous chatting gives way to a melodic cascade of notes. The 60 or so students are part of OrchKids, a program run by the Baltimore Symphony Orchestra, which is hoping to bring change to the troubled city through the power of music. "We are trying to combat some of the social challenges here in Baltimore," says program director Nick Skinner. One recent OrchKids concert took place just a few blocks from where Freddie Gray, a 25-year-old black man, was arrested in April 2015.

Gray fell into a coma while in police custody and later died, and the incident sparked violent protests in Baltimore, a port city plagued by violence, drugs and crime. "Charm City" is now one of the most violent in the United States, with an average of more than 300 murders a year. Nearly a quarter of its 620,000 residents live below the poverty line. In recent years, urban renewal projects have sought to break the spiral of gloom, but in some neighborhoods, only a few blocks separate condemned

buildings from hip hotspots. Those behind OrchKids remain optimistic.

In all, 1,300 children—from grade school to high school—are enrolled in the program, which offers them free music education, four afternoons a week after school. The program offers them a safe place to go after school without charge—easing the minds of busy parents who would otherwise need child care or be forced to leave their children unsupervised.

"We're providing not only academic support but also a healthy snack and a dinner before they go home," Skinner explains. OrchKids—which takes inspiration from El Sistema, Venezuela's venerable music education program—started a little more than a decade ago with just 30 students. "Back when we started the program in 2008, most of the community thought that we were actually undercover cops," Skinner says. "There was no trust," he adds, recalling the long history of distrust, especially in the city's African American community, toward local officials and a police force seen as racist and corrupt.



Cellist mentor Carolyn Rosinsky (center) helps tune a cello for Stefany Carbajal.



Young cellists in the Baltimore Symphony Orchestra's OrchKids program, perform during the String Fling concert.



Autumn Taylor (left), Dion Carter (center) and Desean Anderson (right), violinists in the Baltimore Symphony Orchestra's OrchKids program, sing as they arrive at practice.

Lifestyle | Feature



Instrument cases line the hallway colorfully decorated in a music theme as the Baltimore Symphony Orchestra's OrchKids program performs.



Gabriella Martinez (center), violinists in the Baltimore Symphony Orchestra's OrchKids program, jumps in the air as she performs during the String Fling concert at the Lockerman Bundy Elementary School in Baltimore.



Cristian Salinas, a violinist in the Baltimore Symphony Orchestra's OrchKids program, performs during the String Fling concert.



Morgan Headspeth (left), Kimora Utsey (center) and Tabria McRae (right), violinists in the Baltimore Symphony Orchestra's OrchKids program, perform during the String Fling concert.

Tyrianna Graham, an eight-year-old violinist in the Baltimore Symphony Orchestra's OrchKids program, rests between practices.

'A different kind of future'

This year, that first class of 30 students is getting ready to graduate from high school and some will head on to university-firsts for many of the families involved. Some of the OrchKids students have studied at the prestigious summer camp at the Interlochen Center for the Arts in Michigan. Ludy Gutierrez, a 12-year-old who plays the bassoon, even performed for Barack Obama. "Yeah, that was just once... It was fun," Ludy said, nonchalantly, as if playing a concert for a former US president were an everyday experience.

Even if music is not a career option for most of the students enrolled in OrchKids, the program offers them a perspective that is not always available to inner-city kids, especially in Charm City. Bella, a middle schooler who also plays bassoon, knows that her participation in OrchKids will give her a leg up when it comes time to apply for college, even if she does not want to be a musician. "It's a good way to teach patience," she says. The Baltimore Symphony's long-time conductor, Marin Alsop, has lent her considerable influence to OrchKids.

Alsop, who leads orchestras around the world, has made Baltimore her home since 2007, when she became the first woman

to lead a major US symphony orchestra. She says using her platform to make classical music more accessible, and possibly offer a positive influence to children in her home city, was important to her. "The issues of violence that we face are pretty overwhelming," Alsop explains, adding that the city's children "live under a lot of stress."

"That really takes a toll and I think through programs like OrchKids, they start to see a different kind of future," she adds. "They're able to travel to play... they're receiving positive affirmation for what they're doing," she says. "As a result, many of them are looking at futures that they wouldn't have considered before." The American conductor—who also leads the Sao Paulo State Symphony Orchestra and is chief conductor designate of the Vienna Radio Symphony—says she hopes to reach 10,000 children through OrchKids. That would be one in eight kids in Baltimore's public school system. "I'd love Baltimore to become known as the City of Music rather than the City of Murder," she says. — AFP



Teacher and conductor Jane Cromwell (center), leads the Baltimore Symphony Orchestra's OrchKids program during their performance.

Soweto virtuosos embrace 'white people' music



A young child plays the violin during a lesson with Buskaid at the Reformed Presbyterian Church in Diepkloof, Soweto. —AFP photos



Xolani Zingeni (center), 16, plays with young students and orchestra members from Buskaid during a practice of the South African national anthem ahead of a performance for a grant application.



Xolani Zingeni, 16, stands next to his great-grandmother in her bedroom, at their home in Diepkloof.



Rosemary Nalden, 75, and founder of Buskaid helps a boy play his violin.

Xolani Zingeni plays scales on his violin overlooking a muddy courtyard as his teenage sister washes laundry in a bathtub and his great-grandmother carefully hangs it on a washing line. “When I play it helps me to forget about the situation I am in,” says the 16-year-old South African. Xolani lives a precarious life shuttling between his great-grandmother and his mother, who is addicted to “nyaope”, a potent blend of cannabis and heroin. His father is not around. The routine and staying in the small grey home in Soweto is wearing for Xolani, who is the second brother of five children, all with different fathers.

Classical music has been his escape for three years. He follows the path of dozens of young residents of the poor area who have taken up the violin, cello or bass at a school specifically for black township children called Buskaid. Under apartheid, musical opportunities for children of the black majority were rare as the regime considered it a domain reserved for whites. The state broadcaster’s orchestra was composed solely of white musicians and the Pretoria opera was only open to whites on the pretext that blacks preferred “warrior dances”.

Since the dawn of democracy in 1994, South African society has been decolonizing slowly. In 1997, British woman Rosemary Nalden founded Buskaid in Soweto. Xolani honed his skills at the school, hosted in the grounds of a Presbyterian Reform church, and was accepted after three months of patiently waiting around outside every day. “I saw it in a text book. I just wanted to touch it,” he said with a disarming manner, his short locks hidden under a baseball cap. “The first day I came, they did not take me so I kept coming.” And then Nalden took a shine to Xolani.

‘Drinking beer and taking drugs’

“I stuck it (the violin) under his chin and I could see almost immediately that it just fitted—it worked. He is physically talented and he is musical and he’s got guts,” she said. His fingering is smooth, his right wrist supple and his tone confident—not the strident sounds typical of beginners. Xolani’s great-grandmother, who looks after the family with just \$170 (around 150 euros) of welfare cash a month, smiled.

“I would like his sisters and brothers to go to Buskaid. It keeps them away from the streets, it prevents them from fighting, drinking beer and taking drugs,” said Flora Vuvama, 83, her calloused hands testament to a difficult life. Buskaid has 125 students aged between six and 35 who come to study after school, at weekends and during holidays.

As well as being a refuge for marginalized youth, it is above all a center of excellence. “It is a social program but... the music part is something of such a high standard,” said Nalden, 75, who runs the school with the help of teachers she has trained.

‘Music of the rich white people’

“It is not just a gesture... giving them an instrument and saying that it keeps them away from the streets. “It is giving them an instrument to say: ‘This is very difficult, and you have to work extremely hard if you want to get anywhere,’” Nalden said. For those who work hard, the results are impressive.

At weekly practices the orchestra performs classical greats including Mozart and Sarasate, the jazz of Gershwin and South African variety. The rhythm comes to them naturally and the orchestra sometimes spontaneously begins to sing and dance. But Nalden, with emerald eyes and shocking white hair, was not content as she sat on a chair. “It is so out of tune,” she said to the



A young child plays the violin during a lesson.



Xolani Zingeni, 16, practices his violin inside his great-grandmother's bedroom.



Rosemary Nalden, 75, and founder of Buskaid, gives young kids a violin lesson at the Reformed Presbyterian Church in Diepkloof, Soweto.

cello section. "We have a lot of work to do."

The musicians rose to the challenge without hesitation. Nalden is equally exacting with the beginners, playing the piano to accompany their efforts. "If I don't do my work, she is going to yell at me," said Mzwandile Twala, the orchestra's first violin and, at the age of 19, one of the youngest teachers. "In my neighborhood, you had to smoke drugs to be popular... I am fortunate to have something (else)," said the young prodigy, who dreams of studying in London like six former Buskaid pupils—three of whom now play professionally.

"The violin has become like part of me now, my other half." His Buskaid tuition costs him a nominal amount, and was mostly funded by donations. The school has several hundred instruments which it gives to the novices. "Do not overwind the violin (it must be smiling)," reads a large poster by the violins, violas and cellos.

Former Buskaid pupil Gilbert Stoke, a cellist who works in finance, is enthusiastic about the school. Aged in his 30s, he has toured internationally, visiting Europe, South America and the United States with the organization. "People are shocked and delighted to see that we manage to sound like decent musicians," he said. "At home, we did not even call it classical music, but 'violin music'. We saw it as the music of the rich white people."—AFP



Young students and orchestra members from Buskaid practice the South African national anthem ahead of a performance.



A teacher from Buskaid gives young kids a violin lesson at the Reformed Presbyterian Church.



Rosemary Nalden, 75, and founder of Buskaid, conducts a rehearsal of the South African national anthem.

First time Bangkok!

A microguide to the Thai capital



Scratch Bangkok's surface and you'll find a city with mega-malls minutes from 200-year-old homes, with temples sharing space with neon-lit strips of sleaze, and where streets lined with food carts are overlooked by restaurants perched on skyscrapers. And best of all, as Bangkok races toward the future, these quirks will continue to supply the city with its unique brand of Thai-ness.

Quick information:

Population: around 8.28 million

Visitors per year: around 21.5 million

Daily budget: US\$30 to \$100 (1000B to 3500B), plus accommodation

Best time of year to go: December and January are both the coolest time of year in Bangkok, as well as peak tourist season. Skip some of the crowds and aim for November or February visits.

Neighborhoods and sights

Ko Ratanakosin and Thonburi

The artificial island of Ko Ratanakosin is Bangkok's birthplace - a logical start-

ing point for your visit - and the Buddhist temples and royal palaces here, including Wat Phra Kaew & Grand Palace, and the enormous reclining Buddha at Wat Pho, comprise some of the city's most important and most-visited sights. Cross Mae Nam Chao Phraya (the Chao Phraya River) to Thonburi to visit Wat Arun, one of the only Buddhist temple sights in Thailand that visitors are allowed to climb on.

Banglamphu

Leafy lanes, antique shophouses, hectic wet markets and golden temples convene in Banglamphu - easily the city's most quintessentially 'Bangkok' neighbourhood. It's a quaint postcard picture of the city that used to be, that is until you stumble upon Khao San road, the intergalactic backpacker melting pot that's anything but traditional. If you're not staying here, come in the cool evenings and hit the Khao San Road Market for backpacker essentials, or grab a beer at one of the strip's fun bars such as Hippie de Bar.

Chinatown

Although generations removed from the mainland, Bangkok's Chinatown could be a bosom buddy of any Chinese city. The streets are crammed with vendors, gaudy yellow-gold and jade shops and flashing neon signs in Chinese characters. With this over-the-top vibe, it's hardly a surprise that Chinatown's own Wat Traimit is home to the world's largest solid-gold Buddha statue. And with so much life on the streets, open-air restaurants such as Nai Mong Hoi Thot and the famous Phadungdao Seafood Stalls make Chinatown Bangkok's best 'hood for street food feast.

Siam Square

Multi-storey malls, outdoor shopping precincts and never-ending markets leave no doubt that Siam Square is the heart of Bangkok's commercial district. In addition to shopping, which hits its overwhelming peak at megamalls such as MBK Center and Siam Paragon, don't miss the charming Thai architecture and art museum that is Jim Thompson House.

Riverside, Silom and Lumpini

Although you may not see it behind the office blocks, high-rise condos and hotels, Mae Nam Chao Phraya forms a watery backdrop to these linked neighborhoods. History is still palpable in the riverside area's crumbling architecture, evident in the nearly 140-year-old Mandarin Oriental, arguably the city's most famous hotel. Heading inland, Silom is Bangkok's de facto financial district by day, while after dark it transforms into a nightlife destination with districts such as Bangkok's 'gay-bourhood' on Soi 4, Silom, and Patpong, one of the most famous red light districts in the world. Nearby Sathorn is the much more subdued embassy zone, and is home to naahm, arguably Bangkok's best Thai restaurant. And right next door is Lumpini Park, central Bangkok's premier green zone, best visited in the cool morning or afternoon.

Sukhumvit

Japanese enclaves, French restaurants, Middle Eastern nightlife zones, tacky bars:



it's all here along Sukhumvit road, Bangkok's unofficial international zone. This is modern, cosmopolitan Bangkok, manifest in fun bars such as Badmotel and WTF, and excellent international restaurants such as Jidori-Ya Kenzou and Little Beast.

Other areas

You can hardly say you've been to Bangkok without a visit to Chatuchak Weekend Market, located north of the city. Allegedly one of the world's largest markets, it's an overwhelming assemblage of

vendors that unites commerce ranging from exotic fish to vintage sneakers.

What to Pack

Cool, yet conservative clothing. Bring a scarf or sarong to cover legs and arms when entering temples.

Getting Around

Bangkok has two airports. Suvarnabhumi International Airport is Bangkok's primary international air hub and is located 25km east of the city center. From/to Su-

varnabhumi, transport options include metered taxis, the Airport Link train and city buses. Don Muang International Airport, Bangkok's low-cost terminal, is north of the city. From here, transport options include metered taxis and two airport bus lines.

Bangkok's public transportation network is continually growing, but it is still relatively young, and getting to certain parts of the city - particularly the older areas such as Ko Ratanakosin and Banglamphu - remains extremely time-consuming. The best strategy is usually to

combine a longer trip on the BTS Skytrain or MRT with a short taxi ride.

The elevated BTS Skytrain is probably the most efficient and convenient way to get around central Bangkok. Bangkok's MRT is also convenient, although not quite as expansive as the BTS.

Outside peak hours, Bangkok taxis are a great bargain.

Bangkok's river boats, the Chao Phraya River Express are a slow but steady way to visit the tourist sights in older parts of town. —www.lonelyplanet.com



Booking Ahead

- Book a hotel room a couple months in advance, especially for December/January.
- One month before you leave, apply for a visa at the Thai embassy or consulate in your home country if you plan to stay longer than 30 days.
- A couple weeks beforehand, book a table at naahm or lessons at a Thai cooking school for a proper introduction to Thai food.

Etiquette

- Don't say anything critical about the Thai royal family.
- Do dress respectfully at royal buildings and temples.
- Don't wear your shoes indoors.
- Do try to avoid conflict or raising your voice with locals.
- Don't touch another person's head



Comic

Word Search

Dance crazes - Word Search

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

- | | | |
|-----------------|------------|-----------|
| BOOGIE WOOGIE | JUMP UP | THE JERK |
| BREAKING | LINDY HOP | THE TWIST |
| CHICKEN DANCE | LOCKING | THRILLER |
| COTTEN EYED JOE | MACARENA | VOGUE |
| DO THE DOUGIE | MOONWALK | WATUSI |
| ELECTRIC SLIDE | NEON STYLE | YMCA |
| FOOTLOOSE | ROBOT | ZUMBA |
| HIP HOP | THE HUSTLE | |

Yesterday's Solution

Cooking 2 - Solution

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

- | | | |
|------------|----------|--------|
| BASTE | FLAKE | SCORE |
| BEAT | FLUTE | STEAM |
| BLANCH | GRATE | STEEP |
| BROIL | GRILL | STRAIN |
| CARAMELIZE | MARINATE | WHIP |
| CHOP | MIX | |
| CREAM | PARE | |
| CUBE | PEEL | |

Crossword 2193



ACROSS

- The sign language used in the United States.
- Over the side of a boat.
- Aircraft landing in bad weather in which the pilot is talked down by ground control using precision approach radar.
- A person who makes (and sells) perfumes.
- A loose sleeveless outer garment made from aba cloth.
- An ugly evil-looking old woman.
- The 7th letter of the Greek alphabet.
- In a wasteful manner.
- The blood group whose red cells carry both the A and B antigens.
- (Alkadian) God of wisdom.
- Not only so, but.
- In operation or operational.
- Military action involving the use of electromagnetic energy to determine or exploit or reduce or prevent hostile use of the electromagnetic spectrum.
- A radioactive gaseous element formed by the disintegration of radium.
- (Babylonian) God of storms and wind.
- A lyric poet.
- Small shrimp-like crustaceans.
- A public promotion of some product or service.
- (Scottish) Bluish-black or gray-blue.
- A baroque musical composition (usually for a keyboard instrument) with full chords and rapid elaborate runs in a rhythmically free style.
- (informal) Of the highest quality.
- The fatty flesh of eel.
- 16 ounces.
- Stem of the rattan palm used for making canes and umbrella handles.
- A large family of languages spoken in south and central India and Sri Lanka.
- Someone who stands in front of a show (as at a carnival) and gives a loud colorful sales talk to potential customers.
- English theoretical physicist who applied relativity theory to quantum mechanics and predicted the existence of antimatter and the positron (1902-1984).
- The eleventh month of the civil year.
- Wild sheep of northern Africa.
- A small cake leavened with yeast.
- The work of caring for or attending to someone or something.
- Title for a civil or military leader (especially in Turkey).
- An enclosed space.
- Offer as a sacrifice by killing.
- Made warm or hot.
- Large northern deer with enormous flattened antlers in the male.
- A member of the Samoyedic people living on the Taimyr peninsula in Siberia.
- Hormone secreted by the posterior pituitary gland (trade name Pitressin) and also by nerve endings in the hypothalamus.

DOWN

- Title for a civil or military leader (especially in Turkey).
- Someone who works (or provides workers) during a strike.
- The act of slowing down or falling behind.
- A quantity upon which a mathematical operation is performed.
- Any of various climbing plants of the genus *Vicia* having pinnately compound leaves that terminate in tendrils and small variously colored flowers.
- A period marked by distinctive character or reckoned from a fixed point or event.
- A substance produced by the hypothalamus that is capable of accelerating the secretion of a given hormone by the anterior pituitary gland.
- A nonsteroidal anti-inflammatory drug (trade name Clinoril).
- (Islam) The man who leads prayers in a mosque.
- Completely lacking.
- (Greek mythology) Goddess of discord.
- The longer of the two telegraphic signals used in Morse code.
- (usually followed by 'to') Having the necessary means or skill or know-how or authority to do something.
- Common Indian weaverbird.
- Large west African tree having large palmately lobed leaves and axillary cy-mose panicles of small white flowers and one-winged seeds.
- The lofty nest of a bird of prey (such as a hawk or eagle).
- Extinct flightless bird of New Zealand.
- United States filmmaker (1902-1981).
- (Old Testament) In Judeo-Christian mythology.
- Having the wind against the forward side of the sails.
- Reconnaissance (by shortening).
- Depressing in character or appearance.
- Food mixtures either arranged on a plate or tossed and served with a moist dressing.
- A highly unstable radioactive element (the heaviest of the halogen series).
- The dialect of Ancient Greek spoken in Thessaly and Boeotia and Acolis.
- West Indian tree having racemes of fragrant white flowers and yielding a durable timber and resinous juice.
- Counting the number of white and red blood cells and the number of platelets in 1 cubic millimeter of blood.
- A sock with a separation for the big toe.
- Nonresinous wood of a fir tree.
- A river that rises in northern Colombia and flows generally eastward to the Orinoco in central Venezuela.
- Capital of Vanuatu.
- An informal term for a father.
- An esoteric or occult matter that is traditionally secret.
- (neurology) Of or relating to the vagus nerve.
- One of the evil spirits of traditional Jewish and Christian belief.
- Russian country house.
- (architecture) Forming or resembling an arch.
- The event of dying or departure from life.
- Related to or located at the back.
- God of love and erotic desire.
- Type genus of the Anatidae.
- Estrangement from god.
- A graphical record of electric currents associated with muscle contractions.
- (in Scotland or Ireland) A mountain or tall hill.
- A hard gray lustrous metallic element that is highly corrosion-resistant.

Yesterday's Solution

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

Daily SuDoku

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

Yesterday's Solution

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

TV Listings



00:25 Back In The Day
02:30 Friday The 13th Part IV: The Final Chapter
04:05 The Space Between Us
06:05 The Fast And The Furious
07:35 Boone: The Bounty Hunter
09:05 The Space Between Us
11:05 The Fast And The Furious
12:45 Boone: The Bounty Hunter
14:15 Mine
16:05 Tombstone
18:20 Dante's Peak
20:10 Max Payne
22:00 Bad Boys II



00:45 North Woods Law
01:40 I'm Alive
02:35 Baby Panda's First Year
03:25 Into Alaska
04:15 North Woods Law
05:02 Wildest Islands
05:49 Pit Bulls & Parolees
06:36 Animal Airport
07:25 Whale Wars
08:15 Animal Cops Houston
09:10 Into Alaska
10:05 North Woods Law
11:00 Wildest Islands
11:55 Pit Bulls & Parolees
12:50 Baby Panda's First Year
13:45 The Vet Life
14:40 Extinct Or Alive
15:35 I'm Alive
16:30 Whale Wars
17:25 Animal Cops Houston
18:20 Earthquake: Panda Rescue
19:15 Hanging With The Hendersons
20:10 Extinct Or Alive
21:05 Wildest Islands
22:00 I'm Alive
22:55 Pit Bulls & Parolees
23:50 Hanging With The Hendersons



00:15 EastEnders
00:50 The Split
01:45 Holby City
02:40 Bad Move
03:05 Mum
03:35 Agatha Raisin
04:20 Father Brown
05:05 Death In Paradise
06:00 Doctors
06:30 EastEnders
07:00 Last Tango In Halifax
07:55 Call The Midwife: Christmas Special 2016
08:45 Death In Paradise
09:40 Father Brown
10:30 Bad Move
10:55 Doctors
11:25 EastEnders
12:00 Holby City
12:55 Casualty
13:50 Death In Paradise
14:45 Father Brown
15:35 Bad Move
16:00 Doctors
18:30 The Coroner
20:10 The Split
21:05 The Level
21:55 The Cry
22:55 Shakespeare & Hathaway: Private Investigators
23:45 Doctors



00:00 Kingpin
01:55 I Didn't Do It
02:50 Nightmare In Suburbia
03:45 Cults And Extreme Belief
06:00 Homicide Hunter
07:00 Police Patrol
07:20 The First 48
08:05 Homicide: Hours To Kill
08:50 Homicide Hunter
09:35 Secrets Of The Morgue

10:30 Evil Up Close
11:25 The First 48
12:20 Leah Remini: Scientology And The Aftermath
13:15 Police Patrol
14:10 It Takes A Killer
15:05 Homicide Hunter
16:00 Nightmare In Suburbia
17:00 Crimes That Shook Britain
20:00 Homicide Hunter
21:00 Police Patrol
21:30 Pd Cam
22:00 It Takes A Killer
23:00 Homicide Squad: Atlanta



00:25 Comedy Central Presents Comedy 3alwagef
00:55 Inside Amy Schumer
01:15 Broad City
01:40 Martha And Snoop Potluck Dinner Party
02:05 Takeshis Castle Thailand
02:30 The Daily Show With Trevor Noah
03:00 Inside Amy Schumer
03:45 Are We There Yet?
04:10 Comedy Central Presents Comedy 3alwagef
04:40 Impractical Jokers
05:00 Are We There Yet?
07:05 Lip Sync Battle
07:55 Ridiculousness Arabia
08:20 Takeshis Castle Thailand
08:45 Comedy Central Presents Comedy 3alwagef
09:45 Comedy Central Presents: Menna W FINA
10:15 Friends
12:25 Real Husbands Of Hollywood
14:35 Disaster Date
15:50 Friends
18:00 Impractical Jokers
19:30 Ridiculousness Arabia
20:00 Takeshis Castle Thailand
20:30 Comedy Central Presents Comedy 3alwagef
21:30 Comedy Central Presents: Menna W FINA
22:00 The Daily Show With Trevor Noah
22:30 The Half Hour
23:30 Important Things With Demitri Martin
23:55 The Daily Show With Trevor Noah



00:30 Space Dealers
01:20 America's Cutest Pets
02:10 Bad Dog
03:00 Ultimate Survival
03:50 How It's Made
04:40 Weather Gone Viral
05:30 Space Dealers
06:20 Cliptastic
07:00 Mysteries At The Museum
07:50 Ultimate Survival
08:40 How It's Made
09:30 Cliptastic
10:20 America's Cutest Pets
11:10 Bad Dog
12:00 Mysteries At The Museum
12:50 Weather Gone Viral
13:40 Space Dealers
14:30 How It's Made
15:20 Cliptastic
15:45 Kids Do The Craziest Things
16:10 Xtreme Waterparks
17:00 America's Cutest Pets
17:50 Bad Dog
18:40 The Carbonaro Effect
19:30 Tricks On The Streets
20:20 The Carbonaro Effect
21:10 Ultimate Survival
22:00 How It's Made
22:50 Xtreme Waterparks
23:15 Xtreme Waterparks
23:40 Tricks On The Streets



00:00 People Magazine Investigates
01:00 Murder Chose Me
02:00 What Lies Beneath
03:00 Body Cam

03:45 People Magazine Investigates
04:30 American Monster
06:10 The Perfect Murder
07:00 Disappeared
07:55 Southern Fried Homicide
08:50 The Perfect Murder
09:45 Swamp Murders
10:40 Murder Comes To Town
12:30 Deadly Affairs
13:25 Deadly Affairs
14:20 Disappeared
15:15 The 1980s: The Deadliest Decade
16:10 Swamp Murders
17:05 American Monster
19:00 I Almost Got Away With It
20:00 The 1980s: The Deadliest Decade
21:00 Obsession: Dark Desires
22:00 Grave Mysteries
23:00 Heart Of Darkness



00:00 Alex & Co.
00:50 Evermoor Chronicles
01:40 Alex & Co.
02:05 Binny And The Ghost
02:55 Hank Zipzer
03:45 Alex & Co.
04:35 Violetta
05:25 Binny And The Ghost
05:45 Disney Mickey Mouse
05:50 Rolling With The Ronks
06:00 Miraculous Tales Of Ladybug & Cat Noir
06:25 Raven's Home
06:50 Tsum Tsum Shorts
06:55 101 Dalmatian Street
07:10 Hotel Transylvania: The Series
07:20 Shake It Up
07:45 K.C. Undercover
08:10 Bizaardvark
08:35 Miraculous Tales Of Ladybug & Cat Noir
09:25 Tangled: The Series
10:15 Bizaardvark
11:05 Liv And Maddie
11:55 K.C. Undercover
12:45 Tangled: The Series
13:10 Miraculous Tales Of Ladybug & Cat Noir
14:00 101 Dalmatian Street
14:15 Shake It Up
14:40 K.C. Undercover
15:05 Disney Mickey Mouse
15:10 A.N.T. Farm
15:35 Penny On M.A.R.S
16:00 101 Dalmatian Street
16:25 Miraculous Tales Of Ladybug & Cat Noir
16:50 Raven's Home
17:15 Stuck In The Middle
17:40 Bizaardvark
18:05 K.C. Undercover
18:30 Bunk'd
18:55 Descendants Wicked World
19:00 Raven's Home
19:25 Liv And Maddie
19:50 K.C. Undercover
20:15 Disney Mickey Mouse
20:20 A.N.T. Farm
20:45 Bizaardvark
21:10 Tangled: The Series
21:35 Stuck In The Middle
22:00 Miraculous Tales Of Ladybug & Cat Noir
22:25 Miraculous Tales Of Ladybug & Cat Noir
22:50 Lolirock
23:10 Evermoor Chronicles
23:35 Binny And The Ghost



00:00 Zou
00:30 Henry Hugglemonster
01:20 The Hive
01:40 Zou
02:25 The Hive
02:45 Henry Hugglemonster
03:35 The Hive
03:45 PJ Masks
04:55 Minnie's Bow-Toons
05:00 Disney Muppet Babies
05:20 Paprika
05:40 PJ Masks
06:00 Mickey And The Roadster Racers

Racers
06:15 Puppy Dog Pals
06:30 Vampirina
06:45 Fancy Nancy
07:00 Sofia The First
07:30 Elena Of Avalor
08:00 PJ Masks
09:00 Doc McStuffins
10:00 Vampirina
11:00 Mickey Mouse Clubhouse Road Rally
12:00 PJ Masks
12:40 Doc McStuffins
13:40 Vampirina
14:30 Elena Of Avalor
15:00 Puppy Dog Pals
15:25 Doc McStuffins Shorts
15:30 Mickey And The Roadster Racers

Racers
16:00 Fancy Nancy
16:30 Vampirina
17:00 PJ Masks
17:30 The Lion Guard
18:00 Sofia The First
18:25 Doc McStuffins Shorts
18:30 Elena Of Avalor
19:00 Puppy Dog Pals
19:30 Mickey And The Roadster Racers
20:00 Fancy Nancy
20:30 Vampirina
21:00 PJ Masks
21:30 The Lion Guard
22:00 Sofia The First
22:25 Doc McStuffins Shorts
22:30 Henry Hugglemonster
23:00 PJ Masks
23:50 The Hive



00:15 Dual Survival
01:05 Impossible Engineering
01:50 Mythbusters Jr.
02:35 What On Earth?
03:20 Fast N' Loud
04:50 How Do They Do It?
05:35 Property Wars
06:00 Storage Hunters UK
06:20 Property Wars
06:45 Dual Survival
07:35 Deadliest Catch
08:20 Gold Rush
09:10 Alaska: The Last Frontier
09:55 Alaskan Bush People
10:45 How Do They Do It?
11:30 Fast N' Loud
13:05 Storage Hunters UK
13:30 Property Wars
13:55 Alaskan Bush People
14:40 Railroad Australia
15:30 Virus: Invisible Killers
16:15 Street Outlaws: No Prep Kings
17:05 Alaska: The Last Frontier
17:50 Gold Rush
18:40 How Do They Do It?
19:25 Fast N' Loud
21:00 American Chopper
21:50 Street Outlaws: No Prep Kings
23:30 Deadliest Catch: The Bait



00:15 Randy Cunningham: 9th Grade Ninja
00:35 Boyster
01:25 Counterfeit Cat
02:10 Randy Cunningham: 9th Grade Ninja
03:00 Boyster
03:50 Dude That's My Ghost
04:40 Counterfeit Cat
05:00 Randy Cunningham: 9th Grade Ninja
06:00 Marvel's Spider-Man
06:29 Marvel's Avengers: Secret Wars
07:00 Phineas And Ferb
08:00 Gravity Falls
09:00 Lab Rats
10:00 Mighty Med
11:00 Kickin' It
12:00 Lab Rats
13:00 Mighty Med
14:00 Kickin' It
15:00 Marvel's Spider-Man
15:29 Supa Strikas

16:00 Big City Greens
16:29 Star vs The Forces Of Evil
17:00 Milo Murphy's Law
17:29 DuckTales
18:00 Phineas And Ferb
19:00 Lab Rats
20:00 Big City Greens
20:29 Supa Strikas
21:29 Star Wars Resistance
22:00 Milo Murphy's Law
23:00 Dude That's My Ghost
23:50 Randy Cunningham: 9th Grade Ninja



00:00 Botched
02:00 E! News
03:00 Hollywood Medium With Tyler Henry
04:00 Keeping Up With The Kardashians
08:00 E! News: Daily Pop
08:55 Botched
11:40 E! News
12:35 Very Cavallari
15:20 E! News: Daily Pop
16:15 Botched
19:00 E! News
20:00 Botched
22:00 Hollywood Medium With Tyler Henry
23:00 Botched



00:10 Masterpiece With Alan Titchmarsh
01:00 Emmerdale
01:30 Coronation Street
02:30 Dinner Date
03:25 The Jonathan Ross Show
04:20 One Night With My Ex
05:15 Masterpiece With Alan Titchmarsh
06:15 Who's Doing The Dishes?
07:10 Dinner Date
08:05 The Jonathan Ross Show
09:00 One Night With My Ex
09:55 Masterpiece With Alan Titchmarsh
10:55 Who's Doing The Dishes?
11:50 Dinner Date
12:45 Emmerdale
13:45 Coronation Street
14:15 Who's Doing The Dishes?
15:10 Dinner Date
16:00 Dancing On Ice
17:50 Masterpiece With Alan Titchmarsh
18:50 Emmerdale
19:45 Coronation Street
20:10 Dinner Date
21:00 Dancing On Ice
22:50 Emmerdale
23:40 Coronation Street



00:15 Ancient Aliens
01:00 Ancient Discoveries
01:45 Cities Of The Underworld
02:30 UFO Files
03:15 Ancient Aliens
04:00 The Universe: Ancient Mysteries Solved
04:45 What Really Happened
05:30 Brad Meltzer's Decoded
06:15 Ancient Aliens
07:00 Ancient Discoveries
07:45 Cities Of The Underworld
08:30 UFO Files
09:15 Ancient Aliens
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16:45 What Really Happened
17:30 Brad Meltzer's Decoded
18:15 Ancient Aliens
19:00 Ancient Discoveries
19:45 Cities Of The Underworld
20:30 UFO Files

21:15 Ancient Aliens
22:00 Stan Lee's Superhumans
22:45 The Lost Evidence
23:30 Brad Meltzer's Decoded



00:20 Swamp People
01:05 Pawn Stars
01:25 Pawn Stars
01:50 American Pickers
02:35 Storage Wars
03:00 Storage Wars
03:25 The Zodiac Killer: Case Closed?
04:15 River Hunters
05:05 Forged In Fire
06:00 Counting Cars
06:45 Swamp People
07:30 Pawn Stars
08:15 American Pickers
09:00 Storage Wars
09:45 River Hunters
10:30 Forged In Fire
11:15 Counting Cars
12:00 Swamp People
12:45 Ice Road Truckers
15:00 Counting Cars
16:30 Ultimate Wheels
17:15 Road Hawks
18:45 Detroit Steel
19:30 WW2 Treasure Hunters
21:00 Who Killed Tupac?
22:40 The Warfighters
23:30 Road Hawks



00:45 The Food Files
01:10 A Is For Apple
02:35 World's Best Beaches
03:30 Fish Tank Kings
04:25 Route Awakening
04:50 David Rocco's Dolce Vita
06:15 Poh & Co.
07:10 A Is For Apple
08:05 World's Best Beaches
09:00 Fish Tank Kings
09:55 Route Awakening
10:20 David Rocco's Dolce Vita
11:45 Poh & Co.
12:40 A Is For Apple
13:05 A Is For Apple
13:35 World's Best Beaches
14:30 Fish Tank Kings
15:25 David Rocco's Dolce Vita
16:20 George Clarke's Amazing Spaces
17:15 Poh & Co.
18:10 Celebrity Chef: East vs West
18:35 48 Hrs Destination
19:05 World's Best Beaches
20:00 Fish Tank Kings
21:00 David Rocco's Dolce Vita
22:00 George Clarke's Amazing Spaces
22:55 Poh & Co.
23:50 Celebrity Chef: East vs West



00:10 Nazi Megastructures: America's War
01:00 I Wouldn't Go In There
02:00 To Catch A Smuggler
03:00 Going Deep With David Rees
03:30 Going Deep With David Rees
04:00 Nazi Megastructures: America's War
05:00 Ultimate Survival Alaska
06:00 4 Babies A Second
07:00 How To Win At Everything
08:00 Surgery Ship
09:00 Mine Kings
10:00 Hard Time: Locked Up
11:00 Explorer
12:00 Lost Treasures Of Egypt
13:00 4 Babies A Second
14:00 Surgery Ship
15:00 How To Win At Everything
16:00 Explorer
17:00 Lost Treasures Of Egypt
18:00 Hard Time: Locked Up
19:00 How To Win At Everything
20:00 Explorer
20:50 Lost Treasures Of Egypt
21:40 Hard Time: Locked Up
22:30 How To Win At Everything

Stars



Aries (March 21-April 19)

Today you may realize that you care for someone who's helped you before. He or she may be an older person who's respected by you. The thought of love never passed your mind until now, Aries. It could be the thought that they're more like a parent and give good advice. That may be the reason you're feeling this now. Be careful you don't dwell on this infatuation or you could find yourself having issues at work and home. You're practical and thoughtful on the job today. That's a good thing now. Daydreaming is okay but practical application is better most of the time.



Taurus (April 20-May 20)

At work you may find your temper flaring. You and someone you think of nicely could come to an old-fashioned standoff as to who's correct. Take a breath and think before going forward with this discussion. It won't end well especially if it's with your boss. Get home to be with your love as quickly as possible even if it means taking off early today. Just make sure it's not because of the argument earlier. You need to feel needed and loved. You'll get that at home, Taurus. Live to fight another day.



Gemini (May 21-June 20)

Pluto may make you a little uneasy today by putting a few blocks in your way. That's okay because after you've overcome a couple of those, you'll feel much better about your work ethic and your ability to overcome adversity. See, there's always a bright spot. Work mates will watch what's happening and put more faith in your ability to create better ways to do things. Inventive ideas are on your mind. Your family will notice the same, Gemini. You'll be using the identical abilities at home to make your life better. Go out and celebrate with loved ones tonight.



Cancer (June 21-July 22)

Be careful you don't take what a workmate says the wrong way. It could be easy to misunderstand the situation and the words. Try to keep your mouth in check because you know how you can be if someone seriously injures your feelings. Today could be that day. Try to glide through your work day without too much communication with those that work with you especially if they were bothersome before they seek you out. Keep busy by doing things that don't require much effort. Stay to yourself until you get home.



Leo (July 23-August 22)

Family means a lot to you and you really do want to keep all those you love close. This is a time that you need those you love closer. Think before you make a decision that could lose that for you now. Who else will prop you up when you're down other than that family that loves you? You're very persuasive right now. Use your gift of gab to heal wounds in which you've been stuck, Leo. The time has come to be the bigger person and let pride go.



Virgo (August 23-September 22)

Your mind is running hither and thither on you today. You can't seem to get it together right now. This could make you very frustrated and lacking in patience. There's no way to wear a sign telling others to keep their distance, but really, it's needed now by you. Your short temper may give someone who likes you a quick lesson in diplomacy. Hopefully they're not a Virgo like you. Otherwise, this won't be pretty. Try to work alone today if at all possible. Get home early to someone who loves you even if it's only your pet.



Libra (September 23-October 22)

You may be frustrated socially, emotionally, on a work-related basis and, getting to the crux of the situation, with your sex life as well. You want to be in charge. Love doesn't always allow one person that opportunity. Perhaps you should look in another place to make the selection of an individual who'll give you the love you're looking for and allow you the opportunity to take care of business in all other ways, Libra. Think about whether you need love or lust. Then work towards remedying whatever situation you need fulfilling.



Scorpio (October 23-November 21)

Love takes up more room in your life right now, the appreciation of being loved and the ability to give love to someone else. Of course, that doesn't put food on the table. You do that. Work is not the easiest it's ever been but it's not bad. People look to you for answers and love that you're great at getting the job done quickly and well. Perhaps a loved one invites you to a new church so that you can be taught different religions belief structures. That may be a great way to end this work day, Scorpio. Intelligence dictates that you learn all you can. You may find it fun.



Sagittarius (November 22-December 21)

"Easy gets the prize," doesn't seem to be the way you roll today. You'd rather pick the harder path because you may feel that in the long run it's going to bring what you desire. That's not necessarily true. Need is something you're feeling now. Perhaps you want a little mothering by those you love but you're not opposed to sharing that same nurturing spirit either, Sagittarius. A friend or loved one gets and keeps your attention today as you try to fix a certain situation involving them. Enjoy your day and finish it off with giving your pet extra attention tonight.



Capricorn (December 22-January 19)

You're entering a sensitive time where you can make great strides but also get your feelings hurt too. To others you don't appear the type to get your feelings hurt easily but the stars are giving you that helping hand now just for the spiritual lesson you'll learn. You're asking "Why not," a lot. It's in the context of doing more though. Anything can be done if you put your mind to it, Capricorn, and you're ready to experience new feelings and ideas. Power and control, have you working overtime. Sex is something you relish without caring whether there's love involved but you do want the attention it brings.



Aquarius (January 20-February 18)

Romance and your desires are both strong today. Take the time to indulge in keeping that romance secure. You and your partner need the distraction. Showing love makes you stronger. Partnerships make you want to examine who does what now. Love and work partnerships are really about the only things on your mind today. Making sure the people you keep close to you are who they seem to be is important in the scheme of things, Aquarius. Trust is an issue you need clarified now. Friends may think you're thinking of them instead of examining their worth to you.



Pisces (February 19-March 20)

Well, now since yesterday's fiasco in thinking, you've decided to do something about it. You don't want to be in that particular temperament again. Now you're going to check and change, if necessary, your diet. Furthermore, you've decided outdoor exercise may be just the thing you need. It delivers movement and brain help, plus the sun gives you that all important hormone you need to stay well, Pisces. See good things do come from bad. Enjoy the profits of your thoughts and the progress you notice quickly in your body.

Country Codes

Afghanistan	0093	Jordan	00962
Albania	00355	Kazakhstan	007
Algeria	00213	Kenya	00254
Andorra	00376	Kiribati	00686
Angola	00244	Kuwait	00965
Anguilla	001264	Kyrgyzstan	00996
Antigua	001268	Laos	00856
Argentina	0054	Latvia	00371
Armenia	00374	Lebanon	00961
Australia	0061	Liberia	00231
Austria	0043	Libya	00218
Bahamas	001242	Lithuania	00370
Bahrain	00973	Luxembourg	00352
Bangladesh	00880	Macau	00853
Barbados	001246	Macedonia	00389
Belarus	00375	Madagascar	00261
Belgium	0032	Majorca	0034
Belize	00501	Malawi	00265
Benin	00229	Malaysia	0060
Bermuda	001441	Maldives	00960
Bhutan	00975	Mali	00223
Bolivia	00591	Malta	00356
Bosnia	00387	Marshall Islands	00692
Botswana	00267	Martinique	00596
Brazil	0055	Mauritania	00222
Brunei	00673	Mauritius	00230
Bulgaria	00359	Mayotte	00269
Burkina Faso	00226	Mexico	0052
Burundi	00257	Micronesia	00691
Cambodia	00855	Moldova	00373
Cameroon	00237	Monaco	00377
Canada	001	Mongolia	00976
Cape Verde	00238	Montserrat	001664
Cayman Islands	001345	Morocco	00212
Central African Republic	00236	Mozambique	00258
Chad	00235	Myanmar (Burma)	0095
Chile	0056	Namibia	00264
China	0086	Nepal	00977
Colombia	0057	Netherlands (Holland)	0031
Comoros	00269	Netherlands Antilles	00599
Congo	00242	New Caledonia	00687
Cook Islands	00682	New Zealand	0064
Costa Rica	00506	Nicaragua	00505
Croatia	00385	Niger	00227
Cuba	0053	Nigeria	00234
Cyprus	00357	Niue	00683
Cyprus (Northern)	0090392	Norfolk Island	00672
Czech Republic	00420	Northern Ireland (UK)	0044
Denmark	0045	North Korea	00850
Diego Garcia	00246	Norway	0047
Djibouti	00253	Oman	00968
Dominica	001767	Pakistan	0092
Dominican Republic	001809	Palau	00680
Ecuador	00593	Panama	00507
Egypt	0020	Papua New Guinea	00675
El Salvador	00503	Paraguay	00595
England (UK)	0044	Peru	0051
Equatorial Guinea	00240	Philippines	0063
Eritrea	00291	Poland	0048
Estonia	00372	Portugal	00351
Ethiopia	00251	Puerto Rico	001787
Falkland Islands	00500	Qatar	00974
Faroe Islands	00298	Romania	0040
Fiji	00679	Russian Federation	007
Finland	00358	Rwanda	00250
France	0033	Saint Helena	00290
French Guiana	00594	Saint Kitts	001869
French Polynesia	00689	Saint Lucia	001758
Gabon	00241	Saint Pierre	00508
Gambia	00220	Saint Vincent	001784
Georgia	00995	Samoa US	00684
Germany	0049	Samoa West	00685
Ghana	00233	San Marino	00378
Gibraltar	00350	Sao Tome	00239
Greece	0030	Saudi Arabia	00966
Greenland	00299	Scotland (UK)	0044
Grenada	001473	Senegal	00221
Guadeloupe	00590	Seychelles	00284
Guam	001671	Sierra Leone	00232
Guatemala	00502	Singapore	0065
Guinea	00224	Slovakia	00421
Guyana	00592	Slovenia	00386
Haiti	00509	Solomon Islands	00677
Holland (Netherlands)	0031	Somalia	00252
Honduras	00504	South Africa	0027
Hong Kong	00852	South Korea	0082
Hungary	0036	Spain	0034
Ibiza (Spain)	0034	Sri Lanka	0094
Iceland	00354	Sudan	00249
India	0091	Suriname	00597
Indian Ocean	00873	Swaziland	00268
Indonesia	0062	Sweden	0046
Iran	0098	Switzerland	0041
Iraq	00964	Syria	00963
Ireland	00353	Taiwan	00886
Italy	0039	Tanzania	00255
Ivory Coast	00225	Thailand	0066
Jamaica	001876	Togo	00228
Japan	0081	Tonga	00676

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Friday, April 12, 2019

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- ◆ Treatment of Irritable Bowel Symptoms
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- ◆ Stomach Balloon Insertion & removal
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- ◆ Gallstones & Abdominal Hernias Surgery

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- ◆ Fellow of the Royal College of Physicians & Surgeons of Canada
- ◆ American Board of Colo - Rectal Surgery
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Health

How AI helps out in natural calamities

OXFORD, England: When Nepal suffered devastating twin earthquakes in 2015 that killed nearly 9,000 people, the government provided help for families whose homes had collapsed to rebuild. But tens of thousands of others with damaged homes that were still standing faced a tougher decision: Was it safe to make repairs? Or were they better off building a new, often smaller home at their own cost?

Artificial intelligence (AI), it turned out, could help, said Elizabeth Hausler, a US-based engineer and builder who works on creating affordable, disaster-resilient housing.

In Nepal, many homes are variations on a standard design - rectangular, multi-storey and with similar windows, she said. "We realised the buildings aren't that unique," she told the Skoll World Forum on Social Entrepreneurship in Oxford this week. Using photos and other data collected on a wide range of Nepalese homes,

Hausler and others were able to train computers to analyse photos of quake-hit buildings and then suggest whether they could be repaired safely and cost-effectively. Property owners could download an app created by Hausler's team, upload photos of the home in question, and get back a machine-assisted assessment of the best plan for them, said the founder of Build Change, a Denver-based organization that aims to reduce losses from home and school collapses in disasters.

The technology avoided the costs and long delays of having assessment teams visit each home, and helped people rebuild faster and more securely, Hausler said. It is now being used in other countries, including Colombia.

In disaster zones, AI-assisted efforts can help builders get back to work faster, spurring economic recovery, she added. AI is being used to help solve a wide range of persistent problems,

but its growing application presents a range of risks - including to human rights, as technology like facial tracking becomes widespread, experts told the Skoll forum. Amnesty International, for instance, is lobbying for a human rights framework for the use of AI, said Tanya O'Carroll, director of Amnesty Tech. Meanwhile, it is also piloting the use of AI in human rights monitoring, including by training computers to identify attacks on villages in Sudan's Darfur region from satellite images and monitoring media to track executions worldwide, she said.

Babusi Nyoni, a Zimbabwean who calls himself an "artificial intelligence evangelist", said AI software that underlies a South African dance app is also serving new purposes. The dance app rates users on their skills in Vosho, a dance he described as "infamous for unrealistic demands on one's knees and near superhuman strength". But the software's ability to examine movement

via mobile phones can now provide early remote diagnosis of Parkinson's disease too, based on a user's posture, gait, arm movement and rigidity, Nyoni said.

"We know from the dance app experiment there is willingness to interact with new technology as long as it's relevant," he said. In Africa, mobile phones present "a new frontier for data access", with 80 percent of people using phones, he added.

The continent's general lack of data to underpin AI systems has fostered some remarkable creativity, Nyoni noted. Two years ago he began working with the U.N. refugee agency (UNHCR) on Project Jetson, aiming to predict movements of displaced people in and around Somalia. But data was so scarce they struggled to meet monthly deadlines, with consequences on the ground such as inadequate preparation of services for those uprooted, he remembered. — Reuters

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By this did, I undersigned Kuldeep Singh (new name) S/o Ram Singh, previously called Kuldip Singh S/o Ram Singh, resident of ward no. 7, Cinema Chowk, Hajipur road, Dasuya, Punjab. (C 5518)
26-4-2019

By this did, I undersigned Farash Kayum Ahmed (new name) S/o Kayum Ahmed, previously called Farash (old name) S/o Kayum Ahmed, resident near Chuna bhatti, rajtalab, banswara (raj.) solemnly declare. (C 5517)
25-4-2019

By this did, I undersigned Danish Kayum Ahmed (new name) S/o Kayum Ahmed, previously called Danish (old name) S/o Kayum Ahmed, resident near chuna bhatti, rajtalab, banswara (raj.) solemnly declare. (C 5517)
25-4-2019

STATE OF KUWAIT
DIRECTORATE GENERAL OF CIVIL AVIATION
METEOROLOGICAL DEPARTMENT



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DAY: Thursday 25/04/2019 Valid From 7 PM To 7 AM

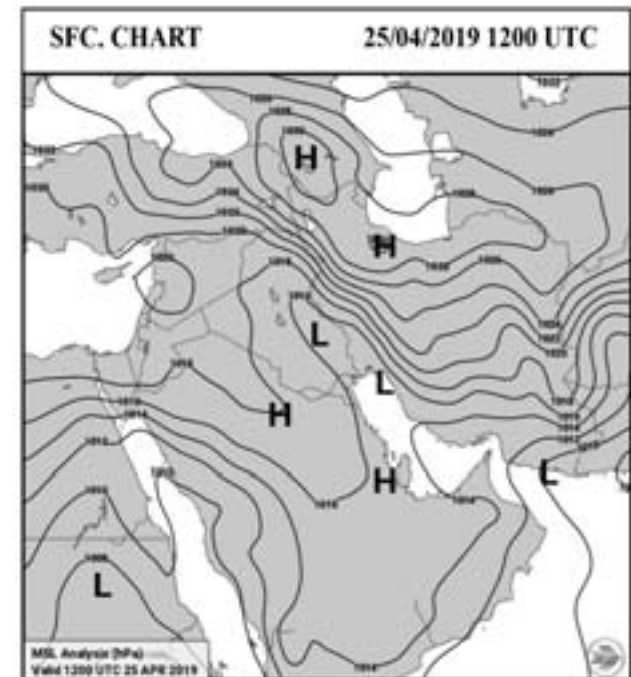
Expected Weather for the Next 24 Hours

BY NIGHT: Fair with light to moderate north westerly wind, with speed of 12 - 32 km/h .

BY DAY: Relatively hot with light to moderate north westerly wind, with speed of 15 - 38 km/h and some scattered clouds will appear.

WEATHER WARNING No Current Warnings

STATION	MAX. REC.	MIN. EXP.
KUWAIT CITY	30 °C	20 °C
KUWAIT AIRPORT	29 °C	18 °C
ABDALY	29 °C	14 °C
BUBYAN	- °C	- °C
JAHRA	30 °C	17 °C
FAILAKA ISLAND	29 °C	18 °C
SALMIYAH	27 °C	20 °C
AHMADI	28 °C	19 °C
NUWAISIB	29 °C	16 °C
WAFRA	30 °C	17 °C
SALMY	27 °C	12 °C



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Jazeera Airways	177
Wataniya Airways	22 066 536
Turkish Airlines	1884918
American Airlines	22087425
	22087426
Jet Airways	22924455
FlyDubai	22414400
Qatar Airways	22423888
KLM	22425747
Royal Jordanian	22418064/5/6
British Airways	22425635
Air France	22430224
Emirates	22921555
Air India	22438184
Sri Lanka Airlines	22424444
Egypt Air	22421578
Swiss Air	22421516
Saudia	22426306
Middle East Airlines	22423073
Lufthansa	22422493
PIA	22421044
Bangladesh Airlines	22452977/8
Indian Airlines	22456700
Oman Air	22958787
Turkish Airlines	22453820/1
Aeroflot	22404838/9

4 DAYS FORECAST

DAY	DATE	WEATHER	Temperatures		Wind Direction	Wind Speed
			MAX.	MIN.		
Friday	04/26	Relatively hot and some scattered clouds will appear	31 °C	18 °C	NW	15 - 38 km/h
Saturday	04/27	Relatively hot and Clouds will increase with a chance for scattered rain later on	32 °C	16 °C	VRB-SE	08 - 30 km/h
Sunday	04/28	Relatively hot and Cloudy to partly cloudy with a chance for rain that might be thundery at times	28 °C	21 °C	NW-NE	20 - 45 km/h
Monday	04/29	Relatively hot	34 °C	19 °C	NW-VRB	08 - 28 km/h

TOMORROW PRAYER TIMES

Fajr	03:47
Sunrise	05:10
Zuhr	11:46
Asr	15:21
Sunset	18:21
Isha	19:43

RECORDED YESTERDAY AT KUWAIT AIRPORT

MAX. Temp.	28 °C
MIN. Temp.	16 °C
MAX. RH	52 %
MIN. RH	17 %
MAX. Wind	N 71 km/h
TOTAL RAINFALL IN 24 HR.	0 mm

Business

FRIDAY, APRIL 26, 2019

38 Jazeera Airways reports KD1.5m in net profit for first quarter of 2019



39 Markaz hosts a tailored governance program offered by Nestor Advisors



41 China defends Belt and Road but vows to battle debt



BAGHDAD: Iraq's Oil Minister Thamer Al-Ghadhban (center) gives a press conference while accompanied by Electricity Minister Luay Khatib (center left) and the Executive Director of the International Energy Agency Fatih Birol (center right) at the Iraqi Oil Ministry's headquarters in the capital Baghdad yesterday. —AFP

Brent oil hits a 6-month high above \$75

Iraq on track to be third oil supplier in 2030: IEA

LONDON: Brent North Sea crude hit a near six-month high above \$75 per barrel Thursday on supply concerns that have been worsened by the United States tightening the screw on sanctions-hit Iran. Stock markets meanwhile mostly dropped, with traders across Europe digesting mixed company earnings updates and news of the collapse of two mega-mergers in the supermarket and banking industries. "Brent crude oil has rallied above \$75 a barrel for the first time this year on the back of tighter sanctions on Iran, while gains in West Texas Intermediate (WTI) have been curtailed by a surge in US supply," noted Dean Poppowell, markets analyst at Oanda trading group.

Brent for delivery in June jumped to \$75.60 per barrel, the highest level since the end of October.

WTI reached \$66.28 per barrel, heading towards a six-month peak. The US removal this week of waivers that allowed countries to buy from sanctions-hit Iran is expected to hit oil supplies, though analysts are keeping watch on the region and

whether OPEC responds by opening up the taps.

Oil prices had already enjoyed a strong recovery this year, with output capped by Russia and the Organization of Petroleum Exporting Countries. Crude futures have won support additionally on unrest in OPEC members Venezuela and Libya.

Oil kingpin Saudi Arabia meanwhile on Wednesday said it had no immediate plans to raise oil output to offset the move by Washington.

Saudi energy minister Khalid Al-Falih insisted that global oil inventories continued to rise despite unrest in Venezuela and the tougher US action. Iran's supreme leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei on Wednesday called the end of oil sanction waivers by the United States a "hostile measure" that "won't be left without a response".

Iraqi advance

Iraq is on track to produce nearly six million barrels of crude daily by 2030, the International Energy Agency said yesterday, which would make

it the world's third biggest oil supplier.

The IEA's wide-ranging report found that Iraq's production in the next decade could increase by an impressive 1.3 million barrels per day to a total of 5.9 million bpd. "Iraq is and will remain one of the key pillars of the oil market in the years to come," IEA head Fatih Birol told reporters yesterday.

The optimism stemmed from Iraq's 50 percent increase in oil production since 2012, Birol said, despite several years of low prices and the devastating rampage of the Islamic State group across a third of the country. "It shows the resilience of the Iraqi oil industry," said the IEA's executive director.

The agency acknowledged a range of potential roadblocks to its outlook, including global market conditions, foreign investment in Iraq, political stability and a steady supply of the water needed to actually produce oil.

Iraq is currently the fifth-largest oil producer worldwide, and the second-largest from among the Organization of the Petroleum Exporting Countries

(OPEC). Iraq has the capacity to produce 4.6 million bpd, but last month exported just under 3.4 million bpd after agreeing to trim its oil production alongside others so prices would go up. Prices have indeed enjoyed a strong recovery, jumping even further Thursday to a nearly six-month high of \$75.60. It came amid supply concerns as the United States said it would end sanctions relief next month for eight countries importing Iranian crude.

Oil minister Thamer Al-Ghadhban said yesterday Iraq could boost its production to meet the shortfall but would do so only in coordination with fellow OPEC members.

"Iraq does not take unilateral decisions," said Ghadban. "We have a huge capacity to increase, but knowing that, it is important to keep the market stable and remove the surplus of oil in the market," he told reporters. Ghadban said OPEC countries would meet in Saudi Arabia on May 19. "Until then, we have time to assess the market's needs and whether it requires an increase," he added. —Agencies

Business

Jazeera Airways reports KD1.5m in net profit for first quarter of 2019

Operating revenue up 48.4% • Number of passengers up 31.2%

KUWAIT: Jazeera Airways yesterday announced its financial and operational results for 1Q 2019, reporting KD 1.5 million in net profit, up from a net loss of KD 321.9 thousand in 1Q 2018, and a 31.2 percent growth in number of passengers.

The company's operating revenue increased by 48.4 percent to KD 21.3 million, while aircraft utilization increased by 16.6 percent to 13.8 hours and yield increased by 6.8 percent to KD 37.8.

1Q 2019 Financial and Operational Highlights

- Operating revenue: KD21.3 million, up 48.4 percent from 1Q 2018
- Operating profit: KD2.4 million, up from a loss in 1Q 2018
- Net profit: KD1.5 million, up from a loss in 1Q 2018
- Passengers: 529,640 up 31.2 percent from 1Q 2018
- Fleet utilization: 13.8 hours, up 16.6 percent from 1Q 2018
- Load factor: 75.6 percent

Jazeera Airways Chairman, Marwan Boodai, said: "Jazeera Airways had a positive performance in the first quarter of 2019, supported by a growing and solid network that serves an expanding customer-base. We also continue to focus on our customer-centric approach as we invest in innovative services that not only add



Rohit Ramachandran

value to our customers' experience, but also create new ancillary sources of revenue and support our strong balance sheet."

The airline operated its third full quarter from its Jazeera Terminal (T5), which carried 529,640 passengers in 1Q 2019 and registered its first quarter of profitability. Terminal 5 has four gates, three connected to boarding bridges, a duty free, restaurants, convenience stores and the recently



Jazeera Airways Chairman Marwan Boodai

introduced self-check-in kiosks.

Jazeera Airways Chief Executive Officer, Rohit Ramachandran, commented on the results saying: "Our earnings are the result of a deep understanding of regional dynamics and a robust plan that enable us to satisfy the needs of our markets. We have significant expansion plans for our network in 2019 and we remain focused on implementing our cost optimization program."

2019 outlook

Boodai said: "2019 will be another milestone year for Jazeera Airways as we prepare to launch new routes in the Middle East, Indian Subcontinent and to the British capital, London. The airline will also take delivery of three new A320neo aircraft on order, while it continues to expand its product offer from the Jazeera Terminal."

Britain blocks Sainsbury's, Asda merger

LONDON: Britain's Competition and Markets Authority watchdog yesterday blocked the merger of supermarket giant Sainsbury's and Walmart-owned Asda, arguing it would result in higher prices and less choice. The pair—the nation's second and third biggest supermarket chains respectively—announced in reaction that they have scrapped their proposed deal.

"The CMA has blocked the Sainsbury's-Asda merger after finding it would lead to increased prices in stores, online and at many petrol stations across the UK," the regulator said in a final report.

The deal has now floundered one year after Sainsbury's and Asda unveiled their merger plans, which sought to create a retail king to leapfrog UK number one Tesco.

The watchdog added that the transaction—which was effectively a takeover bid with Sainsbury's acquiring a majority 58-percent stake in the combined group and Walmart the rest—would result in a "substantial lessening of competition" at a national and local level.

"The Competition and Markets Authority found that UK shoppers and motorists would be worse off if Sainsbury's and Asda—two of the country's largest supermarkets—were to merge," it continued. "This is due to expected price rises, reductions in the quality and range of products available, or a poorer overall shopping experience." Stuart McIntosh, chairman of the CMA inquiry group, added that they "concluded that there is no effective way of addressing our concerns". —AFP

Tesla hit with big loss as car deliveries sputter

NEW YORK: Electric carmaker Tesla on Wednesday announced a heavy loss in the first quarter as car deliveries sputtered overseas and a US tax credit that made its prices more attractive was reduced.

The California-based company reported a loss of \$702 million in the first three months of this year after two consecutive quarters of profit. Tesla produced about 63,000 Model 3 vehicles in the period, an increase of three percent from the same quarter a year earlier but fewer than had been anticipated. The company attributed its disappointing financial results to Model 3 shipping delays, particularly in Europe and China.

Overall company revenue in the period rose 33 percent to \$4.5 billion in a year-over-year comparison, but fell far short of Wall Street forecasts. The company's shares that finished the formal trading day down nearly two percent to \$258.66 were essentially flat in after-market trades that followed release of the earnings figures.

Tesla's quarterly loss followed changes to pricing and reversals in the way the company sells vehicles.

'Running out of steam'

In late February Tesla said its Model 3 — heralded as an electric car for the masses—was available for order online only, at a price of \$35,000 with delivery promised within a month. The following month it reversed course, saying it would keep many of its showrooms open—but

would need to hike prices to do so.

Then, in April, the carmaker ended internet sales of its cheapest Model 3 sedan in another shift to the company's retail strategy. Tesla planned to keep taking online orders for the Standard Plus Model 3, which starts at \$39,500 and became the lowest-price option available to digital consumers.

But online customers could no longer order the Model 3 Standard for \$35,000, a long-promised price for a vehicle that has been seen as essential to CEO Elon Musk's ambition to disrupt the auto industry.

A challenge to vehicle demand has been the lowering of a US tax credit on Tesla vehicles to \$3,500 from \$7,500 previously. Jessica Caldwell, Edmunds.com executive director of industry analysis, said there were "many signals that the brand is running out of steam."

Edmunds research indicated that most of the vehicles Tesla made in the first quarter were shipped overseas, suggesting US demand was softening, according to Caldwell.

Nonetheless, Tesla was confident it would get past the financial speed-bumps and into a smoother road to improved fortune. Musk contended that demand for Tesla vehicles is solid and vehicle production numbers would increase in the current quarter.

Tesla vowed to significantly reduce losses this quarter and aimed to return to profit in the following three months.

The company expected to remain on course to deliver between 360,000 and 400,000 vehicles in total this year, topping 2018 numbers by at least 45 percent.

"If our Gigafactory Shanghai is able to reach volume production early in Q4 this year, we may be able to produce as many as 500,000 vehicles globally in 2019," Musk and freshly-installed chief financial officer Zachary Kirkhorn said in a letter to investors. "This is an aggressive schedule, but it is what we are targeting." —AFP

Business

Friday, April 26, 2019

Markaz hosts a tailored governance program offered by Nestor Advisors

Kuwait Financial Centre continues efforts to strengthen skills of its leaders



KUWAIT: Stilpon Nestor delivers the 'Nominee Director Development Program' at The Chairman's Club.



KUWAIT: Keen to enhance the leadership skills of its teams, Kuwait Financial Centre "Markaz" hosted Nestor Advisors, a leading global firm in corporate governance advisory services, to offer a tailored governance program for Markaz employees who are Nominee Directors and members of the Corporate Affairs team.

The "Nominee Director Development Program" was held on April 24th 2019 at The Chairman's Club. It was delivered by Stilpon Nestor, Founder and Managing Director of Nestor Advisors, a former Head of OECD Corporate Governance Department, along with Florian Sommer, Principal at

Nestor Advisors and formerly Corporate Governance Associate at Cartica Management.

The collaboration between Markaz and Nestor Advisors provided a platform to share expertise in providing custom training to boards and senior management on corporate governance, internal controls and risk management. The seminar addressed the key areas of the role of the board, the role of nominee directors, and related board dynamics.

Manaf A. Alhajeri, Markaz Chief Executive Officer, stated, "Markaz believes in the importance of empowering its leaders and employees and en-

hance their skills. Therefore, Markaz hosts such seminars and programs regularly to continue our mission in building a sustainable wealth for our clients and partners. Responsible and informed board membership is a core competency for our industry seniors."

He added, "Our collaboration with Nestor Advisors affirms Markaz's culture to perform at the highest proficiency level, build confidence in a competitive market and support careers that fulfill both professional and personal goals."

Nominee Directors and members of the Corporate Affairs team came away with a fully rounded

understanding of corporate governance concepts, and with an increased awareness of how to approach their responsibilities as board members of investee companies.

Nestor Advisors is a London-based advisory firm founded in 2003, specializing in corporate governance and organizational design. Nestor Advisors has worked with the boards and senior management of financial institutions, companies and not-for-profit organizations in Europe, Middle East, Africa, Latin America and Asia. The firm concentrates on improving decision making, organizational structures, controls and incentives.

RBS boss resigns having turned around bailed-out bank

LONDON: Britain's state-rescued Royal Bank of Scotland said yesterday that chief executive Ross McEwan is to step down after having steered it to a strong financial position. New Zealander McEwan has been at the helm since 2013 and helped guide the Edinburgh-based giant to a steady recovery with a drastic restructuring following its dramatic bailout during the 2008 global financial crisis.

The news comes after RBS revealed in February that it enjoyed its second successive year of profit in 2018, further cementing its recovery. "RBS announces that Ross McEwan has resigned from his role as chief executive officer and executive director," read a group statement on Thursday, the eve of its first-quarter results.

The 61 year-old has a 12-month notice period and will remain at the helm until a successor has been appointed. "For the past five and a half years Ross has worked tirelessly to make the bank stronger and safer and played the central role in delivering a return to profitability and dividend payments to shareholders," said chairman Howard Davies.

"The board and I are grateful for the huge contribution Ross has made in one of the toughest jobs in banking."

Davies said McEwan's "successful execution of the strategy to

refocus the bank back on its core markets here in the UK and Ireland has helped to deliver one of the biggest UK corporate turnarounds in history". The bank was saved at the height of the financial crisis with £45.5 billion of taxpayers' cash in what was the world's biggest banking bailout.

McEwan has overseen a massive overhaul of operations, slashing the lender's investment banking activities and axing tens of thousands of jobs. In total, RBS suffered net losses of about £60 billion since the state rescue.

The lender, in which the British government still has a 62.4-percent stake, was at one stage more than 80 percent state-owned. In February, RBS revealed that net profits more than doubled in 2018 thanks to lower costs and an improved trading performance, extending its recovery. Profit after tax jumped to £1.62 billion last year.

And in 2017, the lender enjoyed its first annual bottom-line profit since 2007 — before its bailout—after a huge drop in litigation costs.

The bank's recovery was further hampered by costs totalling billions of pounds to settle litigation cases following its roles in the US subprime mortgage and Libor rate-fixing crises.

'Never easy to leave'

"After over five-and-a-half very rewarding years, and with the bank in a much stronger financial position, it is time for me to step down as CEO," McEwan said yesterday.

"It is never easy to leave somewhere like RBS. "However with much of the restructuring done and the bank on a strong and profitable footing, I have delivered the strategy that I set out in 2013 and now feels like the right time for me to step aside."

RBS was last year fined \$4.9 billion by the US Justice Department over its role in the subprime housing crisis that sparked the 2008 meltdown. —AFP

Deutsche Bank, Commerzbank call off merger negotiations

FRANKFURT AM: Germany's two biggest lenders Deutsche Bank and Commerzbank said yesterday they had called off talks on a possible merger, dashing Berlin's hopes of creating a financial "national champion".

"After thorough analysis, we have concluded that this transaction would not have created sufficient benefits" to justify the risks and costs of the complex deal, Deutsche Bank chief executive Christian Sewing and Commerzbank chief Martin Zielke said in a statement. "After careful analysis, it became apparent that such a combination would not be in the interests of either bank's shareholders or other stakeholders."

Both investors and employee unions had strong reservations about a tie-up between the Frankfurt giants. "The disadvantages of such a merger, especially in relation to jobs, would have been disproportionate," said Frank Bsirske, head of service workers' union Verdi.

But the retreat from the mooted merger is a setback for Chancellor Angela Merkel's government. —AFP

Business

Ghosh wins bail again but restricted from seeing wife

65-year-old tycoon faces four charges of financial misconduct

TOKYO: Former Nissan chief Carlos Ghosn emerged from his Tokyo detention center in the late hours of yesterday after accepting bail of \$4.5 million under strict conditions including restrictions on seeing his wife.

The 65-year-old tycoon faces four charges of financial misconduct ranging from concealing part of his salary from shareholders to syphoning off Nissan funds for his personal use.

His case has captivated Japan and the business community with its multiple twists and turns, as well as shone a spotlight on the Japanese justice system which critics say is overly harsh. Ghosn exited the Kosuge Detention Centre in northern Tokyo around 10:30pm (1330 GMT) after spending 21 days answering questions from authorities over allegations he creamed off \$5 million in Nissan funds for personal ends.

Unlike his previous departure when he was dressed bizarrely in a Japanese workman's outfit with cap and facemask, Ghosn this time strode confidently out dressed in a dark suit without tie. Under the conditions of his bail, Ghosn must stay in Japan and must live in a court-appointed residence with cameras to monitor his movements amid fears he might try to destroy evidence.

His lead defence lawyer Junichiro Hironaka said the conditions also included an "approval system" to see his wife Carole, whom prosecutors believe has made contact with people involved in the case. "If the court approves it, she will be able to meet him," he said. Ghosn denies all the charges, with a spokesperson for the executive saying on Monday he would "vigorously defend himself against

these baseless accusations and fully expects to be vindicated". The spokesperson said Ghosn was being detained "under cruel and unjust conditions, in violation of his human rights, in an effort by prosecutors to coerce a confession from him". On Monday, he was hit with what experts have described as the most serious charges yet as prosecutors accused him of syphoning off \$5 million of Nissan cash transferred from the company to a dealership in Oman.

He also faces two charges of deferring some \$80 million of his salary and hiding this in official documents to shareholders, and seeking to shift personal investment losses to the firm during the 2008 financial crisis.

A Nissan spokesman said in a statement that the company's "internal investigation has uncovered substantial evidence of blatantly unethical conduct". "Further discoveries related to Ghosn's misconduct continue to emerge," he added. This was the second time Ghosn has been granted bail after posting \$9 million in March to win his freedom. Last time he left the detention center, he was dressed in a cap, face mask and workman's uniform in an apparent attempt to evade dozens of journalists from around the world hoping to snap a picture of the fallen tycoon.

The bizarre stunt was cooked up by one of his lawyers, Takashi Takano, who later apologized for "tainting" the reputation of his client, who usually appears in public in sharp suits.

Ghosn was preparing to hold a much-anticipated news conference to "tell the truth" about his case but he was re-arrested shortly beforehand to



TOKYO: Former Nissan chairman Carlos Ghosn (second right) is escorted as he walks out of the Tokyo Detention House following his release on bail in Tokyo yesterday.—AFP

face questioning about the alleged \$5 million embezzlement. Clearly aware he was about to return to custody, Ghosn pre-recorded a video in which he accused "backstabbing" Nissan executives of a "plot" against him, as they feared closer ties with French partner Renault.

Unless re-arrested over further allegations, Ghosn will be free to organise his defence ahead

of a possible trial that is likely to take months to prepare. Hironaka has told reporters that a trial as early as the autumn was "not possible for various reasons". His lawyers have demanded he be tried separately from Nissan, which also faces charges for submitting the suspect financial documents, and have voiced fears he will not receive a fair trial.—AFP

Kenyan economy to grow at least 6% in 2019: FM

NAIROBI: Kenya's economy is likely to expand by at least 6 percent this year, the country's finance minister said yesterday, sticking to rosy government forecasts despite delayed rains that could hit agriculture, a mainstay of the economy.

The Kenyan economy grew 6.3 percent last year, the statistics office said, helped by adequate rainfall which spurred farming, which contributes about a third of output. Growth had slumped to 4.9 percent in 2017. "The Kenyan economy remains resilient ... It is expected to perform better in 2019, growing by at least over 6 percent," the minister, Henry Rotich, said at an event to disclose last year's economic performance.

The World Bank trimmed its forecast for Kenyan growth in 2019 to 5.7 percent this month from an earlier forecast of 5.8 percent because the main rainy season was delayed. Food shortages and water scarcity could

worsen if the rainy season—from March to May—fails entirely, the country's meteorological department said just days after the World Bank's move. "Uncertain rainfall may act as an inadvertent drag on growth," said Razia Khan, the head of research for Africa at Standard Chartered in London.

The government, however, which expects the economy to grow by 6.3 percent in 2019, according to President Uhuru Kenyatta in a speech earlier this month, stuck to its optimism. "Though the onset of the long rains have delayed, it is still early to predict on its impact on agricultural production," Rotich said. Last year's recovery in growth was driven by agriculture, excluding fisheries and forestry, which expanded by 6.6 percent, up from 1.8 percent in 2017, said Zachary Mwangi, director general of the Kenya National Bureau of Statistics. Agriculture expanded by 6.4 percent when combined with fisheries and forestry, Mwangi said.

Increased production of crops and animals also helped manufacturing, which grew by 4.2 percent, faster than a revised 0.5 percent a year earlier. The growth was driven by increased processing of agricultural commodities, including dairy, tea and sugar, Mwangi said.—Reuters

Bank of Japan cuts inflation, economic growth forecasts

TOKYO: Japan will fail to hit its two percent inflation target even by 2022, the central bank predicted yesterday as it also revised down its estimate for growth in the world's third-largest economy. In its closely watched quarterly report, the Bank of Japan forecast inflation of 1.6 percent in the fiscal year ending March 2022, meaning its years-long battle to reignite prices is far from won. The BoJ lowered its inflation forecast for the year to March 2021 to 1.3 percent from 1.4 percent. Japanese inflation currently stands below one percent, less than halfway to target, despite six years of aggressive monetary stimulus under BoJ Governor Haruhiko Kuroda. The central bank kept its ultra-loose monetary policy in place after a two-day policy board meeting but added a fresh timeframe, saying the "extremely low" rates would be maintained "at least through around spring 2020".

It cited global economic uncertainties and

the risks of a scheduled hike in consumption tax later this year from eight percent to 10 percent. "It is extremely regrettable that we have not reached the two percent inflation target six years after January 2013" when the government and the BoJ agreed on the target, Kuroda told a press conference.

He said the current monetary easing "could continue beyond" spring 2020, and future policy decisions will be made taking into account economic indicators and other conditions.

Kuroda said the new timeframe was intended to show the cheap money policy will continue for "longer than you think", also noting that global economic uncertainties were also a factor behind clarifying the bank's intentions. But he insisted the economy is moving gradually toward the inflation target, given a tight labor market and "relatively good" economic conditions.

Economic growth would also come in at 0.8 percent this fiscal year, climbing to 0.9 percent the year after—both downward revisions of 0.1 percentage points, the central bank said in the latest report. It forecast GDP at 1.2 percent in the fiscal year ending in 2022.

Kuroda has come under fire over the effectiveness of his monetary easing program and how he intends to return the bank's policy to normal. In 2013, the BoJ embarked on a huge bond-buying program in a bid to stimulate long-dormant prices with the stated aim of hitting the two percent mark within two years.—AFP

Business

China defends Belt and Road, vows to dispel debt concerns

Xi's pet project seeks to connect Asia to Europe, Africa through massive investments

BEIJING: China launched yesterday a staunch defense of its Belt and Road global infrastructure project as it opened a summit with a pledge to ease concerns about debt linked to its signature foreign policy.

President Xi Jinping's pet project is a reboot of the ancient Silk Road to connect Asia to Europe and Africa through massive investments in maritime, road and rail projects.

The initiative offers to bring much-needed modern infrastructure to developing countries, but the United States has dubbed it a "vanity project" and critics warn it is a "debt trap" favoring Chinese companies. Huang Kunming, a member of China's powerful Politburo, said at the opening of the three-day Belt and Road Forum in Beijing that there have been "some misunderstandings and unfounded rumors" about BRI that they hope to clear up.

But in a nod to the concerns over loans, Finance Minister Liu Kun said China would release a framework to "prevent debt risks," according to state-owned China Securities Journal. The "debt sustainability analysis framework" encourages Chinese financial institutions and BRI countries to voluntarily improve debt management levels, the report said.

China must properly address "issues of environmental protection and debt management that the international community pays close attention to," said Zheng Zhijie, governor of the China Development Bank. The state policy bank has doled out much of the Belt and Road-related loans

since 2013, with Zheng saying it had extended \$190 billion in financing to 600 projects.

Debt trouble

International Monetary Fund chief Christine Lagarde said Liu's announcement and China's increased focus on the long-term success of BRI projects were "very welcome steps in the right direction." Lagarde told the forum that "sound financial regulation, transparent rules for investment, and attention to fiscal sustainability" were needed to successfully open capital markets, according to her prepared remarks.

Leaders from 37 countries have begun to arrive in Beijing for the three-day forum, with officials from scores of other nations in attendance. Russian President Vladimir Putin and Italian Prime Minister Giuseppe Conte, whose country became the first G7 member to sign up to Belt and Road, are among the headliners. But EU powers Germany and France are sending ministers instead, while the United States has not dispatched any officials from Washington.

"We call upon all countries to ensure that their economic diplomacy initiatives adhere to internationally-accepted norms and standards, promote sustainable, inclusive development, and advance good governance and strong economic institutions," a US embassy spokesperson said.

Since Xi launched Belt and Road in 2013, China has invested \$90 billion in projects while banks have provided between \$200 bil-



BEIJING: China's Foreign Minister Wang Yi (right) and his French counterpart Jean-Yves Le Drian (left) pose for photographs as they meet at the Diaoyutai State Guesthouse in Beijing yesterday.—AFP

lion and \$300 billion in loans, according to Chinese officials.

But examples of debt trouble abound. Sri Lanka turned over a deep-sea port to China for 99-years after it was unable to repay

loans. Pakistan needs an international bailout.

And Montenegro has had to make difficult choices after taking on crushing Chinese debt to pay a Chinese company to build a new highway. — AFP

US core capital goods orders strong; weekly jobless claims surge

WASHINGTON: New orders for US-made capital goods increased by the most in eight months in March, but a drop in shipments suggested business spending on equipment slowed down in the first quarter.

Other data yesterday showed the number of Americans filing claims for unemployment benefits recorded its biggest increase in 19 months last week. The trend in jobless claims, however, remains consistent with a strong labor market. The Commerce Department said orders for non-defense capital goods excluding aircraft, a closely watched proxy for business spending plans, surged 1.3 percent, powered by a jump in demand for computers and electronic products.

That was the largest increase in these so-called core capital goods since last July and followed a 0.1 percent gain February. Economists polled by Reuters had forecast core capital goods orders nudging up 0.1 percent in March. Core capital goods orders increased 2.8 percent on a year-on-year basis.

Shipments of core capital goods slipped 0.2 percent in March after gaining 0.2 percent in the prior month. Core capital goods shipments are used to calculate equipment spending in the government's gross domestic product measurement. Business spending on equipment is expected to have slowed in the first quarter because of the delayed impact of sharp drops in oil prices toward the end of 2018 and fading depreciation provisions in the 2018 tax bill. March's surge in core capital goods orders, however, suggests a pickup in business spending in the months ahead. It also implies some stabilization in manufacturing activity, which has been squeezed by the ebbing stimulus from a \$1.5 trillion tax cut package and supply chain disruptions caused by Washington's trade war with China.

US Treasury prices fell on the data, while the dollar held gains. U.S. stock index futures were little changed. In March, orders for machinery rose 0.3 percent after declining 0.7 percent in February. Orders for computers and electronic products soared 2.2 percent. There were also increases in orders for electrical equipment, appliances and components. But orders for primary metals fell, as did those for fabricated metal products. Overall orders for durable goods, items ranging from toasters to aircraft that are meant to last three years or more, shot up 2.7 percent in March after declining 1.1 percent in the prior month. Orders for transportation equipment rebounded 7.0 percent after falling 2.9 percent in February.—Reuters

S Korea economy unexpectedly contracts in Q1

SEOUL: South Korea's economy unexpectedly shrank in the first quarter, marking its worst performance since the global financial crisis, as companies slashed investment and exports slumped in response to Sino-US trade tensions and cooling Chinese demand.

The shock contraction boosted money market bets that the central bank is likely to make a U-turn on policy soon, shifting to an easing stance and possibly cutting interest rates to counter waning business confidence and growing external risks.

A worse-than-expected downturn in the memory chips sector hit first quarter capital investment, while falling exports offset gains from private consumption, the Bank of Korea said on Thursday, echoing strains in other trade-reliant Asian economies. Gross domestic product (GDP) in the first quarter declined a seasonally adjusted 0.3 percent from the previous quarter, the worst contraction since a 3.3 percent drop in late 2008 and sliding from 1

percent growth in Oct-Dec.

None of the economists surveyed in a Reuters poll had expected growth to contract. The median forecast was for a rise of 0.3 percent. "Government spending failed to keep up the bumper boost of the fourth quarter, especially for construction investment, while a drop in business investment was worse than expected due to a downturn in the chips sector," a BOK official said, adding there was also a strong base effect after solid fourth-quarter growth. From a year earlier, the Korean economy grew 1.8 percent in the January-March quarter, compared with 2.5 percent growth in the poll and 3.1 percent in the final quarter of 2018.

South Korea's main stock index fell 0.4 percent after the data, while the won weakened to its lowest since early 2017. June futures on three-year treasury bonds rose 0.15 points to 109.58 while the nation's three-year bond yields fell below the benchmark interest rate of 1.75 percent again, in a sign that rate-cut expectations are rising to put an end to the bank's tightening cycle that began in 2017. Kong Dong-rak, a fixed income analyst at Daishin Securities, said he may push forward his rate cut call from the fourth quarter to sometime earlier this year. "A rate cut won't come as early as May when policymakers next meet, as it will monitor how the government's supplementary bill goes at the parliament," Kong said.—Reuters

Sports

Rodriguez guides Red Sox past Detroit Tigers 11-4

BOSTON: Eduardo Rodriguez shined over six innings, and J.D. Martinez collected a season-high three hits to lead the Boston Red Sox to an 11-4 win over the visiting Detroit Tigers on Wednesday. Rodriguez (2-2) struck out seven while allowing one run on two hits and three walks. He kept the Tigers hitless over his first 4 1/3 innings as the Red Sox rebounded from a doubleheader sweep on Tuesday. After Brandon Workman struck out the side for Boston in the seventh, Matt Barnes did the same in the eighth, though Detroit had loaded the bases with two outs while down 4-1. Barnes fanned Ronny Rodriguez on three pitches to escape the jam. The Red Sox sent 12 men to the plate and scored seven runs in the bottom of the eighth to make it a blowout. Three came home on bases-loaded walks.

ASTROS 7, TWINS 1

Justin Verlander gave up four hits and a run over eight innings to pick up his fourth win, and Michael Brantley, Carlos Correa and Josh Reddick each homered to lead Houston to victory over visiting Minnesota. It was the seventh straight victory for Verlander (4-0) dating back to last season. He struck out eight and didn't walk a batter while improving to 20-9 all-time against the Twins and becoming the first Houston starter to pitch past the seventh inning this season. Brantley, Reddick and Robinson Chirinos each had two hits for Houston, which won the series 2-1. Jorge Polanco homered for Minnesota. Kohl Stewart (0-1), recalled from Triple-A Rochester earlier in the day, took the loss.

PHILLIES 6, METS 0

Vince Velasquez combined with four relievers on a six-hit shutout for visiting Philadelphia, which blew open a close game by scoring three times in the eighth inning to beat New York. The Phillies, who were outscored 14-1 in losing the first two games of the three-game series, won for just the second time in the last seven games. Velasquez (1-0) danced around trouble all night and had just one 1-2-3 inning, but he stranded seven baserunners in his five innings, including five in scoring position. The right-hander allowed three hits and three walks while striking out six.

PADRES 1, MARINERS 0

Rookie right-hander Chris Paddock allowed one hit over seven shutout innings and Ian Kinsler homered on the first pitch he saw from Felix Hernandez as San Diego defeated visiting Seattle. Paddock and relievers Trey Wingenter and Kirby Yates combined on a two-hit shutout and retired 24 of the last 25 Mariners they faced—with the only baserunner during the stretch erased on a game-ending double play turned by rookie shortstop Fernando Tatis Jr. Paddock (1-1) picked up his first major league win in a pitching duel with Mariners veteran Hernandez (1-2). The 6-foot-5, 23-year-old Paddock retired the last 19 Mariners he faced after working out of a bases-loaded, two-out jam in the first.

CARDINALS 5, BREWERS 2

Marcell Ozuna and Yadier Molina homered in a four-run fourth inning, and St. Louis completed a three-game sweep of visiting Milwaukee as the Cardinals won their fifth straight overall. Ozuna, Paul Goldschmidt, Lane Thomas and Paul DeJong

had two hits each for St. Louis. Brewers first baseman Eric Thames homered for the Brewers in the 10th meeting between these teams already this season. St. Louis right-hander Adam Wainwright (2-2) went six innings, allowing one run and four hits with three strikeouts and a walk. Brewers starter Jhoulys Chacin (2-3) did not allow a hit through the first three innings, but he gave up back-to-back singles to Goldschmidt and DeJong to open the fourth before Ozuna lined a three-run homer over the fence in left for a 3-1 lead.

ROYALS 10, RAYS 2

Kansas City snapped a five-game overall losing streak—and a 10-game skid against Tampa Bay—with a victory in St. Petersburg, Fla. It was the first time this season the Royals have scored 10 runs. Adalberto Mondesi homered and had four RBIs for the Royals, who went 6-13 in a 19-day stretch without a day off. Kansas City is off Thursday. Jakob Junis (2-2) pitched five solid innings, allowing one run on four hits with six strikeouts and two walks. But he had to leave after taking a line drive off his pitching hand to end the fifth, suffering a contusion. Blake Snell (2-2) took the loss for Tampa Bay in his first start after coming off the 10-day injured list due to a broken toe on his right foot.

ATHLETICS 6, RANGERS 5

Chad Pinder dumped a game-winning single into shallow right-center field that scored Stephen Piscotty with two outs in the bottom of the ninth inning, as host Oakland took advantage of a Texas defensive miscue to complete a three-game sweep. In a game that featured five home runs—including a three-run shot by the A's Marcus Semien in the second inning and a pair of solo shots by the Rangers' Nomar Mazara—Oakland's winning rally was the product of a pair of singles sandwiching a stolen base, which occurred when Texas forgot to cover second base on Piscotty's steal attempt. Pinder then hit the next pitch by the Rangers' fourth pitcher, Chris Martin (0-2), for the walk-off single. A's closer Blake Treinen (1-1), who escaped a two-on, one-out situation in the top of the ninth by inducing a double-play grounder, got the win.

CUBS 7, DODGERS 6

Javier Baez and Jason Heyward each hit three-run home runs in a six-run sixth inning, and Anthony Rizzo also doubled and drove in a run for Chicago, which won for the seventh time in eight games. Cody Bellinger and Alex Verdugo homered for Los Angeles. The Dodgers have dropped three of four. Cubs right-hander Brad Brach (2-0) earned the win in relief, retiring the only two batters he faced to close out the sixth inning. He replaced Cole Hamels, who gave up three runs on three hits with six walks and seven strikeouts in 5 1/3 innings. Dodgers left-hander Scott Alexander (1-1) drew the loss after giving up three runs in one-third of an inning.

ROCKIES 9, NATIONALS 5

Charlie Blackmon homered, Raimel Tapia had two doubles and three RBIs, and Colorado beat Washington in Denver as Trevor Story doubled and tripled to extend his hitting streak to 13 games, which ties his career high. David Dahl had three hits, and Nolan Arenado drove in three runs for the Rockies. German Marquez (3-1) allowed three runs



BOSTON: Christian Vazquez #7 of the Boston Red Sox looks on as Jeimer Candelario #46 of the Detroit Tigers scores in the sixth inning of a game at Fenway Park in Boston, Massachusetts. — AFP

on eight hits and struck out seven over seven innings. He bounced back after pitching with an infected tooth in his previous start. Marquez had the tooth pulled. Wade Davis got the final out for his third save. Juan Soto homered and Matt Adams had three hits for the Nationals. Jake Noll's first career hit was an RBI double in the second inning that gave the Nationals a 1-0 lead.

GIANTS 4, BLUE JAYS 0

Left-hander Drew Pomeranz pitched six innings, Pablo Sandoval hit a home run and visiting San Francisco defeated Toronto to complete a quick two-game sweep. Pomeranz (1-2) gave up two hits and two walks while striking out five as the Giants swept the two-game series. Two Giants relievers retired the final nine Toronto batters of the game. Toronto starter Clay Buchholz (0-1) gave up six hits and four runs in five-plus innings, striking out two and not walking a batter. After the game, Blue Jays manager Charlie Montoyo told reporters that Vladimir Guerrero Jr., the top-ranked prospect in baseball, will be called up from Triple-A Buffalo to make his major league debut Friday at home against Oakland.

BRAVES 3, REDS 1

Mike Soroka enhanced his case to remain in the Atlanta rotation by posting his second straight strong effort to help the visiting Braves to a win over Cincinnati. Soroka (1-1) pitched 5 2/3 innings and allowed only one run on five hits—all singles and two of those infield hits—with seven strikeouts in his first career start against the Reds. The effort helped Atlanta even the three-game series, which concludes on Thursday.

Soroka, the team's first-round draft choice in 2015, has now worked 10 2/3 innings and allowed two runs in his two starts since being recalled from Triple-A Gwinnett.

DIAMONDBACKS 11, PIRATES 2

Ketel Marte drove in four runs with two homers as visiting Arizona beat Pittsburgh for the third straight night. Nick Ahmed also homered, Eduardo Escobar was 3-for-4 with a triple and a double,

David Peralta was 2-for-5 with two RBIs and Christian Walker was 2-for-5 with an RBI for Arizona, which has won nine in a row at PNC Park. The Diamondbacks can sweep the four-game series with a win Thursday. Arizona starter Merrill Kelly (2-2) went seven innings, giving up two runs and six hits, with five strikeouts and two walks. Josh Bell and Jung Ho Kang homered for Pittsburgh, which has lost a season-worst four straight. Jordan Lyles (2-1) took the loss.

ORIOLES 4, WHITE SOX 3

John Means pitched five strong innings, and the offense produced a series of timely hits, lifting host Baltimore to victory against Chicago.

Baltimore earned a win in the rubber game of the three-game series thanks in part to Means' solid return to the rotation, which was prompted by the club's doubleheader over the weekend. The left-hander, who has operated as a swingman in the early season, improved to 3-2 by showing effectiveness with his changeup, scattering one run and four hits with one walk and six strikeouts. Mychal Givens allowed a run in the ninth but recovered to leave the potential tying run at third base and close out a two-inning save, his first of the season. Givens struck out James McCann and retired Yoan Moncada on a groundout to second base to end the game.

INDIANS 6, MARLINS 2

Jose Ramirez homered and drove in four runs as host Cleveland snapped a three-game losing skid by beating Miami as Jake Bauers and Francisco Lindor each had an RBI single before Ramirez ripped a two-run double to cap a four-run eighth inning. After Miami's Martin Prado belted a solo homer to forge a tie at 2 with two outs in the eighth inning, Cleveland went to work against reliever Adam Conley (0-3) in the bottom of the frame. Carlos Gonzalez worked a lead-off walk and advanced to second on Jason Kipnis' single to center field. Bauers followed two batters later by slapping a low fastball through the shift and into left field to plate Gonzalez to give the Indians a 3-2 lead. — Reuters

Sports

Farah bust up with Gebrselassie escalates over assault claim

LONDON: Athletics icons Mo Farah and Haile Gebrselassie are locked in an escalating dispute just days away from the London Marathon with claims of robbery and an alleged assault at the heart of the row. Britain's quadruple Olympic champion Farah, aiming to win Sunday's race, went public at his pre-marathon press conference with claims Gebrselassie had made no effort to recover items stolen from his room at the Ethiopian's hotel near Addis Ababa.

Farah was staying at the hotel in late March as part of training for Sunday's prestigious race. Gebrselassie—a two-time Olympic champion—hit back by accusing Farah of not paying his heavily discounted hotel bill and told The Guardian on Thursday Farah had been seen by several people punching and kicking a husband and his wife in the gym.

"Farah said to him (the husband): 'Why are you following me?'" Gebrselassie told the Guardian, adding that the man had been copying Farah's exercise routine. "The guy said he wasn't—and that he was just doing his work."

"Immediately Farah punched them and kicked them by foot. Especially the husband. There were lots of witnesses." Farah's camp denied the allegations. "There was an incident at the gym a number of weeks ago, at which Haile was not present but it was categorically not of Mo's making," a source close to Farah told The Guardian.

"He immediately raised a complaint to the highest level within the police force. 'The individuals concerned were warned that any further threatening behaviour towards Mo would result in police action.'"

For his part Gebrselassie maintained that it

was only thanks to his personal intervention police dropped an assault case against Farah. The dispute was escalating as Farah was engaged in hardly ideal preparations for taking on world record holder and defending champion Eliud Kipchoge in Sunday's marathon.

He alleged on Wednesday that around £2,500 pounds (\$3,200) had been stolen on March 23 — his 36th birthday—from his hotel room along with a watch given to him by his wife Tania. He had also earlier strongly dismissed Gebrselassie's assault accusations, saying they were an effort to "distract from the situation, where members of his hotel staff used a room key and stole money and items from Mo Farah's room".

"Someone's got the key from reception, opened it up, took my money, took my nice watch that my wife got me, and two phones," said Farah. "The watch was sentimental—it can't be replaced."

Farah, who finished third in last year's race but has since set a new European record in landing the prestigious Chicago Marathon, also revealed the contents of a text message he sent Gebrselassie when he lost patience at not having his pleas for help answered.

"I want to inform you that I'm disappointed you have not made any effort to find my stolen money, and especially my watch," the text read. "I have tried to contact you by telephone several times."

"Know that I am not responsible for what I say during the press conference in London and what influence it will have on your personality and your business. Greetings, Sir (he has been ennobled by Queen Elizabeth II) Mo."

Gebrselassie, who also won four outdoor

year's Chicago winner, have both run under 2:19 while a group of three Ethiopians — Roza Dereje (2018 Dubai champion), Birhane Dibaba (2018 Tokyo champion) and the promising Haftamnesh Tesfay, who turns 25 on race day, are only marginally behind them in times.

Cheruiyot switched to marathons only in 2017 at the age of 33 after a track career that brought Olympic and world titles over 5,000 and 10,000 metres. While she judged her race to perfection to reel in Keitany in London 12 months ago, her rival later gained revenge in New York. Cheruiyot then provided a reminder of her track speed by scorching to a 66.34 half-marathon victory in Lisbon in March.

"I did a personal best in Lisbon and what I can say is that I am in better shape than last year," she told journalists on Thursday. "I'm learning a lot in the marathon now. When I did my first one in 2017, I was like, 'Am I going to finish it?'. But now I'm getting used to it. This is my fifth marathon and I'm really enjoying the training." Keitany has taken heart from her 2:22.48 performance on the tough New York course, where she finished over a minute ahead of Cheruiyot.

"I ran fairly fast in New York on what is not an easy course so I wanted to get enough recovery — which is why I cancelled a half-marathon so I could prepare for London well," she said. "Everything has been going well in training, so I'm ready." — Reuters

Cheruiyot stands in way of fourth London title for Keitany

LONDON: Kenya's Mary Keitany will seek to match Norwegian Ingrid Kristiansen's tally of four London Marathon titles on Sunday but, unlike her compatriot Eliud Kipchoge, bidding for a fourth win in the men's race, she is by no means the hot favourite.

Keitany won in 2011, 2012 and 2017 — when she set a women-only record (without male pacemakers) of two hours, 17 minutes, one second. Last year, she set her sights even higher when she ran with male pacemakers in a bid to break Paul Radcliffe's world record of 2:15.25 — but paid for her early efforts and was overhauled by fellow Kenyan Vivian Cheruiyot, finally fading to finish fifth.

The two are likely to set the pace again on Sunday but it is a tough race to call; race director Hugh Brasher said it was "undoubtedly the best women's field ever put together for a major marathon". Kenyans Gladys Cherono, who has won Berlin three times, and Brigid Kosgei, last



LONDON: Men's elite runners Kenya's Eliud Kipchoge (L) and Britain's Mo Farah attend a press conference following a photocall for the London marathon at Tower Bridge in central London. — AFP

world titles in his illustrious career, hit back claiming the text message looked like "an act of blackmailing and accusation" and added there had been "multiple reports of disgraceful conduct" at the hotel levelled against Farah and his entourage.

Gebrselassie denied the alleged robbery had been taken lightly, saying that five hotel staff were held in custody for three weeks while it was investigated. "They were later released by legal bodies after they were found

clear," said Gebrselassie. "The police were doing all their investigation thoroughly, but found nothing on the reported robbery case." It appears that the case has escalated to such an extent that the two athletics greats could end up in court.

"He (Farah) hired a lawyer in Ethiopia," Gebrselassie told The Guardian yesterday. "And we have our own lawyer. And now the fight will start and we will see—and one of us will be the winner." — AFP

Lee bows out of Sudirman Cup in another blow to Olympic dream

KUALA LUMPUR: Malaysia's badminton king Lee Chong Wei, under treatment for nose cancer, has withdrawn from next month's Sudirman Cup in China after doctors advised him against "exerting himself", an official said yesterday.

The decision to skip the May 19-26 tournament in Nanning marks the third time Lee, 36, fails to make a comeback and will probably dash his hopes to play in the Tokyo 2020 Olympics. He had earlier skipped the All England Open in March and the Malaysia Open in April.

Struggling to make a full recovery, the three-time Olympic silver medallist has been on the sidelines since July last year, when he was diagnosed with early-stage nose cancer. The 36-year-old legendary shuttler underwent a gruelling programme of specialist treatment in Taiwan but opted not to retire and resumed training in January.

"I would like to confirm that Lee Chong Wei will not compete in the Sudirman Cup mixed

team event," Ng Chin Chai, secretary general of the Badminton Association of Malaysia. "He is on treatment. Lee is advised by his doctor against exerting himself and not to participate in competition yet."

Lee initially planned to play the All England Open in March but then delayed his return to the Malaysia Open, where he is the defending champion, in early April. Asked if Lee's delay in making a comeback could throw his Tokyo 2020 Olympics dream in a jeopardy, Ng said: "It may have an effect."

Lee must make a comeback by August 14, or lose the protected ranking of World No 3, he said. "After that his ranking will drop and it would be difficult for Lee to get into major competitions," Ng said. In another blow to his hopes of making his fifth Olympic appearance, Ng said Lee is not registered for any Badminton World Federation tournaments after May.

"We are not pushing him. It is up to Lee to make the call when he wants to return to competition," he said. Asked if Lee may not return to competition at all, Ng said: "We will support whatever he decides." Lee's ranking has dropped to 73rd in the world since his illness, with three other Malaysians ranked above him. He will need to begin climbing up the rankings to get a shot at elusive gold as countries are able to send a maximum of two singles players to the Olympics, provided they are both in the world's top 16. — AFP

Sports

Hamilton wary of rivals' street smarts in Baku

BAKU: Championship leader Lewis Hamilton is expecting his main rivals to give him a tough time on the demanding streets of Baku at this weekend's Azerbaijan Grand Prix. The five-time world champion, who heads the embryonic 2019 title race by six points after three races, has struggled to master the Baku circuit in the past and won last year only after Mercedes' teammate Valtteri Bottas had a puncture when leading with three laps remaining.

That disappointment was a body blow for Bottas who did not fully recover and failed to claim a win as Hamilton romped to his fifth drivers' crown. This time, Hamilton expects him, and Ferrari, to respond.

"I was fortunate to get the win here last year," admitted Hamilton, who has developed a habit of turning unpromising races into valuable podium finishes or wins. "I wasn't quick enough really, right through the weekend so it will be interesting this time.

"I'm expecting Valtteri to be quick and I expect the Ferraris to be particularly quick. It will be interesting. I'm going with a mind-set that I've got to improve on my previous performances." Victory last year was Hamilton's first at the tricky track made up of the season's longest and very fast-straight and tight corners, some with little run-off and walls.

A reinvigorated Bottas, winner of the season-opener in Melbourne, but beaten twice since then by Hamilton, has often relished such conditions. "I'm disappointed that I didn't win from

pole in China and I know that was all about the start," he said. "It's all about details and learning from them.

"That's life. It's how it goes sometimes. I know I can turn this around so that's my goal now. I would prefer to be leading." After three outings, Mercedes have proved they are in form with three straight one-two finishes, the first team to do so since 1992 when Williams, now struggling, were the dominant force.

Hamilton, however, has warned his team needs to be wary of Ferrari, wounded by their disappointing start after shining in pre-season testing. Already adrift by 57 points in the constructors' contest, they will be extra-keen to bounce back and end Mercedes' run.

New boy Charles Leclerc, in particular, could be a major threat to Hamilton and Bottas as he is a slick street track specialist, won the Baku F2 race from pole in 2017, following his father's death, and is keen to prove Ferrari wrong to use team orders in favour of four-time champion Sebastian Vettel.

"I love racing at Baku and scored my first F1 points there last year," said the 21-year-old Monegasque. "I always go well there." Hamilton, who spoke in support of an under-fire Vettel earlier this season, was this week hailed by former Ferrari driver Gerhard Berger as the only man "on the same level" as his ex-McLaren team-mate Ayrton Senna.

Berger's praise made clear that he saw nobody on the grid to equal Hamilton, an assess-



BAKU: Mercedes' technicians prepare British driver Lewis Hamilton's car ahead of the Formula One Azerbaijan Grand Prix in Baku yesterday. — AFP

ment sure to add vigour to Vettel's need for success. Ferrari fans may hope to see the raw power of their car's engines give them a speed advantage on the long Baku straights, but team chief Mattia Binotto was reluctant to en-

courage the tifosi's dream. "Let's wait—Mercedes were very strong in China and Baku is a very difficult circuit," he said, hinting at the track's reputation for creating chaos and the unexpected. — AFP

Golovkin splits with long-time trainer Sanchez

WASHINGTON: Former world middleweight champion Gennady Golovkin and long-time trainer Abel Sanchez parted company on Wednesday in an acrimonious split apparently triggered by a dispute over money.

Golovkin, who recently signed a lucrative six-fight deal with streaming company DAZN, confirmed the break-up of one of boxing's most famous partnerships in a short statement. "I would like to announce that I have made a major decision for myself and for my career," Golovkin said. "I want to build on what I have already achieved and continue to better myself. Therefore, I will not be training with Abel Sanchez." Shortly after Golovkin's announcement, Sanchez issued his own statement, blaming "greed" for the boxer's decision.

"He insisted on an insulting new trainer compensation schedule," Sanchez said. "My dignity and honor does not allow me to be screwed like that. It's unfortunate being greedy, being ungrateful, and (having) no ethics, honor or integrity will end this relationship." The decision means Golovkin will have a new trainer in his corner when he returns to the ring in June. Golovkin owned the World Boxing Association, World Boxing Council and International Boxing Federation



Gennady Golovkin

world titles until last September, when he lost a 12-round majority decision to Mexico's Canelo Alvarez in Las Vegas.

The 37-year-old Kazakhstan fighter, 38-1-1 with 34 knockouts, is scheduled to return to action on June 8 at Madison Square Garden in New York against unbeaten Canadian Steve Rolls, 19-0 with 10 knockouts. It will be the first time "Triple G" will enter the ring without Sanchez guiding him since they began working together in early 2010. They won 20 fights together, only denied victory by Alvarez in a September 2017 draw and last September's defeat. "This was not an easy decision for me and it is not a reflection on Abel's professional abilities. He is a great trainer, a loyal trainer, and a Hall of Fame trainer," Golovkin said. "I will be announcing my new trainer at a later date. But today, I want to thank Abel for the lessons he taught me in boxing." — AFP

Woods to return to Japan for PGA Tour event

TOKYO: Newly crowned Masters champion Tiger Woods announced yesterday he will return to Japan for the first time in more than a decade to play in a new US PGA Tour event in October. "I'm excited to play in the inaugural ZOZO Championship in October, and return to Japan, one of my favorite countries. It's going to be a fun fall," tweeted the 43-year-old American.

Woods stunned the sporting world earlier this month by completing an epic comeback from spinal fusion surgery to win his 15th major at Augusta National and his first since the 2008 US Open. A 2009 sex scandal followed by knee and back injuries that required seven operations had led to an 11-year major drought.

But his fairytale fifth green jacket has put Woods firmly back in pursuit of the all-time record of 18 major wins by Jack Nicklaus. The ZOZO Championship will be held from October 24-27 at the Accordia Golf Narashino Country Club near Tokyo as the second of three big prize money Asian events on the early part of the 2019-2020 US PGA Tour calendar.

It will offer a purse of \$9.75 million—a

record for Japan—and replaces Malaysia's CIMB Classic. The other two events on the Tour's Asian swing are the CJ Cup in South Korea, which was launched in 2017, and the WGC-HSBC Champions in Shanghai, China.

Woods has tasted success in Japan before, winning back-to-back trophies at the Dunlop Phoenix in 2004 and 2005. He missing out on a hat-trick of Japan titles in a 2006 playoff loss to Ireland's Pádraig Harrington.

Golf is one of Japan's most popular sports and the PGA are hoping to boost their presence ahead of the 2020 Tokyo Olympics, which will feature the sport at the Kasumigaseki course, where US President Donald Trump played on a trip to the country.

The sponsor, billionaire Yusaku Maezawa, who runs Japan's largest online fashion store ZOZOTOWN, is no stranger to publicity. He holds the record for the most retweets of all time — 4.3 million—after he promised one million yen (\$9,250) in cash each to 100 randomly selected followers.

Maezawa has also paid an undisclosed sum for a ticket on fellow tycoon Elon Musk's SpaceX rocket around the moon as early as 2023 and the passionate art collector also plans to take around half a dozen artists with him on the trip.

His firm's stock spiked more than three percent after he returned to Twitter to retweet Woods's announcement. — AFP

Coach Steve Kerr rips Warriors after playoff defeat to Clippers

LOS ANGELES: Golden State Warriors head coach Steve Kerr accused his team of taking victory for granted on Wednesday as the NBA champions slumped to an upset 129-121 playoff defeat to the Los Angeles Clippers. The Warriors had looked set to advance into a Western Conference semi-final showdown with Houston, needing only a victory on home turf against the eighth-seeded Clippers to complete a 4-1 series victory.

But a 45-point display from Kevin Durant could not mask a shoddy Warriors defensive performance which the Clippers exploited to claw the series back to 3-2 as the team's head to Los Angeles for game six. Lou Williams delivered 33 points off the bench for the Clippers while Patrick Beverley hauled down 14 rebounds to craft an upset which left Kerr bemoaning a lacklustre showing from his team.

"It's been a year where things haven't gone exactly smoothly all the time so I'm not surprised by anything, but I expected us to come out and play better and win the game," Kerr told reporters afterwards.

"But it's the NBA playoffs. It's a seven-game series and you've got to play, and defend with some urgency. We gave up 129 points on our home floor. We weren't right from the very beginning. Everything we did in LA, we didn't do tonight. We seemed to take it for granted that we were going to be okay. But I said it before the game—this Clipper team has been scrapping and clawing all year.

"I knew they weren't going to go down without a fight. Patrick Beverley came in and kicked our butts." While Kerr and the Warriors reflected on a chastening loss, Clippers head coach Doc Rivers waved off suggestions that his team could go on to eliminate the Warriors, who are chasing a fourth title in five seasons.

"We're not getting ahead of ourselves. They're up 3-2 still," Rivers said. "But I just loved how we played. I thought tonight was more like us, throughout. We kept attacking, we kept running. That was our team out there today."

As well as Williams and Beverley, three other players made double figures for the Clippers, notably Danilo Gallinari. The Italian veteran finished with 26 points and seven rebounds.

"To beat this team in a game, you need everybody," Rivers said. "Everybody did their job. Each guy was a star in their role and that's why we won the game." While the Warriors now face at least



OAKLAND: Stephen Curry #30 of the Golden State Warriors and JaMychal Green #4 of the LA Clippers go for a rebound during Game Five of the first round of the 2019 NBA Western Conference Playoffs at ORACLE Arena in Oakland, California. —AFP

one more game in their series, Houston will benefit from extra rest after wrapping up a 4-1 series win over the Utah Jazz in Wednesday's other playoff game. James Harden led the scoring with 26 points as the Rockets overcame an improved Utah defensive effort to seal a 100-93 victory at Houston's Toyota Center. The Rockets were made to work hard for the win however, and had pulled to within four points at 86-90 with 4min 30sec remaining.

But Utah's Ricky Rubio missed a golden chance to put the Jazz ahead, squandering a wide open three-pointer from the corner to leave Houston 94-93 in front. The momentum shifted after that

error, PJ Tucker adding two free throws to make it 96-93 to Houston. Harden then made a superb steal and drew a foul to earn two free throws that put the Rockets up by five with 38 seconds remaining.

Chris Paul added two late free throws to make the game safe. Paul finished with 15 points, eight rebounds and five assists. Royce O'Neale led the Utah scoring, finishing with 18 off the bench.

"You've got to give them credit for the entire series," Harden said. "Every game they found a way to compete, especially tonight. They just didn't let up." — AFP

West Indies spinner Narine rues missed WCup opportunity

KOLKATA: Sunil Narine has still not given up hope of a return to international cricket after missing out on a spot in West Indies' World Cup squad due to injury, the spinner has said. The 30-year-old, who last played an one-day international in 2016, had come into consideration under the new selection policy of Cricket West Indies (CWI) but missed out due to a finger injury on his right hand.

"I would have loved to play in the World Cup," Narine, who is currently playing for the Kolkata Knight Riders in the Indian Premier League, told ESPNcricinfo. "I've missed international cricket and missed representing the West Indies. It's where my heart lies. But I don't feel my finger is quite ready for ODI cricket.

"I can get through a T20 where I bowl just four overs. But even that isn't easy and I need help from the physio. It's holding me back from playing international cricket. I wouldn't be able to do myself or the team justice."

New CWI president Ricky Skerritt had earlier this month announced a series of administrative changes including an overhaul of the selection panel, with Robert Haynes replacing Courtney Browne as interim head of selectors.

As part of the old selection policy, availability for domestic tournaments was a requirement to be picked for West Indies squads, but Skerritt said selectors would be allowed to pick all players who make themselves available.

"I'm really happy the selectors considered me. It shows they have faith in me," Narine added. "I haven't played international cricket in so long and this shows how much they want me to come back. It was good to have some conversations with them and I feel we're all on the same page going forward."

West Indies, champions in 1975 and 1979, begin their World Cup campaign on May 31 against Pakistan in Nottingham. — Reuters

Rising wage bills curb Premier League profits despite record revenues

LONDON: England's 20 Premier League clubs amassed record combined revenues of £4.8 billion (\$6.2 billion) for the 2017/18 season, but saw profitability hit by rising wage bills, according to a report by football finance experts Deloitte.

Total revenues were up six percent from £4.6 billion in 2016/17 but operating profits were just £0.9 billion due to a 15 percent increase in wages to £2.9 billion. Tottenham posted a world-record £113 million net profit earlier this month thanks to increased matchday revenue from playing at temporary home Wembley last season, reaching the Champions League last-16 and improved commercial income.

Liverpool had briefly held the world record for their £106 million profit based on reaching last season's Champions League final and the £142 million sale of Philippe Coutinho to Barcelona.

The participation of five English clubs in the Champions League for the first time last season helped boost revenues. However, the number of clubs posting a pre-tax loss rose as Arsenal, Liverpool and Tottenham combined for more than 75 percent of total profits.

That is partly because player wages rose well in excess of revenue growth. "Almost half of Premier League clubs recorded a wages/revenue ratio of 70 percent or greater, with overall wage spend increasing 15 percent to £2.9 billion," said the report.

"This had a direct impact on clubs' collective operating profitability, falling to £0.9 billion, albeit still the second highest in Premier League history." The rise in wages came on the back of record transfer windows for spending by Premier League clubs in the summer of 2017 and January 2018.

Yet, with the rapid growth in TV rights deals slowing for the 2019-2022 cycle, Deloitte expect that spending on transfers and wages may decline in coming seasons. "With the total value of Premier League broadcast rights expected to only marginally increase in the 2019/20-2021/22 broadcast rights cycle, increases in wage and transfer expenditure may be expected to slow in the medium term, as already signalled by the reduced estimated £1.4 billion gross transfer spend in the current season," said Tim Bridge, director in the Sports Business Group at Deloitte. — AFP

Sports

Title homecoming awaits untouchable Barcelona

BARCELONA: Barcelona can clinch the Liga title with victory at home to relegation-threatened Levante tomorrow—the first step in what they hope will be a clean sweep of trophies this season. Ernesto Valverde's side are nine points clear of Atletico Madrid with each club having four games left and Barca, who have the better head-to-head record, could be champions before kick off at the Nou Camp if Atleti lose at home to Real Valladolid.

Should second-placed Atletico draw, a point against Levante would be enough for Barcelona to clinch their 26th league title and eighth in 11 years in front of their supporters, underlining their dominance of Spanish soccer for more than a decade.

They will not receive the trophy though until their final home game of the season against Getafe on May 12. The Catalans began the season by winning the Spanish Super Cup and, assuming they win the league, could lift a third domestic trophy when they face Valencia in the Copa del Rey final on May 25.

The prize they covet most though is the Champions League, which Real Madrid have dominated in the last three seasons, especially with the final taking place in the Spanish capital.

Valverde can afford to rest players against Levante ahead of next week's Champions League semi-final first leg at home to Liverpool, which will provide the high watermark of a season in which no-one has come close to challenging his side in La Liga.

Barca have led from the front since early December, when they crept ahead of Sevilla and Atletico as Real Madrid endured a nightmarish season and were not considered realistic title rivals until a burst of form in February.

Barca soon knocked their biggest rivals back out of the title race though by marching 12 points clear of them with a 1-0 victory at the Santiago Bernabeu in March. Atletico could not be written off until Barca overpowered them in April with a 2-0 win which took the Catalans 11 points clear at the top and began a procession towards retaining the title, which they also won at a canter last season.

"We're very happy with how we've worked throughout the season, now we cannot wait for Saturday so we can become champions at our home in front of our fans," said Sergio Busquets after Barca's 2-0 win at Alaves on Tuesday.

"What we have done in the last few years is historical." Barca have only lost twice this sea-



VITORIA: File photo shows Barcelona's Spanish midfielder Carles Aleña (R) celebrates with Barcelona's Uruguayan forward Luis Suarez after scoring a goal during the Spanish league football match between Deportivo Alaves and FC Barcelona in Vitoria on April 23, 2019. — AFP

son, with their last defeat coming in early November at the hands of Real Betis. "We deserve this title, we have been the best team throughout the season," added Barca midfielder Carles

Aleña. On Sunday, Real Madrid make the short trip to struggling Rayo Vallecano, while Getafe visit Real Sociedad in their bid to secure a top-four finish for the first time. — Reuters

The battle for Premier League title and top four

MANCHESTER: Manchester City's 2-0 derby victory at Manchester United edged Pep Guardiola's men one point ahead of Liverpool once more in one of the tightest Premier League title races ever. A seventh defeat in nine games further damaged United's chances of Champions League qualification, but they could still make the top four with Tottenham, Chelsea and Arsenal also faltering. Here, AFP Sports looks at what remains in the run-in for all of the top six.

MANCHESTER CITY - 89 POINTS

The title remains in City's hands thanks to a run of 11 straight Premier League wins and victory at Old Trafford on Wednesday was a huge step towards becoming the first side to retain the Premier League in a decade. A trip to Burnley on Sunday is followed by the visit of Leicester to the Etihad before City end the season at relegation-threatened Brighton. City's Champions League elimination means they will have a full week to prepare for their final two league games.

LIVERPOOL - 88 POINTS

A run of nine consecutive wins in all competitions has helped keep Jurgen Klopp's men stay on City's coattails and in position to pounce should the champions suffer an unexpected stumble in their remaining three games. A first top-flight title in 29 years was described by Klopp as the "holy grail" after Sunday's 2-0 win at Cardiff and even if they fall short, it has been a historic campaign for the Reds. Liverpool already have more points than ever before in the Premier League era and they should comfortably add three more when relegated Huddersfield visit Anfield on Friday. A tricky trip to Newcastle sandwiched between two Champions League semi-final clashes with Barcelona is a potential banana skin before they host Wolves on the final day of the season.

TOTTENHAM - 70 POINTS

Spurs could still seal their place in the Champions League next season by winning the competition as they face Ajax in the last four. However, Mauricio Pochettino's men are on course to seal a fourth straight season of Champions League football as they sit third, four points ahead of fifth-placed Arsenal. Tottenham have won all four games since moving into the club's new stadium and appear to have the easiest run-in of the top four contenders as they host West Ham and Everton either side of a trip to Bournemouth.

CHELSEA - 67 POINTS

Chelsea missed a huge opportunity with a 2-2 draw at home to Burnley on Monday after a weekend during which Tottenham, Arsenal and United all lost. However, a meeting against United at Old Trafford offers the chance for immediate redemption and to realistically kill off the Red Devils' chances of the top four. Chelsea also have the safety net of Champions League qualification should they win the Europa League, where they face Eintracht Frankfurt in the semi-finals. After their visit to Manchester, Maurizio Sarri's men host Watford and visit Leicester in their final two league games, both of whom are involved in the race for seventh and potential Europa League football next season.

ARSENAL - 66 POINTS

The Gunners have suffered shocking back-to-back defeats to Crystal Palace and Wolves at the worst time to fall back outside the top four. Unai Emery's men have won just six of their 17 Premier League away games and face two more difficult road trips to Leicester and Burnley either side of Brighton's visit to the Emirates. However, like Chelsea, Arsenal could end up relying on the Europa League as a route into the Champions League as they face Emery's old club Valencia in the last four.

MANCHESTER UNITED - 64 POINTS

Despite a dreadful run of seven defeats in nine games, capped by another derby lesson at the hands of City, United remain in the hunt for a top-four finish. However, Ole Gunnar Solskjaer must summon a response when Chelsea visit Old Trafford on Sunday if the Norwegian is to dismiss growing doubts that his superiors jumped the gun in handing him the job on a permanent basis last month. — AFP

Man United can still qualify for Champions League

MANCHESTER: Ole Gunnar Solskjaer says Manchester United can still qualify for the Champions League despite a collapse in form extended by their derby defeat against Manchester City. United have now lost seven of their past nine games in all competitions, leaving them three points behind fourth-placed Chelsea in the Premier League with three matches to go.

But they have been helped by the stumbles of others, with Arsenal's 3-1 defeat to Wolves on Wednesday keeping the door open. Chelsea visit Old Trafford on Sunday and Solskjaer has urged his side to keep fighting for Champions League football despite the chastening 2-0 defeat at the hands of City on Wednesday.

"We need more quality on Sunday and if we win that game, we have two games to go," Solskjaer told manutd.com. "Of course we want to get into the top four. I haven't been planning on playing on Thursday nights (in the Europa League) yet. We just have to make sure we give ourselves a chance on Sunday."

"We're three games away from the end of the season, we're three points behind the top four and no one would have given us a chance a few months ago. It's maybe taken its toll on the players. It's my job now to see who wants to sacrifice enough to be here."

Like Arsenal and United, Chelsea have also endured some disappointing recent results, missing their own chance to pull clear when they drew at home with Burnley on Monday. United's poor recent form has been a particular disappointment given the impressive sequence of results when Solskjaer first arrived as caretaker boss following Jose Mourinho's exit in December.

They began brightly against City at Old Trafford but could not maintain the intensity required, though they avoided a repeat of the insipid display during the weekend's 4-0 loss at Everton. Striker Marcus Rashford urged fans to keep the faith.

"Tough period for us at the moment and as a United fan myself I understand how you're feeling," he wrote on Twitter. "We've shown how we can play, we need to get back to doing what we know we can do!" — AFP

Sports

Man City underline dominance over fading Manchester United

MANCHESTER: Manchester City are closing in on becoming the first side since Manchester United a decade ago to retain the Premier League title after they gave their rivals a stark reminder that they now rule the city.

City were once described by former Manchester United boss Alex Ferguson as the “noisy neighbours” in the early days of their spending splurge after the club’s Abu Dhabi owners took charge in 2008. But since Ferguson’s retirement in 2013, when they were last crowned champions, United have not finished above City. In the past two seasons, with City under Pep Guardiola, the gap between the sides has grown into a gulf in class.

“They’ve set the standard the last couple of seasons,” said United manager Ole Gunnar Solskjaer after Wednesday’s 2-0 defeat at Old Trafford—a seventh loss in nine games. “They have been the best team in the country and that’s the challenge for us to get to. Clearly we’re not there now.

“That’s for everyone to see, but that’s what I’m in the job for, to make sure we improve and get closer to them.” The gap between the Manchester giants appears to be widening rather than narrowing.

When City romped to the title with 100 points last season, United were at least the best of the rest, 19 points behind. With three games of the current campaign left, United are 25 points adrift and languish in sixth, with qualifying for next season’s Champions League an uphill task. City will have to wait until next season for another shot at finally lifting the Champions

League trophy after a dramatic quarter-final elimination at the hands of Tottenham last week.

But they have responded like champions to gain some measure of revenge over Spurs in the league and lay down another marker by winning for the third straight season at Old Trafford under Guardiola.

“You cannot imagine the frustration we felt going out of that beautiful competition, the Champions League,” said Guardiola. “Then we had Spurs at home to stay alive in the Premier League. “The pressure we felt and how we reacted was so important. After that (1-0 win) we come here to our neighbours, the most prestigious team in English football in the last 20 or 30 years knowing if we lose we have nothing, and we won. “For two seasons now this team has shown great character, an incredible mentality and strength committing to what they have to do.” Despite amassing 89 points so far, there is still work for City to do as they have been pushed all the way by Liverpool.

Jürgen Klopp’s side are just one point behind and have already broken their club record for points in a Premier League season. “We increased the level for the Premier League last season with 100 points. That’s the level Liverpool are chasing. What they have done is incredible but it’s in our hands,” added Guardiola.

“Both teams deserve the title. But it can be just one. The team that is going to lose can’t have regrets because they have given everything.” United’s fans took some comfort from the fact that defeat to City will likely prolong

who is the player who is worst. “First I am thinking about the solution and the solution for me is to take the possibility on Sunday at Leicester and get our best performance and the best possibility to take the three points.”

Neves’s superb free-kick, Doherty’s header and Jota’s weaving run and shot did the damage for Wolves before Sokratis pulled a goal back late on for the visitors.

But for all of Wolves’ clinical preying on Emery’s men, Arsenal left Molineux licking wounds that were, to a large extent, self-inflicted, thanks to careless passing, brittle defending and an erratic display of goalkeeping from Bernd Leno. Having looked comfortable in the early exchanges, the Gunners simply wilted once Wolves piled on pressure at the end of the opening half and a catalogue of errors left the visitors 3-0 down at half-time with no way back.

Emery, however, refused to criticise his goalkeeper. “I don’t want to speak individually about the players,” he said. “We need to continue together and not look at one player or the defensive or attacking players. We need to recover our confidence.” Emery admitted, however, that his side had lost discipline as Wolves ran riot at the end of the opening period. Sokratis scored a late header for the visitors but they never threatened a genuine fightback.

“It was a good performance against a tough team,” said Wolves boss Nuno Espirito Santo. “First-half was very good, second-half not so good, but very well played. If we look at all the game I think the boys worked very hard.” — AFP



MANCHESTER: Manchester City’s Brazilian goalkeeper Ederson (2L) watches as Manchester City’s Belgian defender Vincent Kompany clears the ball during the English Premier League football match between Manchester United and Manchester City at Old Trafford in Manchester, north west England. — AFP

Liverpool’s 29-year wait to win the title. However, Liverpool’s painful wait should serve as a warning for United—at the time of the Anfield club’s last top-flight title in 1990 it was unthinkable that their barren run would last so long. “We can’t linger along many years because the Premier League is so com-

petitive. Suddenly you’ll be caught up by other teams as well,” said Solskjaer. City have a long way to go to match United’s record tally of 20 top-flight titles but should they claim a sixth next month, half of those will have come during their neighbours’ six-year drought. — AFP

Emery clings to CL hopes after Wolves inflict more pain

WOLVERHAMPTON: Unai Emery refused to give up on Arsenal’s Champions League hopes after seeing his side embarrassed by Wolves in a 3-1 defeat at Molineux on Wednesday. Ruben Neves, Matt Doherty and the outstanding Diogo Jota scored the goals that condemned Emery’s side to a third defeat in four Premier League games, severely denting their hopes of a top-four finish with just three games to go.

The Arsenal manager admitted his team were outplayed by Wolves, who scored three goals in the first half to give the visitors a mountain to climb. Despite the chastening defeat the Spaniard said his side will keep striving for Champions League football, which they can achieve either through a top-four finish in the Premier League or by winning the Europa League.

Defeat in the Midlands left Emery’s men a point behind fourth-placed Chelsea. “I usually am very critical with myself and I am angry with myself that we didn’t do the gameplan we wanted—not with the players,” said Emery when asked if he was angry with his team. “First it is with me and after that my style and idea is to look in front and find a solution, not

Bayern target Nuebel ahead of Ruhr derby

BERLIN: Schalke goalkeeper Alexander Nuebel was a bench-warmer at the start of the season, but ahead of this weekend’s derby in Dortmund, he looks set to walk in the footsteps of Manuel Neuer. Nuebel, 22, has been one of the few players to have shone in a dreadful year for Schalke. His performances between the posts have kept relegation at arm’s length and reportedly piqued the interest of Bundesliga giants Bayern Munich.

With Schalke now just one place above the bottom three, Nuebel hopes to restore some lost pride for his current club when they take on old rivals Borussia Dortmund on Saturday. Nuebel, who joined Schalke from Paderborn at the age of 18, began the season playing second fiddle to more experienced goalkeeper Ralf Faehrmann.

Runners-up last year, Schalke slumped into a relegation fight this season. When Faehrmann fell out of favour, Nuebel grabbed his chance by the horns. Promoted to number one in January by then Schalke coach Domenico Tedesco, Nuebel earned plaudits for his performances, even as Tedesco’s reign began to implode.

Amid a growing chorus of boos from the terraces in Gelsenkirchen, he has been one of the few players to receive recognition from the fans.

After a 3-0 defeat to Mainz in February, Schalke fans taunted the players, chanting: “Apart from Nuebel, you can all go”. His form has also earned him comparisons with Bayern’s superstar keeper, with Bild newspaper nicknaming Nuebel “mini-Neuer”. Neuer too was the standout player in a forgettable season for Schalke back in 2011, just before the Germany number one moved to Munich.

Speculation is now rife that Nuebel may follow the same path. “Alex is allowed to think about a move, contracts are not one-sided,” Nuebel’s agent Stefan Backs told Sport1 earlier this month. “If Schalke get a big transfer fee for Alex, like they did with Neuer, then it will be a good bit of business.”

With Nuebel’s current contract set to expire in 2020, Schalke may have to sell him at the end of this season if they are not to lose him on a free transfer. Nuebel himself has reportedly put off any contract discussions until after the Under-21 European Championships in June, but he has been peppered with contradictory advice of late.

Last Sunday, former Bayern and Liverpool midfielder Dietmar Hamann urged the young keeper to join Bayern. “Even a year training next to Manuel Neuer is better than being first choice keeper at Schalke,” he said. Bayern’s number two Sven Ulreich, on the other hand, said that a move to Bayern would “make no sense” for Nuebel. “I don’t think that, at 22 years old, he will want to be Manuel’s number two. If he comes, he will want to play,” Ulreich told SportBild magazine on Wednesday. At Schalke, at least, Nuebel is guaranteed game time, having held on to his number one spot even after Tedesco was replaced by interim coach Huub Stevens. — AFP

Sport Times

FRIDAY, APRIL 26, 2019



BAKU: A woman holds a matryoska (traditional Russian wooden doll) of Mercedes' British driver Lewis Hamilton while visiting the pit lane ahead of the Formula One Azerbaijan Grand Prix in Baku yesterday. —AFP

Hamilton wary of rivals' street smarts in Baku

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